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STUDIES
Malcolm Ross: a Sense of Our Identity

By Laura Groening

Part I: The Story of an Affinity

A young boy is pulling his wagon up a slightly inclined road. The boy is eleven or twelve years old. A shock of light brown hair falls over his forehead. The wagon is made of wood and it is piled high with vegetables fresh from the family garden. The boy is taking his bountiful load from hotel to hotel in order to see what he might sell. The money he earns he will spend on a volume of Bliss Carman's poems.

The boy goes to Smythe Street Elementary School in the heart of Fredericton. A year or two earlier, his teacher had announced that Bliss Carman was coming home from abroad to read from his poetry. The teacher had succeeded in making the child very excited about the coming event. But that poetry reading had loomed just outside the boy's grasp. "You're too young," Miss. Hoben told him, "and Carman will be reading too late at night." Carman did come and speak to the class, however, and Ross's interest in the poet remained strong.

The life of Malcolm Ross is a story that displays an almost miraculous affinity between one person and his culture. From the time he was a little boy, Malcolm Mackenzie Ross was excited by the creative activity around him. Born to a middle-class Fredericton family, he was, long before his teens, caught up in the grand adventure that would be his life: finding a way to make literature prevail. It reads like a biographer's dream, but the life that follows the childhood makes clear the perfect truth revealed in the wonderful picture of the small child longing for art, for this boy will become the man who will give his country access to a national literature. This is the man who will enable entire countries to discover that culture, who will head the National Film Board's trans-Canada distribution of rousing national films throughout the war, who will work to establish the renowned Dalhousie Arts Centre, who will teach hundreds of students the value of literature, and who will write two learned books, *Milton's Royal-*

ism and *Poetry and Dogma*, and a host of articles expressing the world view that is embodied in the cultural monuments he helped found.

Although Fredericton in 1921, the year of Bliss Carman's Canadian tour and the year that Ross turned 10, was a small town of only 8,114 people (*Historical Statistics of New Brunswick* 1984), it had already produced a remarkable amount of culture for a country that was only about fifty years old. It was in Fredericton that Bishop Medley, newly emigrated from England, chose to build a magnificent cathedral. The town would never have been considered a city without that cathedral, the university, and the government buildings, Elizabeth Brewster is quite certain (*The Invention of Truth* 18). Two of the four major Confederation poets, Sir Charles G.D. Roberts and Bliss Carman, began their careers in Fredericton, and it was in Fredericton on January 2, 1911 that the man who would keep alive their contribution to Canadian literature was born.

In "A Strange Aesthetic Ferment," Ross captures the world that produced Roberts and Carman, and what emerges most clearly from his depiction of late nineteenth-century Fredericton is his keen appreciation of how culture and tradition are so intimately linked:

> When one looks down over Fredericton from the hills where Charles Roberts and Bliss Carman once took their long hikes with George Parkin, one still sees the spire of Bishop Medley's Cathedral rising above a city hidden in elms. Old Frederictonians, whether they be Anglican or Roman, Baptist or Marxist, think first of their Cathedral whenever they think of home.
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> George Goodridge Roberts, the father of Charles and Theodore (and Bliss Carman's uncle), was Canon of the Cathedral and Rector of the parish church of St. Anne's. George Parkin, headmaster of the Collegiate School in Fredericton, was an active Cathedral layman.
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> (*The Impossible Sum of Our Traditions* 27)

"Something," Ross stresses, "should be said about the coincidence at just the right time of the Tractarian Bishop, his Gothic Cathedral, the great teacher whose classroom had no walls, 'the new music, the new colours, the new raptures of Pre-Raphaelite poetry,' and the young and eager spirits ready to respond to the peculiar genius of this place and this time" (27).

Ross's account of the intellectual world of early Fredericton also reveals an intense faith in the capacity of an environment to nourish the development of youthful imaginations. The title of Ross's article comes from a piece written by Sir Charles G.D. Roberts in 1930. Roberts too emphasizes the peculiar strengths of the small maritime city where he grew

up. "She had little of the commercial spirit, and I fear was hardly as democratic as is nowaday considered the proper thing to be," Roberts allowed. "But," he adds significantly, "she was not stagnant, and she was not smug. Instead of expecting all the people to be cut of one pattern, she seemed to prefer them to be just a little queer. . . . Conformity, that tyrant god of small town life, got scant tribute from her. There was much good reading done, up-to-date reading, and if people wrote verse, they had no need to be apologetic about it" (qtd. in Ross, *Impossible* 27-28). Years after Roberts' published his recollections, Ross wonders "what would have happened . . . if an evangelical had been sent as first Bishop of Fredericton, if there had been no Gothic Cathedral on the river, if between the teacher [George Parkin] and his 'favourite two' there had been no band of friendship in the faith?" (29).

