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André Dodeman

- 1 British Columbian poet George Bowering once said that "Canadian literature like Canadian history is largely Scottish. To get into Canadian literature it helps to be named [...] Alex or Ian or Malcolm" (qtd in Trumpener, 1997, p. 246). Hugh MacLennan's fiction is no exception to this rather playful statement as Canada's Scottish heritage is always present in the background of his novels or chosen as a central theme in his novel *Each Man's Son*. His work remains associated with mid-twentieth-century Canadian realism and the design to write a national novel that would reconcile divisions within Canadian society and language groups, but any critical approach to his work as an outdated, homogeneous oeuvre would not only be unfair to the writer but also to the field of Canadian studies. Although the seven novels he published between 1941 and 1980 share a great deal of thematic and narrative features, the progression from one novel to the next unveils phases of hesitation and doubt that affect narrative, plot, and style. In his first three novels, MacLennan attempted to write stories that have often been criticized for reducing its characters to mere allegorical national figures and sacrificing them to the universalizing humanist discourses which orient the reading of the novel. These discourses permeate his very first published novel, *Barometer Rising*, set in the small Canadian town of Halifax during WWI which rapidly transcends its rather limited geography to become the stage for world events, as well as the two novels that followed, *Two Solitudes* (1945) and *The Precipice* (1948), which deal respectively with the issues of reconciliation between the French- and English-speaking communities of Quebec and the cultural discrepancies between Canadian and American worldviews.
- 2 His fourth novel, *Each Man's Son* (1951), however, marks a shift away from the usual narrative techniques used in his previous work and reveals a more critical approach to

what Canada has inherited from Europe's past and more particularly from Scotland. MacLennan explained that *Each Man's Son* was a "transitional piece—a kind of bridge between *The Precipice* and [his] last" novel, *The Watch that Ends the Night* (MacLennan, 1960b, p. 36), and critics reacted to and quoted this statement to either justify the novel's shortcomings or praise its singular position in the author's life's work. This paper will contend that, although transitional, the novel occupies a rather central position in MacLennan's work insofar as its approach to Scottish heritage in Eastern Canada is more critical in tone and experimental in form compared to his previous novels. The clichéd portrait of the wise character of Scottish descent in *Barometer Rising* progressively gives way to a more ambiguous one in *Each Man's Son* which dwells on a native Cape Breton community that has been mineralized by an imagined Scottish past. Much of the transitional features of the novel lie in its shifts in viewpoint which aim to downplay the idealized portrait of a Cape Breton community that is overly proud of its heritage and deeply attached to its language. This distance between the narrative voice and the fictional community living in the mining town of Broughton also serves to revisit the relationship between Nova Scotia and the Highlands of Scotland, and by extension Europe and Eastern Canada, and thereby interrogate the validity of the grand narratives inherited from Europe and responsible for shaping Canadian identity in the early twentieth century. *Each Man's Son*, which combines the defining characteristics of realist and romance fiction, proposes a different space for MacLennan to not only revisit Cape Breton's Highland heritage at the beginning of the twentieth century but also to examine how this heritage has confined the community to the isolated geography of the island and condemned its people to an existence of repetition and defeat that originates from their unresolved issues with the past.

- 3 With *Each Man's Son*, MacLennan revisits his native Cape Breton to tell the story of a small mining community in Broughton in 1913 and its historical and cultural roots which can be traced back to the Highlands of Scotland. The novel narrows its focus to two families which comprise, on the one hand, the community doctor, Daniel Ainslie, and his infertile wife Margaret, and on the other, Mollie MacNeil, her son Alan and the father of the family, Archie MacNeil, who left the community four years earlier to become a prize fighter in the United States. The story opens with Alan, an eight-year-old boy whom Doctor Ainslie will grow to love as his own son. The doctor's fatherly attachment is expressed in his desire to offer the young boy much more than what his lower-class mother and absent father could ever offer him. With the exception of the doctor's wife Margaret whose Loyalist family came from Massachusetts, the protagonists all share Highland origins that date back to the second half of the 18th century. The incipit sets the story on the shore of Cape Breton Island to highlight the rugged insularity of the area and introduce the readers to Mollie and Alan MacNeil:

