# *The Uses of Diversity: The Internationalization of English-Canadian Literature*

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"THE MULTI-NATIONALIZATION of English-Canadian Literature" might have been an apter title for this paper, but in choosing "internationalization" I wish to point out how international influences and developments have become reflected in the evolution of Canada and its literature. As a country of mass, diverse immigration, Canada, with or without Quebec, seems unlikely to transform itself into a remarkable unitary society, but at best to persist as a soft-centred federation, lacking homogeneity of race, culture, or values. Canada has still to be invented, yet it may be too late. The worst outcome may be foreshadowed in contemporary Britain. Since the dissolution of Empire, its diverse and probably incompatible elements have reassembled on British soil, in often abrasive propinquity.

There are now, to instance one strongly active group, two million "British" Muslims. Of these, an extremist element, loudly supportive of Khomeini's *fatwah* pronounced upon Salman Rushdie, categorically rejects British society and its values; its leader, Dr. Siddiqui, has called for the establishment of a non-territorial Muslim state in Britain whose members would be subject only to Islamic law and custom. Never again will Britain enjoy the cohesive sense of nationhood Churchillian patriots invoked in 1940. We are witnessing the ironic dissolution of one of the oldest self-sure nations.

In English Canada, notably Loyalist Ontario before the Second World War closely identified with Britain, the Churchillian spirit and Anglo-Saxon dominance held; as one versifier expressed it: "The Lion roars, and when he calls / The Cubs respond with quickening pride" (Ross n.pag.)—not in French

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Canada, of course. An unwillingness at the outbreak of war to accept Japanese, Italian, and—as in the Great War—German Canadians as fully fledged citizens seems now ironically countered by the hesitant or downright reluctant allegiance to their new country not only of those Canadian Muslims who supported the cry for Rushdie's death but (if their writers are representative) many other Third World immigrants. (It need hardly be added that the so-called "Native" peoples have neither been, nor wished to be, citizens of the "Canada" which their ancestors inhabited under other names.) The postwar influx of alienated or uncommitted immigrants is not the first to be greeted without enthusiasm. Earlier, not only Chinese or Sikhs, specifically excluded from 1923 to 1947, but many kinds of European and the Jews fell into the euphemistic category of "non-preferred immigrants." Now visible immigrants show signs of themselves rejecting from within or refusing to merge their native being within a homogeneous or blandly multicultural Canadianness. Hence, an ominous similarity to the British phenomenon.

Evolving Canadian nationhood, carrying the burdens of its flawed past (as the old imperial nations do) has many more than "two solitudes" or Northrop Frye's six to reconcile; Hugh McLennan himself said he would now write, not of two, but "a million." Various thematic attempts to encapsulate the Canadian identity—such as Frye's "garrison mentality," Malcolm Ross's "the bifocal people," Margaret Atwood's "survival"—echoed in historian Ramsay Cook's *The Maple Leaf Forever*—fail to embrace the steadily swelling numbers of the populace (now about 30%) neither anglophone nor francophone in origin. This necessitates a struggle for community rather different from that urged by Robin Mathews in his *Canadian Literature*. When that appeared in 1978, it recorded his running battle over the decade before against the "domineering American 'other'" (2) and involved "a quest," in English-Canadian terms, "for community and nation by which the individual seeker can find and understand his or her full identity" (5). Inter-racial harmony he tends to take as a Canadian virtue, but Canada's amorphous multicultural make-up was not in the forefront of his mind, nor was it yet a prominent public issue (140). The world immigrating to

Canada now comes increasingly on its own terms; its many groups are liable to seek new definitions outside traditional West European or Anglo-Saxon culture, whose sense of its past and images of identity are alien to them.[1] Somehow Canada must accommodate the diverse world.