Ross himself was born to a household full of good books and rife with theological and political debate. On the Anglican side was his mother, Cora Elizabeth Hewitson, whose father had been an Anglican and an officer in the British army in India. When his period in the army was over, he was given land outside Fredericton in Doak. As a child, Malcolm often spent time on the farm. Although his grandfather had died before his birth, his grandmother, Mary O'Rourke, became one of his favourite people. Her family had come from Ireland during the potato famine. She was born in Fredericton, an Irish Catholic, "right off the soil." It was from Mary O'Rourke that Ross received his first lesson in the politics of religion. "When I married your grandfather," she liked to tell the young Malcolm with relish, "I *turned*." They were all brought up as Anglicans in Doak and Mary O'Rourke Hewitson apparently knew the famous Bishop Medley, who, in fact, had brought her into the Church.

The other side of the family was defined by the marriage of Scottish Presbyterians and New England Puritans. Ross was named after his grandfather, Malcolm Ross Senior. Ross's father was Charles Duff Ross and the maiden name of Charles Duff's mother was Hooper. The Hooper name goes all the way back to the American revolution. William Story Hooper signed the Declaration of Independence. In Loyalist Fredericton, this revolutionary background was not looked upon favourably, and Ross remembers growing up to the taunt, "They're Yankees!" "The Loyalist tradition," he adds drily, "was not ours." Charles Duff was expected to go to Normal School, but instead he ran away from home and joined the Royal Canadian Regiment in Halifax. When he married Cora Elizabeth, he was manager of a department store, but the store burned down and he turned to selling

insurance. Cora Elizabeth and Charles Duff had two children, first Malcolm Mackenzie and then, five years later, a girl named Margaret.

From an early age, Ross was exposed to the antagonism between the two sides of the family. His father's side was very American: Ross says that by the time he was two years old, he knew all about Roosevelt. He was also caught up in the theological debates that invaded the family home. Church union was the ruling issue of Ross's childhood and St. Paul's Presbyterian Church did not favour the reforms. Two weeks before the vote, people became very angry and began to proclaim, "we won't go in with the dirty Methodists." As a consequence, Ross, a child of ten, was compelled to join the church in order to vote with his father against the union. On the other hand, he had also been baptised in St. Anne's Anglican Church, the Cathedral's "Chapel of Ease." He was profoundly religious as a child, and church union upset him. The pull between his British and American heritage, and the Anglican and Presbyterian traditions introduced the concept of extreme tension at a remarkably early age. The belief that tension could be "fruitful," that, in fact, different traditions could not be successfully repudiated but rather must be allowed to coexist in a state of balance, would develop years later.

Fruitful tension not yet welcomed, then, the young Malcolm was increasingly drawn towards the Anglican tradition in his family, where he found a "kinship of beauty and holiness" (33). The Loyalists, on the other hand, while they may have "brought with them their books and their crafts and a deep-down instinct for forest, river, and sea," also embodied a "Puritan distrust of the senses." As Ross writes in "A Strange Aesthetic Ferment," the Puritans believed that "[t]o stain a window was perhaps to stain a soul" (32).

As a child, Ross attended school with Theodora Roberts, daughter of Theodore Goodridge Roberts, Sir Charles' brother. Theodora and Malcolm talked about books and poetry. He heard a great deal about Carman and Frances Sherman and he received a letter of introduction to Sir Charles himself. Eventually Ross met Roberts at Elsie Pomeroy's home. Pomeroy, ostensibly Roberts' biographer, was dutifully copying down and the poet was busily dictating what would become the infamous story of Roberts' life. (E.K. Brown had written to Duncan Campbell Scott, "I doubt that I shall order the book on Sir Charles, it sounds like our national criticism at its worst," February 5, 1943). The closest Ross ever came to Carman, other than that fateful day at Smythe Street Elemntary School, occurred after the poet's death. Ross happened upon the church the day Carman's ashes lay in state. It was to be a private funeral but the curator suggested

Ross might like to hold the urn. "It was heavy," Ross recalls, describing how he gingerly held the poet's remains in his very own hands.

Ross went directly from Fredericton High School to the University of New Brunswick in 1929. The university had fewer than 300 students at that point. Ross's primary teacher at the University of New Brunswick was Malcolm McPherson, a graduate of the University of Edinburgh and a former student of Sir Herbert Grierson. McPherson, in fact, represented the entire combined English and History department: he taught day and night, and Ross took all his courses.

At McPherson's urging, Ross read Sir Herbert Grierson's *Cross Currents in English Literature of the Seventeenth Century.* "To me then the book was a very blaze of revelation. It shaped my scholarly interests and efforts for the next twenty-five years" (Ross, *Impossible* 8). Grierson's book was published in 1929, and Douglas Bush characterizes the 1920s as a period in which "the advanced study of literature . . . still meant chiefly 'research' into sources, influences, literary backgrounds, a kind of study which had and has its solid virtues but, as commonly pursued, remained factual and eternal. Although the new historical study of ideas had been growing, it had not yet widely revitalized scholarship" (321). When Ross read Grierson, his mind changed direction, and the man who had foreseen a career in history switched to English literature.