The tide was moving into the cove and now the water was breaking not many yards away from the boy's feet. The whole place was awash with sound as the cliff caught and magnified the noise of the wind and water, echoed the screams of sea birds and reverberated with the occasional thunder of a big wave. (p. 3)

- 4 The liminal setting of the opening chapter, between the ever-moving ocean and the mineral interior of the island, is replete with sounds, echoes and reverberations that establish the historical connection between the isolated community of Broughton and a larger narrative of displacement and Cape Breton identity. Nevertheless, MacLennan subscribes to the notion that islands are places chiefly defined by geographical isolation and human disconnectedness, a notion shared by geographers like Yi-Fu Tuan

who, in 1995, used the concept of insularity to describe people's desires to express their differences from the rest of the world: "They may push their separateness and autonomy, their cultural singularity, to the point than no one outside the group and its unique experiences can understand it, much less speak about or for it. People and cultures are, in this sense, islands, their insularity both fate and a source of pride." (Tuan, 1995, p. 229)¹ In the same vein, MacLennan's prologue to *Each Man's Son* defines the people of Cape Breton as descendants of Highlanders who "were lonely [and] were not part of the great outer world" (p. viii),² a preliminary definition that presents the community of Broughton as an isolated microcosm whose cultural development has been stunted by a bleak existence in the mines. The omniscient narrator's description of the shore in *Each Man's Son* does not serve to connect the characters to a larger outside world but rather to a European past that relegates them to the margins of history and dismisses them as an insular people who is entirely disconnected from the mainland. Pitting the changing seascape against the monolithic island interior and its collieries highlights the community's precarious existence and sense of isolation.

- 5 The town of Broughton is surrounded by more than fifteen collieries that function as the economic backbone of the island. The minerality of the mines and collieries stand in sharp contrast with the openness and fluidity of the seascape depicted in the incipit. When the story turns to Alan's bedroom at night, the narrator describes "a soft breeze [that] carried balsam-laden air into the packed area of Broughton, where the miners' rows looked desolate and the bankheads of the collieries loomed like monuments in a gigantic cemetery" (p. 44). The "miners' rows" do more than recall the nineteenth-century naturalist esthetic that investigated and criticized the dire living conditions of the miners and the lower classes, as the simile that associates collieries with cemeteries aims more importantly to underscore the mineralization or fossilization of Broughton's Gaelic culture and identity, to the extent that the miners appear, speak and live as if their evolution and development had been stunted by their environment.
- 6 As a result, the text draws an essentialist portrait of Cape Bretoners who continue to refer to or define themselves as Highlanders shaped by a distant Scottish past that dismisses continental Canada altogether. This essentialist portrait applies to the characters' physical traits which recall a heritage that repeats itself in genetic terms. When Daniel Ainslie spends a day with Mollie and Alan in Louisburg, he reflects upon Mollie's typically Celtic features:

[Daniel Ainslie] saw a face with small features and a short Celtic nose so straight it was almost Grecian. He saw her frail body with a certain wistful grace and he saw that her eyes had the eager loving-kindness of a deer's eyes. He knew, as one Highlander always knows when he sees it in another, that she had quality. (p. 135)
- 7 The novel abounds with references to the physical traits of Highlanders. In this passage, Daniel Ainslie is the main focalizer who represents Mollie as an idealized figure of Cape Breton's Scottish past, and in so doing, reduces her to a mere imitation or a repetition at best of a prior Highland model. In *The World, the Text and the Critic*, Edward Said aptly reexamines the concept of filiation and the role it plays in the formation of cultural memory. Said dates this connection back to Enlightenment thinkers like Buffon, the eighteenth-century French naturalist, who posited that heredity was "guided by memory" which guarantees "the repetition of features [...] into the next generation" (Said, 1991, p. 115). The concepts of filiation and repetition here serve to ensure the continuity of Gaelic identity in Cape Breton and preserve the community's cohesion. In addition, the repeated physical traits are accompanied by

specific language patterns, the frequent repetitions of which convey a stereotypical image of the community whose linguistic origins are also steeped in the Highlands. While readers may interpret entire sections of the text as a rather neutral reconstruction of a Gaelic community and language in Canada, the narrator draws a more ambivalent portrait of Cape Bretoners who are stunted by filiation and repetition. It is the characters whose origins are located outside the community that best illustrate this ambivalence.