Grierson's book epitomizes the slow shift in graduate studies away from what Bush describes as "a grim round of Gothic and kindred things, with bits of literature if they could be squeezed in" (320). Allowing that he was neither a philosopher nor a theologian, Grierson nevertheless thought he should try to "select for consideration some aspect of the contact between literature and the life and thought of the time, to discuss literature as reflecting the spiritual conflicts of an age; the growing pains (one might hope) of civilisation at a definite epoch" (ix). This would be the agenda of Ross's first book, *Milton's Royalism*, and, even more important, it would define the fundamental premise that underlay all his work on Canadian literature. Grierson gave Ross a glimpse of the possible, and Ross never looked back.

Ross graduated in 1933 with an honours degree in English and Philosophy, and he continued throughout his career to study philosophy. "I went on thinking I was going to be a philosopher like Descartes," Ross recalls. "It was great fun." From a very early age, he was a person who derived the greatest amount of satisfaction from the deepest intellectual pursuits. The harder the work, the more fun Ross had.

McPherson arranged for Ross to attend graduate school at the University of Toronto, but financial troubles intervened immediately. First of all, Ross almost failed to graduate from the University of New Brunswick because he refused to take the two years compulsory military training required of all male students before they graduated. He started out doing it, but he was reading H.G. Wells and becoming increasingly anti-military. In the end, he just did not attend. Apparently he was the first student to refuse the call to arms and the senate met until 2 a.m. to decide the fate of the young rebel who was due to graduate with first class honours. In the end, after McPherson defended him, he was allowed to graduate, but his past caught up to him when, dreaming of the University of Edinburgh, he applied to the I.O.D.E. for a scholarship. ("I was kind of foolish in those days.") Eventually Colonel Albert Anderson, an uncle in Ottawa, agreed to finance Ross's first year at Toronto. Ross then completed his education with fellowships and summer school teaching.

The University of Toronto opened a whole new world to Ross. Ross studied with Wilson Knight, whom he calls a "romantic dreamer," and the very sensible R.S. Knox. McPherson pointed him in the direction of A.S.P. Woodhouse, and Ross found Woodhouse's lectures to be "brilliant stuff." Woodhouse, like Grierson, "faced toward the new light" (Bush 321). His "concentrating in history . . . foreshadowed his lifelong concern not merely with religious and political thought but with the necessity of an historical approach to literature" (Bush 321). According to Douglas Bush, Woodhouse had basically three original ideas about Milton, ideas that would later infuse Ross's own work on the seventeenth century. Woodhouse argued the "Puritan principle of segregation, the capacity . . . to separate the secular from the religious" (Bush 323). Ross would eventually demonstrate how Milton failed to do precisely this, as he attempted to use traditional Royalist symbolism in his religious poetry, long after he had rejected the legitimacy of the Crown. Woodhouse also believed that "the doctrine of 'Christian liberty' . . . could become dynamic and revolutionary individualism" in a writer like Milton. Finally, he articulated what he called the "'dogma of the two orders' of nature and grace" (Bush 327). According to Ross, "His lectures on Milton were the most exciting and stimulating academic lectures I have ever heard, and his seminar on the origins of Romanticism opened up whole new worlds of meaning for me" (qtd. in Staines, *Impossible* 9).

Although Ross found the University of Toronto intellectually exciting and the city full of culture, he experienced Toronto as "an utterly alien land" and he suffered "spasms of homesickness which, as it turned out,

were not infrequent" (*Impossible* 46). At moments like this, Ross would pull out his boyhood copy of Carman's *Lyrics and Ballads*. "My fellow graduate students (all of them much more sophisticated and self-assured than I was) mentioned Carman and Roberts, when pressed, with lofty condescension. I had to locate myself in a new and forbidding literary landscape. Eliot, Yeats, and Edith Sitwell were the new gods." Ross was a long way from Alice Hoben's classroom, where he had first heard of Carman. "He is from Fredericton," Alice Hoben had taught her young students, "and you should all be proud of him" (*Impossible* 66). Alice Hoben's enthusiasm and Ross's own youthful discovery of Carman's landscape ("Carman was the river, the sea, the new air I breathed"), stayed with him. "Certainly I went up to Toronto in the fall of 1933 with a pride, which I have never lost, in the literary culture of my own city—and with a sense of somehow belonging to it" (44-45).

After writing a thesis on critical approaches to Shakespeare, Ross graduated with an M.A. from Toronto and moved to New York University, where he intended to complete his doctorate. (This was not yet possible at Toronto, where an M.A. was the highest degree offered). Like Toronto, New York gave him access to unlimited amounts of culture, particularly music, as he attended concert after concert at Carnegie Hall. During this period, however, he was offered a job at the University of Canton in China. It was too exciting a prospect to ignore. He packed a big trunk full of books and boarded a C.P.R. train to Vancouver. Oddly enough, Ross was transported across the Atlantic on a ship called the President Roosevelt. The boat docked for two or three days in Japan, and Ross explored the terraced gardens up the sides of mountains and the lovely outdoor restaurants. Japan was "incredible."

But Ross's adventures were just beginning. He left Coby on the boat for China and, as soon as the ship entered the Sea of Japan, it was hit by a typhoon. The boat headed directly into the storm and passengers were ordered to their cabins and told to lie still. Then, just off Formosa, Ross witnessed a strange light. It was a submarine and Japanese sailors boarded their ship. Japan's war with China had begun.

The ship finally made it safely to Hong Kong, where Ross and his trunk full of books took the train to Canton. Japan, however, had started to bomb Canton. "I didn't enjoy it," Ross says, with characteristic understatement. As a child he had almost been hit by lightening. Bombs were like that. The air raid shelter was just a cellar. There was no defense against the bombs. The Chinese were defenceless against modern Japanese warfare. No one could do anything. At the university, Ross could not do any serious work

either. He decided to take the Empress of Asia back to Vancouver. Ross then returned to Toronto, committed to left-wing politics.

It was during this period that Ross joined the League Against War and Fascism. The League was then four years old. It had been founded on October 6, 1934 in Toronto and "had emerged as Canada's major anti-fascist voice" (Zuehlke 28). It "united people from across the progressive social spectrum into one body. In all, 211 organizations were involved in the League's establishment. The membership of these organizations comprised 337,000 Canadians." Mark Zuehlke writes: "that the civil war in Spain was a fight of democratic forces against fascism might have eluded the majority of North America's mainstream press, but . . . obviously this fact had not escaped the average person" (Zuehlke 27).

The Spanish Civil War certainly crystallized Ross's political leanings: he was horrified by the sight of one democracy being abandoned by other democracies. The United States, Britain, and France did nothing to help the Spanish people. Only Russia intervened, and the Communist influence spread. The League itself was, as Ross describes it, dominated by Communists, although only in an unofficial capacity, for people feared to declare their allegiance openly. Other League members were Liberals or, like Ross, voted C.C.F.

One day, while Ross stood looking out the window in the office of the League at 73 Adelaide Street West, he caught his first glimpse of Lois Hall, the woman he would marry. There she was, complete with a Russian style hat that captured Ross's imagination. Women played a key role in the League, and Lois Hall was a woman committed to fairness, justice, and equality. She and Ross dated briefly and were married on June 4, 1938.

In 1939, a year after he and Lois were married, Ross decided to complete his Ph.D. at Cornell. The war had not yet broken out and Cornell was a natural choice: Toronto and Cornell had been exchanging students and faculty since the days of Archibald Lampman; Herbert Davis had recently left Toronto to teach at Cornell; and Lois's family had roots there. Ross and his wife arrived in Ithaca just as the war began. The Ph.D. completed in 1941, Ross accepted a teaching position at Indiana University. Ross was still teaching in Indiana when he decided to return to Canada. It was 1942 and the war in Europe was becoming increasingly nasty. To his horror, Ross was encountering people who took pleasure in the plight of the British. Prevailing sentiment, while probably not actively pro-Nazi (although Ross does remember proto-fascist groups being organized), was perhaps rooted in the historical animosity between the United States and Great Britain, and Ross recalls that many of the people in Indiana thought the British

got what they deserved. Then the Maginot line fell. "People," Ross snaps, "were getting hurt." "We're going home," he told Lois.

Part II: Our Sense of Identity

Ross and his wife left Indiana for Ottawa, where Ross tried to enlist in any branch of the service that would take him. The boy who had refused compulsory military training at the University of New Brunswick was determined to join the war. Turned down repeatedly for being colour blind and for having high blood pressure ("Be careful," one doctor warned him), he was somewhat nonplussed until he took advantage of a contact with John Grierson, head of the newly founded National Film Board.

"Looking for a job?" Grierson demanded at the end of a pleasant social evening. "Be in my office at 10 o'clock," and he doubled Ross's salary at Indiana University. Ross had found his war-time niche. Years later, he discovered that he did not even have high blood pressure, merely a blood pressure that rose under stress. And he is fairly certain that he has never been colour blind.

By the time Ross started to work at the film board, his commitment to his two major fields was firmly established. He was fascinated by the cultural tradition of Canada and deeply attracted to the spiritual conflicts of seventeenth-century England. Both interests had been initiated by his boyhood experiences. Growing up in Fredericton when it was defined by the legacy of Roberts and Carman established his first connection with a national Canadian literature. Developing intellectually in a household radically divided between Puritans and Anglicans triggered a profound sensitivity to spiritual debates. Both concerns were solidified by Ross's reading of key texts, Sir Herbert Grierson's *Cross Currents in English Literature of the Seventeenth Century* and Donald Creighton's *The Commercial Empire of the St. Lawrence* (a book he had, ironically, first encountered in the university library at Indiana).