- 8 The novel's shifts in focalization represent a major change in MacLennan's fiction as this narrative technique, already a well-known trademark of nineteenth-century realism, allows the narrator to distance himself from the characters and draw a more critical portrait of the isolated community he is trying to represent. Unlike the omniscient narrators of *Barometer Rising* and *Two Solitudes* who delve into the characters' psyches to subsume them into the concept of nation, the narrator of *Each Man's Son* is much less intrusive and enables the reader to imagine the community from an external viewpoint and take note of its shortcomings. The character of Margaret Ainslie, Daniel Ainslie's wife, offers one of these external viewpoints. The narrator begins by stressing her non-Scottish family origins in the early chapters of the novel:

Her family had been Loyalists with ancestors who had been prominent in Massachusetts before the Revolution. Her father had been born on the main peninsula of Nova Scotia, and though she had grown up in Broughton, Margaret had never been able to think of the Highlanders here as anything but strange. (p. 36)

- 9 Although she reveres her husband and articulates her pride in being married to "one of the ablest men in Nova Scotia" (p. 175), the strangeness that Margaret refers to shuts her out from the Gaelic-centric community and pinpoints a lack of knowledge of Gaelic customs and traditions that encourages readers to form a less one-dimensional image of the community instead of receiving it unfiltered by an omniscient narrator. Her reflections on her husband often serve to deliver a biased account of the idiosyncrasies of Gaelic culture in Cape Breton and the overbearing presence of guilt inherited from Calvinist Scotland. Readers are informed that Daniel Ainslie was raised by a strict Presbyterian father, surrenders to the self-inflicted agony of reading and translating Homer's *Odyssey* in his spare time and feels personally responsible for operating and accidentally sterilizing his own wife. What sets the story apart from his previous novels, often concerned with foregrounding the power and influence of history over the characters, is its indirect allusions to Scottish history and its emphasis on the haunting presence of the past. The overwhelming guilt that Daniel suffers from explains the strangeness and unhomeliness of his existence to the point that his present is constantly haunted by a tormented personal and collective past. History is no longer the transcendent force that governs the plot and determines the characters; instead, it becomes a ghostly presence that invades the character's most private spaces. In her study of postcolonial gothic fiction, *Unsettled Remains: Canadian Literature and the Postcolonial Gothic*, Cynthia Sugars examines the connection between ghost and monster figures and the excruciating experiences of exile caused by a central imperial power. She argues that the unhomely legacies of imperialism "which appear in the form of unresolved memory traces and occluded histories resulting from the experience of colonial oppression, diasporic migration, or national consolidation, is readily figured in the form of ghosts or monsters that 'haunt' the nation/subject from without and within" (Sugars, 2009, p. vii). Even though *Each Man's Son* cannot be categorized as gothic fiction *per se*, it nevertheless manages to foreground subjects and communities

that are haunted by overbearing figures of the past as well as by their traumatic displacement from their Scottish homeland.

- 10 The Highland characters of *Each Man's Son* are portrayed as the victims of Calvinism, a branch of Protestantism that transcends social class by including both Daniel Ainslie, the guilt-ridden doctor of the local elite, and the miners, many of whom are prone to superstition and led to believe that even physical ailments can be sent as “punishment for sin” (p. 41). This conflation of Calvinism with disease paves the way for the emergence of an etiological discourse which pertains not only to individual cases but also to the community's local identity. The figure of the doctor is indeed a significant motif in MacLennan's novels that can be identified as far back as *Barometer Rising* in which Angus Murray, a shell-shocked physician of Gaelic origin, woos the heroine of the story. His later and more successful *The Watch That Ends the Night* features another doctor, Jerome Martell, who has often been interpreted as an avatar of famous Canadian physician Norman Bethune. Etiological discourse functions here as a pretext to both investigate the symptoms and causes of a disease and interrogate the historical and religious origins of the community's predicament or illness. When discussing Calvinism at the hospital with his seventy-six-year-old mentor, Dr Dougald MacKenzie, the analytical features of etiological discourse surface explicitly via free indirect speech:

Ainslie became aware that his whole body from the neck down through the diaphragm felt sore, aching and lacerated. His doctor's intelligence awoke, and as it began to function the curse of his ancestors seemed farther away. Why did a man like himself have no migraine headaches and no stomach ulcers? Why, instead, did he have frequent spasms in the muscles of his back which he knew were caused by nervous tension? Could it be possible that all emotional processes reacted physiologically in one of these three different ways with various individuals? (pp. 65-6)