Ross's newly developing feelings for the country were strengthened and confirmed by his association with John Grierson. Grierson, Ross believes, had a better sense of Canada than most Canadians. And he loved the West. In fact, Ross found Grierson's views and the National Film Board's overall ideological approach to the nation to be highly congenial. Grierson's goal for film was "to develop national unity and to describe war activities and related themes" (Evans 58). He saw his role in Canada as that of leader of a moral crusade. "We shall use the film," he argued, "to

give visual significance to the words of Mr. King when he said that the spirit of mutual tolerance and the respect for fundamental human rights are the foundation of the national unity of Canada" (qtd. in Evans 62 and Beveridge 151). This may not have been exactly the Mackenzie King who ignored the plight of Spain a few years earlier, but, as Grierson put it, you only have one prime minister so you had better make do with what you have.

Ross's energies were immediately channelled into non-theatrical distribution. "You must forever go where the people are," Grierson believed (qtd. in Evans 7), and so Ross went to every part of the nation, to the "hospitals, hotels, chambers of commerce, libraries, and churches, and to youth and women's groups" (Evans 161), where the films were being shown, for, as Grierson pointed out, there are more seats outside the theatres than inside them. Under Ross's direction, "Grierson had the National Film Board turn to the unglamorous task of orchestrating the various information campaigns to inspire public will and active citizenship in all other walks of life where people were likely to congregate" (Evans 147). In 1942, the non-theatrical network "reached a Canadian audience of more than a quarter million a month" (Evans 60). By 1945, the year Ross left the N.F.B., the 43 travelling theatres of 1942 had become 85 (Evans 148-9). The difficulty of reaching such a dispersed audience can only be imagined. According to Evans, "the projectionist, ferrying his own equipment around himself by car, tugboat, dogsled, or other transport had to make his circuit once a month" (149). But it worked. James Beveridge recalls that "leaving aside the film-making, an apparatus was formed for communicating throughout this sprawling country." He adds, "The interests and talents of many ardent, sometimes slightly nutty individuals stood ready to be fired up by Grierson in person, or by his ideas" (32).

Successfully reaching the disparate Canadian audience was one thing, but ensuring their response was quite another matter. Donald Buchanan explains that about "three hundred of the points served by the rural (film) circuits consist of farming areas populated by Canadian citizens of foreign origin. Here the real test of the documentary movie comes. Will these people respond to its stimulus? They turn out in crowds for the showings, but at first they seem to be merely passive spectators" (qtd. in Beveridge 152). Grierson was undeterred and the NFB turned its hand to producing films that celebrated this very cultural diversity.

As Ross travelled the non-theatrical film circuit, he began to be aware of the many differences among the Canadian population. A year after he arrived in Ottawa, the National Film Board produced *The Peoples of Can-*

ada (March 1941), a film documenting the national origins of nine of the different ethnic groups that made up the Canadian mosaic. The film, which highlighted the French, Scots, Dutch, Germans, Scandinavians, Dukhobors, Hutterites, Mennonites, and Chinese, stressed that national unity lay in the respect of different beliefs. "I liked all the differences," Ross recalls, "and I thought they all fit together. That's when I began thinking about Canadian literature. I had thought about it earlier, in Fredericton, especially in regards to Roberts." But working at the N.F.B. confirmed Ross's growing conviction that the multiethnic heritage of Canadians was key to understanding the culture of the nation as a whole. When Ross had first arrived in Toronto with his Bliss Carman poems ("my secret sin"), he had quietly resisted the scepticism of his fellow students who were devoted to the study of modernism. Even then he could not see "why you had to discard one tradition in order to support another." He had learned from Alfred Bailey that new critical theories need not displace those of the previous generations (Ross, *Impossible* 46). Ross was interested in how various theories and approaches might relate. Now his views were expanding from questions of period aesthetics to issues of ethnicity, and he had no difficulty conceptualizing a reality in which citizens could embrace one cultural heritage while remaining attached to another.

The Japanese surrendered in August 1945. The war finally ended, and Ross's wife gave birth to Julie Martha, their only child, on August 15, V-J Day. The end of the war also marked the conclusion of John Grierson's association with the National Film Board. Always "one inch to the left of the Party in power," Grierson became implicated in the Igor Gouzenko spy case, and the "propaganda maestro" had to move on (qtd. in Evans, 14). Ross was outraged, his confidence in Grierson's innocence unshaken. Grierson, in turn, recommended three men as his possible successor, Ross McLean, the assistant film commissioner, James A. Beveridge, an N.F.B. producer, and Malcolm Ross. "Grierson urged me to stay on at the Film Board," Ross says. "He even suggested I stand for commissioner. But I was not a film man. I was in charge of all distribution by this point. However, I could not *make* films." When Ross received an offer from the University of Manitoba to return to academia, the move seemed ideal. Roy Daniels, who was then head of the Department of English, had been in touch with A.S.P. Woodhouse, and Woodhouse, who had taught at Manitoba himself from 1924-29 and was fond of placing his favourite students in the "colonies," recommended Ross for a position teaching seventeenth-century literature. Ross was ready to move West.