- 11 The interrogative form which often underlies etiological discourse reflects the novel's chief concerns with aporia. Indeed, such questions pertaining to the causes of physical illness like headaches and muscle spasms suggest a lack of knowledge and foresight that gives structure to the plot and foregrounds the doctor's agnosticism and quest for spiritual meaning. In his study of *The Watch That Ends the Night*, Keiichi Hirano contends that its protagonist, Jerome Martell, is more interested in investigating “the socio-economic aspect of diseases” (Hirano, 1973, p. 126) than its physiological causes. The etiological discourse present in *Each Man's Son* identifies Calvinism as the main cause of Cape Breton's dire economic, intellectual and emotional plight, along with the collective symptoms that can only be diagnosed by the text's isolation of specific historical patterns.
- 12 The main argument that Calvinism is the cause of everything gone wrong in the community is not a new one. In the 1970s, Hugo MacPherson had already expatiated on “MacLennan's admission that the Puritan problem [could not] be solved in the social-symbolic manner of *Two Solitudes*” (MacPherson, 1973, p. 30), but what may have been overlooked is perhaps the connection between the biblical text and the Calvinist “curse” that has sentenced the entire community to a life of guilt and hardship. Many critics were quick to identify Calvinism as a major cause of inbred collective guilt without reading deeper into how it affected the act of reading in the novel. For instance, MacLennan's prologue does not mention the biblical text and prefers to focus on the roles played by Calvin and Knox:

They [Cape Breton Highlanders] brought with them an ancient curse, intensified by John Calvin and branded upon their souls by John Knox and his successors — the belief that man has inherited from Adam a nature so sinful there is no hope for him and that, furthermore, he lives and dies under the wrath of an arbitrary God who will forgive only a handful of His elect on the Day of Judgment. (p. viii)

- 13 MacLennan goes to great lengths to lay the blame on Calvin and Knox but the early precepts of Calvinism that enforced the primacy of Scripture and laid focus on sin and predestination is somehow dissociated from the biblical text. That their souls have been “branded” by John Knox is a suggested reference to the banishment of the biblical Cain who stands as a symbol of the entire community, cast from its homeland upon the inhospitable shores of Cape Breton and doomed to exile and isolation. The cause of the community’s predicament is much less located in the biblical text itself than in Calvin’s and Knox’s literal, and therefore nearsighted, interpretations of the original. The additional guilt Daniel feels over accidentally sterilizing his own wife is an apt illustration of how various forms of personal guilt can be subsumed into and instrumentalized by Calvinism: “[H]e was a physician, a learned man of forty-two years, and he no longer believed in hell and damnation. No, but he did believe, and believed because it was true, that he had permitted the fables of his childhood to destroy much of Margaret’s happiness” (p. 65). The narrator’s polyptotic repetition of “belief” castigates the Calvinist faith as the main cause of a collective disease that cripples and stifles existence as well as the multiple ways its founders have used Calvinist precepts to assert emotional and intellectual control over their congregations.
- 14 The discrepancy between text and interpretation is further illustrated by Daniel Ainslie’s self-inflicted task to practice his Greek and translate short sections of Homer’s *Odyssey* in his spare time. Intertextual references such as these are quite common in MacLennan’s novels, and they show the author’s extensive knowledge of ancient history and culture as well as his conviction that this knowledge can help interpret the present. However, in *Each Man’s Son*, such a fixation on antiquated language is construed as yet another instance of the vagaries of literalism. MacLennan’s first two unpublished novels, *So All Their Praises* (1933) and *A Man Should Rejoice* (1937) were experimental in form and proved that the author was quite familiar with modernist narrative techniques and the modernist writer’s aim to challenge classic conventions and problematize the acts of reading and interpreting. Reading is problematized as well in *Each Man’s Son* by the protagonist’s obsessive quest for an untainted original meaning that precludes any attempt to adapt and provide a modern or contemporary reading of Homer’s text. Daniel Ainslie’s reading of Homer’s *Odyssey* as a stable monolithic text dooms the character to a Sisyphean existence of pointless repetition severed from the heteroglossia of the external world. To a perhaps limited extent, MacLennan’s work prefigures some of the questions that would be later investigated by poststructuralist thinkers and theorists in the 1960s and 1970s, who were concerned, among many other things, with the problematics of representation and the instability of meaning.
- 15 A case in point is Gilles Deleuze’s *Différence et répétition* which revisits the “paradox of repetition,” a paradox that implies that there must be difference for there to be repetition. The human mind would be unable to identify repetition if there were no differences between what the mind construes as separate distinct moments (Deleuze, 1968, p. 96). In 1935, MacLennan completed his Ph.D in classics at Princeton and wrote his dissertation, *Oxyrhynchus: An Economic and Social Study*, on a small Egyptian town at the periphery of the Roman Empire. His study attempted to find social and historical