At least he thought he was ready. Actually little in his academic career so far had prepared him to deal with the rowdy, working class reality of a multicultural crowd of returning soldiers who made up a great proportion of the student body at the University of Manitoba in 1945. Furthermore, the war had unleashed Old World animosities. Ross's Manitoba students had originated from all over Europe and they were all learning about each other at university. Hungarians and Ukrainians, for example, hated one another. But at the University of Manitoba they learned they had something in common as well as something different to cherish. They never lost their pride in their origins, but they also became Canadian. Here Ross found the living proof that his theories about culture were valid: one heritage need not preclude another, one tradition need not invalidate a second. "Pierre Trudeau did not invent multiculturalism," Ross says. "It was happening naturally before your very eyes. You did not have to think about it; you just lived it."

Undergraduate classes were held in the large lecture halls in the old Broadway buildings erected temporarily as a "downtown campus." These were the hallowed halls that E.K. Brown claimed to negotiate like a football player, head down, hand on the shoulder of a larger colleague who broke ground for him, and these were the students who took their breaks from classes in "Theatre W," the old Windsor Hotel (*E.K. Brown: a Study in Conflict* 46-7). "Throw someone out of the class," was Woodhouse's advice. Not someone who was in fact a problem, he suggested, but someone who looked like he *might* cause trouble. "I was lucky no one clobbered me," Ross says.

Manitoba's Fort Garry Campus, on the other hand, was a little more traditional. A substantial bus ride brought Ross to the outskirts of the city where he could meet his honours students in somewhat more splendid surroundings. The Fort Garry Campus, however, was not without its own challenges. When Ross finally managed to supplant the bus ride with a lift in a colleague's car, he discovered that the short walk from the parking lot to the arts building in winter was quite enough to freeze one's nose solid. "It was 50 below zero," Ross roars in delight at the outrage, "and my nose was completely white."

No one lives for any extended period of time in Winnipeg without accumulating a multitude of horror stories about the weather, and Ross's frozen nose was just the beginning. The Rosses' first house in Manitoba was located on Langside Street. It was a small house, but unfortunately the furnace did not work particularly well. One winter's night the Rosses set out to attend a New Year's party at the Dean's residence. Earlier, Roy Daniels

had announced, "I don't want to go," and he offered to babysit. Ross showed him how to care for the temperamental heating system and Lois put the baby to bed. They went to the Dean's party, had a nice time, and returned home about 1 a.m. Ross opened the door and found the house full of smoke. "You know," Daniels remarked from the living room, "I haven't had much luck with the furnace." Ross recalls, "We had to open all the windows, even though it was 30 degrees below zero. Julie survived. Daniels was just sitting there in all the smoke. An academic, you know. My respect for him as a man of action dropped. But he meant well." The next year the Rosses moved to more gracious lodgings on Upper Academy Road.

The cold of Winnipeg winters, so extreme that it was physically visible as white frost, was exceeded only by the excessively hot and mosquito-ridden summers. During the summer of 1946, Ross took advantage of the opportunity to escape the weather and teach summer school at the University of Toronto. It was a fateful move, for it was during that summer that Jack McClelland, just ashore from his stint in the Canadian navy, entered Ross's classroom. ("Jack took my survey course: you know, *Tom Jones* in half an hour.") The history of Canadian literature would change direction forever. But that was not immediately obvious and Ross returned, although not for long, to the extreme climate of the West.

Officially Ross spent the years 1945-50 at Manitoba. However, 1949-50 actually constituted a leave of absence so that he could assume a Guggenheim Fellowship. The Guggenheim gave him the luxury of 6 months at Harvard and 6 months as the Huntingdon Library in Pasadena, California to write *Poetry and Dogma*.

From the University of Manitoba, Ross moved to Queen's, where he became editor of the *Queen's Quarterly* (1953-1956). During his first year at the *Quarterly*, Lorne Pierce suggested he might like to edit a book of Canadian essays. The book would provide the perfect venue for Ross to explore and communicate his ideas about the emerging Canadian culture. *Our Sense of Identity* was published in 1954. It included essays from Susanna Moodie and Joseph Howe to Northrop Frye and Harold Innis. Most remarkable, however, was the piece that Ross wrote as his introduction, an essay that illustrates that over half a century ago Malcolm Ross had a clear vision of Canadian culture as the product of a diverse, multicultural heritage that he argues defines the way Canadian literature has developed from its inception. He wrote:

> Ours is not, can never be, the "one hundred per cent" kind of nationalism. We have always had to think in terms of 50-50. No "melting pot." Rather, the

> open irony of the multi-dimensional structure, an openness to "the larger mosaic," to the vivid themes of A.M. Klein's Jewish heritage, to the fine Slavic interlacings of Winnipeg and the prairies. (xi)