patterns in the growth and decline of the Roman Empire and his conclusions suggested that history could be understood as an intelligible series of movements and cycles that helps historians anticipate the future. In the 1935 issue of the *Dalhousie Review*, MacLennan published an article in which he wrote that “any completed human pattern has a meaning; and if that meaning can be isolated and rendered coherent, it must necessarily explain our own society to ourselves” (MacLennan, 1935, p. 67).³ In a similar fashion, the narrator identifies Calvinism as a pattern that explains the community’s inability to turn away from its overly pessimistic beliefs and practices. The narrator defines the curse of the original sin as an original moment in history that repeats itself over time, and it is precisely this ceaseless repetition that maintains the community within its confined space. Consistent with MacLennan’s views on the inevitable return of history and its cosmic catastrophes, the third-person narrator resorts to cosmic irony in the closing chapters of the novel to foreshadow the end of the community’s isolation:

If an omnipotent and interested God looked down on them that summer, irony must have been one of His pleasures. For here in Cape Breton were these innocent ones, eager to make themselves worthy of the great world of Europe from which their ancestors had been driven long ago; and there across the sea was that great world of Europe, enjoying the final summer of its undisturbed arrogance. For this was the year before 1914. (p. 204)

- 16 When novels are written from a retrospective standpoint, the time distance between the date of publication and the timeframe of the novel allows levels of cosmic irony that stage characters as mere pawns in a larger universal story. However, what is at stake here is perhaps less the narrator’s hindsight and position outside the timeframe of the story than his satirical portrait of an arrogant Europe that Cape Bretoners and Canadians are encouraged to shift away from. Setting the story of *Each Man's Son* in 1913 purports to question the submission of the colonial periphery to yet another cycle of European wars that would ultimately conclude with the downfall of imperial Europe and the rise of settler countries like Canada. If the narrator is so intent on isolating patterns derived from repetition, it is to better interrogate and break the cycles of defeat that the community has internalized and repeated since the eighteenth-century Highland clearances.
- 17 As mentioned earlier, MacLennan draws a rather ambivalent portrait of the Highland community of Cape Breton insofar as he simultaneously records the Highland culture that is about to be transformed by world events and describes the community’s ignorance and resigned acceptance of its fate. Even though Margaret Atwood’s thematic guide to Canadian literature would undergo academic revision after its publication in 1972, her view that English and French-Canadian literature “choose the negative rather than the positive versions of the religious symbolisms made available to them by their respective cultures” remains accurate concerning MacLennan’s novel (Atwood, 1972, p. 217). In addition to his work as a novelist, MacLennan was also a well-known essayist whose personal life as a Canadian of Scottish descent tended to seep into his fiction. His personal observations of his father’s Scottish heritage and identity in his essay “Scotchman’s Return” reveals the author’s tendency to extrapolate and generalize at the risk of drawing a clichéd portrait of the Highlander. When remembering his father, he writes that

[h]e was simply Scotch. All the perplexity and doggedness of the race was in him, its loneliness, tenderness and affection, its deceptive vitality, its quick flashes of violence, its dog-whistle sensitivity to sounds to which Anglo-Saxons are stone-

deaf, its incapacity to tell its heart to foreigners save in terms foreigners do not comprehend, its resigned indifference to whether they comprehend or not. (MacLennan, 1960a, pp. 1-2)