This diversity Ross calls "the proper diversity of the full Canadianism" (xi). Ross believes that as a result of reconciling French and English interests, we have become "the people of the second thought." Our "'characteristic prudence'" is a "bi-focalism" that is structural and not ethnically-based. It "is not the Scot in us, or the Puritan, or the 'North Irish'" (ix). Consequently, it is not the content of the ethnic diversity that matters, but rather the habit of first recognizing, then accepting, and finally celebrating difference that paved the way for a multicultural literature in contemporary Canada. Here we have a view of the nation rooted in the idea that a multiethnic culture produces not a series of discrete and different communities, but rather a new community of many voices singing in harmony, what Ross calls "a diverse yet single people" in his introduction to F.P. Grove's *Over Prairie Trails* (v). Furthermore, he argues, "[t]here is a North Americanism which is Canadian and not 'American.' It is marked and structured by a phenomenon uniquely ours and the very contrary of the 'melting pot' imperative of United States nationalism: The 'two nations'." "The opening out was never easy," Ross allows. "The taunt 'Hunky' or 'Uke' or 'Kike' has been heard in our air. There has been strain. And anguish. But we grow" (xi).

These were the ideas that would embody Ross's creation of the New Canadian Library series, a series he longed to bring into existence because of the impossibility of teaching the literature he was intent on nourishing at the *Queen's Quarterly.* "I was teaching then at Queen's University and was anxious to prepare a full course on Canadian literature. We were teaching some Canadian literature from anthologies at the tag-end of a course on American literature. But you cannot teach a novel with only a chapter in an anthology to go by. The older novels were out of print, and the recent ones too expensive for classroom use" ("Achievement" 125-26). What we needed, he was convinced, was an inexpensive series of paperback reprints.

Thanks to David Staines' introduction to *The Impossible Sum of Our Traditions*, we all know what happened next: Ross contacted John Grey at Macmillan of Canada with his proposal and Grey laughed him out of the office. "We'll lose our shirts," Grey roared. He did not believe paperbacks were here to stay, let alone Canadian paperbacks. At McClelland and Stewart, Jack McClelland was eagerly taking over the family business. A young maverick, he wanted to make his mark on the bastion of Canadian

publishing he was going to head. He listened to his former teacher's dream and decided to take a chance. In 1957, Grove's *Over Prairie Trails*, Callaghan's *Such is My Beloved*, Sinclair Ross's *As For Me and My House*, and Leacock's *Literary Lapses* appeared under McClelland and Stewart's imprint. "My main role," Ross told Judith Breen and Lynn Atkinson in 1974, was "to get these books moving so that people could use them" (60). Ross (and others) could, for the first time, teach a course in the literature of their own nation. The New Canadian Library was born.

Ross's introductions to five N.C.L. volumes make clear his concern with cultural and literary issues.[1] He chose to introduce two of the first four selections, Grove's *Over Prairie Trails* (1957) and Callaghan's *Such is My Beloved* (1957), as well as subsequent editions of Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1960), and Richler's *The Incomparable Atuk* (1971).[2] He also brought out *Poets of the Confederation* (1960), a selection of poetry by Roberts, Carman, Lampman, and D.C. Scott. Each of the introductions stresses the writer's mastery of his craft. Ross praises Grove's evocative language and strong sense of place, concluding, "Here is lore for the naturalist and the historian—but shaped and held in the hand of the artist" (x). Callaghan is singled out because "well in advance of the vogue of Graham Greene and Evelyn Waugh," he had "written a religious novel" (v), the symbolism of which is "controlled and objectified by irony" (viii). Richler is endorsed for the brilliance of his satire, while Leacock is defended against charges that he is a failed novelist: "he writes *sketches*, and the Leacock sketches are a blessed compound, like nothing else that ever was or ever shall be, of caricature, anecdote, and *essay*" (x). Ross argues on behalf of Leacock's genius. "To attack and defend, to love and hate in one breath, is not the genius of satire but the genius of irony, the subtler art, the deeper wisdom" (xi).

Although his diction implies confidence in a receptive audience, each of the introductions indicates that Ross is conscious of the challenges of presenting a reprint series to a nation ignorant of its own accomplishments. Only after carefully detailing the distinctive quality of each of Grove's trails does Ross say, "No one, surely, will deny to this first book its permanent place in our literature" (x). Looking at Leacock, he muses, "It is hard to imagine anyone reading *Sunshine Sketches* for the first time" (ix). "The editor's job (and the publisher's)," he adds, "is simply to keep the book going *ad infinitum*" (ix). The perspective of time, of re-reading, that can be brought to a reprint series is a quality Ross deeply values. "The first thing that strikes one on re-reading *Over Prairie Trails*," he argues, "is Grove's almost incredible love for the harsh, punishing, desolate Manitoba

land" (v). Turning to Richler in 1971, he writes, "[p]erhaps [*The Incomparable Atuk*] makes more sense now than it did in 1963" (vi). Thus he echoes his conviction at the inception of the NCL, when he wrote:

> *Such is My Beloved* is unmistakably a novel of the Thirties. The date is stamped on every page. And yet this novel is not "dated." Indeed, while so much of the writing of the Thirties seems as remote and as alien as the Gothic romance of Monk Lewis, Callaghan's novel can now be read as it was meant to be read. (v)

For Ross, the passage of time enables the critic to transcend ideology. Callaghan, for example, "has no slogans for the day" (v), and it was his "ironic vision of social crisis which puzzled the reader of the 1930's" (viii). But, Ross insists, "after these years of 'iron curtain,' 'cold war' and now 'coexistence' we presumably have second thoughts about the desirability (and even the possibility) of 'liquidating' our ideological opposites" (viii).

> *Over Prairie Trails* was written by a man born in Russia of mixed Swedish, Scottish, and English blood. Educated in Paris, Munich, and Rome, twenty-one years of age before he came to this country after tours (large if not grand) from the Sahara to Madagascar to the Antipodes to America, Frederick Philip Grove is yet the typical, perhaps even the archetypal, Canadian. (v)

Ross not only focuses on Grove's ethnicity in his opening sentence, but he isolates Grove's background as the source of his Canadianism: Grove is the "typical, perhaps archetypal, Canadian." For Ross, however, the term "Canadian" has meaning that is enriched, not limited, by ethnicity:

> Grove's was no mere passport Canadianism. He was not just a writer who happened to be writing in Canada. He was a *Canadian writer*, wholly absorbed by the Canadian scene and by the pioneer drama of a diverse yet single people; wholly convinced that this scene, this people, could yield to the artist's vision themes and values at once unique and universal. (v)

Ross is trying to define a community that will never be restricted on the basis of a particular ethnic background. As he says in "American Pressures and Canadian Individuality" (1957),

> I am trying to define a community which opens into the community of man. . . . Our task is to become what we are. We have learned that we are *not* just a mixed batch of transplanted Englishmen, Frenchmen, Slavs, Jews. We are a uniquely structured community. As individuals we live by various and

> separate ethnic and spiritual inheritances. We preserve these differences. At another level, as Canadians, we take our cultural life from the lively collision and interplay of many inheritances. Thus we grow. It is not the item—French, Jewish, Slavic, or English—it is not the item but the pattern which is Canadian. (*Impossible* 122)

As Malcolm Ross put it in 1954, "many tongues are ours. But this tower is not Babel" (*Our Sense* xi).

In 1962, Ross left Queen's for Trinity College, Toronto, where he served as Dean of Arts (1964-1967) and co-edited (with John Stevens) two more books on Canadian identity. From Toronto, Ross returned to the Maritimes. Hired by Dalhousie University in 1968 to teach English literature, he was also drafted to the position of chairman of the Cultural Activities Committee, a position he held until 1972. Ross's love of music dated back to his years in Toronto and then New York, where he attended the opera and the symphony on a nightly basis. He was a fervid admirer of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet during his years at Manitoba. And his years at the National Film Board had consolidated his theories about a national culture. He was uniquely suited for the appointment.

Ross also became the voice of Canadian literature abroad. In 1982, he was the first humanist appointed Visiting Professor for the Centre of Canadian Studies at the University of Edinburgh. During his appointment, he travelled throughout Europe, lecturing to a new audience of students of Canadian literature, helping universities in Germany and Scandinavia set up courses in Canadian literature and order books that might be taught.

The year 1982, his active year abroad, marked Ross's retirement from Dalhousie University. And, for now, this is where we shall leave him, comfortably ensconced in his office in one of the old houses on Henry Street that comprised the Department of English until just recently; Professor Emeritus, an officer of the Order of Canada since 1976, the newest receiver of the Lorne Pierce Medal (1982), and the eventual recipient of 11 honourary degrees; guiding students, working with academics from around the world, advising all who are committed to Canadian culture.

Part III: Saying Farewell

A memorial service was held for Malcolm Ross in St. George's Church in Halifax on Friday, November 29, 2002, with the Reverend Douglas Chard and the Reverend Canon Gary Thorne presiding (J. Andrew Wainwright, January 24, 2003). Ross died on November 4, 2002, after a brief illness. Ross's doctor claimed the pneumonia that took his life was so virulent that

a man of 25 would have had only a fifty per cent chance of surviving (Julie Ross, November 22, 2002). Ross was 91. If there is any comfort to be found in Ross's unexpected death, it is that Malcolm remained Malcolm right up until the end. Enraged by President George Bush's policies in Iraq, scandalized by the Roman Catholic Church's handling of recent sexual abuse charges, and, finally, concerned about the symptoms exhibited by the man who lay next to him in the emergency ward of the Queen Elizabeth II Health Sciences Centre, Malcolm Ross remained committed to world justice, to community ethics, and to the well-being of his fellow citizen. He will be deeply missed.

Notes

1 The following discussion of Ross's introductions is part of a larger argument about the relevance of Ross and the N.C.L. to contemporary debates about canon formation in Canada. See Groening 2000, 95-110.

2 Ross also wrote a new introduction for *The Hidden Mountain* (1975), after Gabrielle Roy expressed her outrage at the original introduction by Mary Jane Edwards.

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