- 18 The distance between the author and his father's heritage partly explains the narrator's critical tone and irony in *Each Man's Son*. In the essay, the author's representation of the Scotchman as descending from a brave and sensitive ancestry is downplayed by his inability to articulate his own culture in a way that would reconnect him to a larger society.⁴ Unlike Alistair MacLeod's short stories whose nostalgic narrators often act as the bardic mouthpieces of a bygone Cape Breton culture and represent "the resistance of vernacular oral traditions to the historical pressures of British imperialism" (Trumpener, 1997, p. 33), the narrative voice of *Each Man's Son* draws the readers' attention to the Cape Breton Highlanders' perpetuation of a garrison mentality that finally portrays them as the reified vestiges of an extinct clan society whose native Cape Breton Island has become little more than a pale imitation of Scotland. This pessimistic representation of the community is further amplified by the novel's romance elements which are present only to be overturned.
- 19 In her article "*Each Man's Son: Romance in Disguise*", Laurel Boone concentrates on the novel's romance formulas and characters who are "fully human, but, unlike those of more realistic fiction, [...] frequently have superhuman powers" (Boone, 1980, p. 149). The distinction between realism and romance, which has been a matter of discussion and debate since the rise of the realist novel in the middle of the nineteenth century, is not always clear to determine insofar as one mode of representation usually tends to dominate the other. Francis O'Gorman writes that romance is more concerned with "fantasy, imagination, and strangeness" than the classic realist novel that aims to express "the painfulness of being alive" (O'Gorman, 2012, p. 485). The novelty of *Each Man's Son* consists precisely of its use of both realist and romance conventions to pit one against the other. The character of Archie MacNeil, for instance, a twenty-eight-year-old prize fighter who has been away for four years and missed out on his son's early childhood, is a fine example of the heroic figure who has been entirely reimagined and fantasized by the community. Each chapter focuses on one of the protagonists and the chapters recounting Archie MacNeil's life in Trenton foreground his feelings of loss, his solitary wanderings in Trenton and his final defeat as a boxer before returning home to reclaim his wife and family. In the second chapter of the novel, the narrator introduces the readers to Archie MacNeil whose heroic stature is depicted from the Highlanders' perspective:
- But to the men of Broughton, Archie was a hero. When he gave an exhibition before going away, six thousand Highlanders — men who had been driven from the outdoors into the pits where physical courage had become almost the only virtue they could see clearly and see all the time — paid to watch him fight. They loved him because he was giving significance, even a crude beauty, to the clumsy courage they all felt in themselves. (p. 16)
- 20 Here again, the narrator's somewhat derogatory description of the Highlanders, with their "clumsy" courage and fascination with physical strength, aims to debunk the narrative of the Scottish folk hero, not to mention the parenthetical narratorial comment that underlines the community's limited scope. While MacLeod's stories romanticize and lament the loss of the long tradition of oral storytelling in Highland clan culture, MacLennan's text rather draws attention to the limitations of oral storytelling by pitting the community's imagined and fantasized construction of Archie

MacNeil against the disappointing description of the hero at the end of the novel. The final chapters recount the end of Archie MacNeil's odyssean journey from the United States back to Cape Breton where he finds his wife together with Louis Camire, a Frenchman whose socialist convictions draw an even more disparaging portrait of Highlanders as the ignorant victims of false consciousness disguised as fate. As the figure upon whom the entire community projects its hopes and sense of pride, Archie MacNeil takes on a symbolic dimension to represent the community's long history of defeat. Archie's stature as folk hero who has inspired his own legend by cutting down his opponents is offset by the realistic description of the hero from the child's perspective at the end of the novel. When Alan sees his father for the first time in four years, he sees

An ugly man with a great body in a soiled city suit, his face battered and lumpy and his nose mashed square, [who] was standing sideways to the door. His arms were bent at the elbows and thrust forward, his huge hands half-clenched, his shoulders poised and on guard, and in the split second while the boy watched, not taking a breath, the big man's clenched fist shot out and smashed into Mr. Camire's head. (p. 234)

- 21 The shift to internal focalization in this scene draws the readers' attention to the fabricated nature of the folktale and the Highlanders' seemingly anachronistic and deceptive attachment to myth and legend. In addition, the scene misleads the readers into having them expect a conclusion worthy of a heroic figure like Ulysses, but instead renders a pathetic portrait of a fallen hero who, unlike the classic Homeric figure, kills not only the suitor but also his wife.
- 22 The text's criticism of the community's subdued acceptance of its fate is taken further with the character of Daniel Ainslie. Its totalizing view of Broughton society at the turn of the twentieth century, with its medley of secondary characters who cling to ancient beliefs and certainties about existence, isolates Dr Ainslie from the rest of the community, a pattern of isolation that enables the narrator to further investigate the doctor's existential crisis by virtue of his social, intellectual and even geographical position on the outskirts of the town. Indeed, the doctor's various journeys back and forth to the hospital and the miners' row involve the crossing of a bridge that functions as an interstitial space between his time-consuming duties as the miners' doctor and his more introspective queries about the meaning of existence. Mikhail Bakhtin defines such liminal spaces as chronotopes of the threshold which involve turning points when "the decision that changes a life (or the indecisiveness that fails to change a life [...])" is finally made (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 248). On his return from Mollie's house to check on young Alan who is recovering from surgery for appendicitis, Dr Ainslie's crossing of the bridge triggers an existential epiphany:
- Now his spirit flickered like a bat over a dark and sinister landscape as lifeless as the mountains of the moon, its bat's eyes contemplating a world older than the human race; a world where there were no gods, no devils, no laws, no certainties, no beginnings and no end. A world without purpose, without meaning, without intelligence; dependent upon nothing, out of nothing, within nothing; moving into an eternity which itself was nothing. (p. 223)
- 23 The pessimistic succession of anaphoras and epiphoras expressing absence ("no", "without", "nothing") illustrates what Hugo MacPherson terms the "de-Puritanizing" force of MacLennan's novels (MacPherson, 1973, p. 29). This epiphanic moment, no doubt inspired by the reemergence of existentialist philosophy resulting from Jean Paul-Sartre's publication of *Existentialism Is a Humanism* in 1948—i.e., three years before

the publication of *Each Man's Son*—, deals the final blow to the narrow essentializing principles of Calvinism and marks the end of the character's indecision. The agnostic protagonist finally dismisses the essentialist Calvinist beliefs of the Highlanders in favour of an existentialist approach whose new godless world of individual freedom and choice offers the only solution to break the community's patterns of defeat. The novel's tragic *deus ex machina* resolution with Archie's murder of Camire and his wife Mollie solves Daniel Ainslie's problems by delivering the young boy from the violence of his Highland background and providing him with a long-awaited son, a rather convenient conclusion foreshadowed by the novel's title. The convenient arrival of the son compensates for the loss of eternity "which itself was nothing" and lays the groundwork for MacLennan's *Return of the Sphinx* in 1967 which eventually redefined *Each Man's Son* as the first part of a family saga featuring Daniel Ainslie's adopted son Alan. *Return of the Sphinx*, which combines elements from *Two Solitudes* and *Each Man's Son*, illustrates once again MacLennan's purpose to dissect the patterns of social, political and religious unrest in light of the raging conflict between federalists and separatists in Quebec in the late 1960s.

- 24 Even though MacLennan's fiction shares a great deal of common ground with the classic thesis novel, *Each Man's Son* stands apart in many ways as it attempts to explore liminality, indecision and ambivalence. The experimental and transitional aspects of the novel that MacLennan mentioned himself are rather what makes the book such an insightful study of Highland culture in Canada and its struggles with its overpowering Calvinist heritage. Francis Zichy's conclusion that MacLennan fails to "grasp, or is not interested in, the changes in world view that inform modernist experimentation with narrative point of view" (Zichy, 1994, p. 176) may still be accurate, but this statement should not belittle MacLennan's efforts in *Each Man's Son* to combine different viewpoints in order to form a more conflicted representation of Cape Breton rendered by a narrative voice that wavers between admiration and harsh criticism. The modernity of MacLennan's fiction may not lie in its narrative techniques and formal characteristics, but it successfully tackles the major social, political and religious changes that were reshaping Canada in the second half of the twentieth century. While readers may still be tempted to dismiss his work as a classic, unambiguous rendering of Canadian society at a given moment, they should keep in mind that his first two novels and their representations of intergenerational conflict, anti-imperialism, anti-traditionalism and sexual intimacy were considered innovative and modern, so much so that some of them had even been attacked for obscenity. Colin Hill responds to this discussion on the modernity of Canada's early twentieth-century realists by subsuming writers like Hugh MacLennan, Frederick Philip Grove and Morley Callaghan into the broader category of "modern realism" that seeks to account for the time lag between the prolonged popularity of realism in Canada and the deferred emergence of Canadian modernism in the early 1950s with writers such as Ernest Buckler, Sheila Watson and Ethel Wilson, to name but a few. He argues that "the modern-realist style is at once conservative and experimental, and characterized by a writerly exploration of a variety of subjective points of view within the framework of objective narration" (Hill, 2012, p. 199). This statement no doubt applies to *Each Man's Son*, but it more importantly offers the advantage of encouraging readers and academics alike to revisit a fictional work that some may consider outdated or overly conservative.

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NOTES

1. The conflation of islands and insularity with isolation and disconnectedness should not overshadow the considerable amount of work that has been done in the field of island studies since the 1950s. Edouard Glissant's essays and fictional pieces on islands and archipelagos in the second half of the twentieth century, along with the creation of the *Island Studies Journal* in 2006, which was first established at the University of Prince Edward Island (Canada), have challenged the classic binary oppositions between land and sea and the traditional representations of islands as remote, isolated areas by thinking in terms of relationality and movement. Jonathan Pugh defines settler colonies such as Canada and Australia as "archipelagos composed of thousands of island-island movements" (Pugh, 2013, p. 10).
2. In *Faith and Fiction*, Barbara Pell specifies that MacLennan reluctantly agreed to add a prologue to the novel to explain the historical context behind the connection between Cape Breton and Calvinism (Pell, 1998, p. 38). His publishers probably feared that the readers would not be able to fully understand the novel and especially its criticism of Cape Breton's Calvinist heritage.
3. The idea that history could have transcendental significance was not uncommon at the time. Oswald Spengler's 1922 *The Decline of the West* also discussed history in terms of the evolution and teleology of nations and empires. Such interpretations of history would have a long-lasting impact on the plots of MacLennan's novels which unfold along realist lines. For instance, the fact that each chapter of *Each Man's Son* focuses on one central character foreshadows the final confrontational conclusion between all the characters.
4. Struggle with language has often been considered a defining theme of Canadian maritime literature, starting with Ernest Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley* (1952), a *Künstlerroman* in which the young artist, David Canaan, acts as the voice of his community in the Annapolis Valley in Nova Scotia. This question is also raised by Janice Kulyk Keefer's *Under Eastern Eyes* in which she writes that one of the essential features of "hard" realism in the Maritimes is "a consciousness of how language is implicated in the process of impoverishment, victimizing those who cannot aspire to correct or educated speech, and liberating those who can" (Keefer, 1987, p. 167).

ABSTRACTS

This paper proposes to study the novelistic representation of the descendants of Scottish Highlanders who were forced to immigrate to Cape Breton, Canada, after the eighteenth-century Highland clearances. Hugh MacLennan's realist novel entitled *Each Man's Son* (1951) is set on Cape Breton Island where its inhabitants eke out an existence of resignation and defeat in the year 1913 and this study purports to delve into the narrative's ambivalent portrait of Cape Breton Highlanders who are either characterized by a strong attachment to their Scottish heritage or criticized for their inability to break free from its haunting past. This ambivalence will be examined with a view to explaining the novel's experimental and transitional form as well as its unique position in MacLennan's work.

Cet article propose d'étudier la représentation romanesque des descendants des Highlanders d'Écosse qui furent obligés d'immigrer au Cap-Breton au Canada après leur expulsion des Hautes Terres d'Écosse au dix-huitième siècle. Le roman *Each Man's Son* (1951) de Hugh MacLennan, qui

s'inscrit dans une tradition réaliste, se déroule en 1913 sur l'île du Cap-Breton où ses habitants mènent une vie difficile faite de résignation et de défaites, et cette étude visera à examiner le portrait ambigu de ces descendants d'Highlanders qui se distinguent tantôt par un puissant attachement à leurs racines écossaises, tantôt par leur impuissance à se libérer des hantises du passé. Cette ambiguïté sera analysée afin de démontrer le caractère expérimental et transitoire du roman et d'expliquer la place singulière qu'occupe ce roman dans l'œuvre de MacLennan.

INDEX

Mots-clés: Canada, Écosse, Hugh MacLennan, Cap-Breton, Highlander, héritage

Keywords: Canada, Scotland, Hugh MacLennan, Cape Breton, Highlander, heritage

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