Since the late 1960s, multiculturalism, officially acknowledged in 1971 and defined in the Canadian Multiculturalism Act which received consent in 1988, has become a panacea attractive to both politicians and liberal idealists. Like Mao's "hundred flowers," it may actually have encouraged fragmentation, as liable to foster an inscrutable, not necessarily acceptable otherness as the colourful togetherness which is so appealing in the shape of folk-dancing or egg-painting—a tourist brochure nation. Supposing, however, some groups, not content with being encouraged to paint eggs, affront the majority in some such manner as the extremist Dr. Siddiqui in Britain? It may seem laughable that turbans for Sikh RCMP officers can excite such passions, but it means potent symbolism to supporters of the Reform Party, who have also begun reviving the spectre of uncontrolled immigration by those with darker skins. If multiculturalism means "unity in diversity," what makes for unity?

Earlier "ethnic" writers in Canada, whether they cling proudly to their native culture or eagerly seek total acceptance by shrugging it off, recognize that they must live within an overarching "English" nationhood. At the "positive" extreme, as in Laura Goodman Salverson's *The Viking Heart* (1923), Icelandic pioneers contribute, though keeping alive their language and sagas, to the collective "Soul of a Nation." It is sealed in shared struggle and finally by the sacrifice of Thor, the finest son, who falls in the Great War beneath "the Flag of Britain, a holy Thing" (306). A less ideal paradigm, a generation later, may be found in John Marlyn's *Under the Ribs of Death* (1957) where the Hungarian-Canadian protagonist grasps from a terrorized childhood of bullying "English" gangs that "when you're English, it's the same as bein' Canadian." This means, in his Winnipeg (roughly contemporary with Salverson's) changing his name from Sandor Hunyadi to Alex Hunter and gaining entry, as successful businessman, to the South End. He becomes, like V. S.

Naipaul's colonized Trinidadian, a "mimic man" or Canadian. "Tell me . . . Mr. Canada," a German philosopher-barber taunts him, "What do you believe?" (161). He cannot answer: but George Grant would know: material success, domestic happiness, and not rocking the Anglo-Saxon boat might sum it up. (Peter Newman, formerly Neumann, is an actual case of name-bending.) Marlyn's novel, unlike Salverson's, poses uncomfortable questions. In Rudy Wiebe's *The Blue Mountains of China* (1970) the character Wilms, who changes his name to Williams, finds identity in material success underscored by his credo, "Church and business don't mix" (214). In such examples, Canada is more melting-pot than mosaic.

From a more positive viewpoint, many Canadian writers of European origin fled or descend from those who fled from intolerance and persecution to an El Dorado of the North. Canadian "freedom" meant for them, above all, the persistence of the minority voice in exile. Adele Wiseman's *The Sacrifice* (1956) recalls the pogroms against the Jews, Henry Kreisel's family fled Nazi-occupied Austria, Jan Drabek's family and Josef Skvorecky chose exile from Stalinist Czechoslovakia; similarly, more recent immigrants from the Third World would escape the sectarian violence of Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and India, and the foreshadowed tyranny of Hong Kong.

The reciprocal benefit such exiled writers have brought is their vital contribution to the internationalization of English-Canadian literature. This goes beyond the mere variety of multicultural diversity in its opening the literature, vicariously, to worldwide experience. Two modern waves, or phases, may be readily distinguished: the European and the Third World. The first belongs to the rise of Nazism, the Second World War, and the Cold War; the second is postwar, consequent upon the decolonization and independence of the West Indian and Asian countries especially. This immigration, steadily undermining Anglo-Saxon predominance, continues and its effects are unpredictable.

Nazism provoked a flood of exiles, largely Jewish, to North America. Among these, Henry Kreisel is significant as an Old World writer whose work, unlike that of Salverson or Wiseman,[2] would deeply challenge the New. Fleeing the Austrian *Anschluss*,

Kreisel went first to England, but when war broke out was transferred, with others ironically labelled "enemy aliens," to Canada. After eighteen months of internment, he was released and able eventually to study at the University of Toronto. Taking Joseph Conrad as model and later, among Canadians, A. M. Klein (not F. P. Greve alias F. P. Grove), he became a remarkably fluent writer in English; but, unlike Grove, who so plausibly Canadianized himself, Kreisel thrusts the "old ghosts" of Europe to the fore in his two major novels, *The Rich Man* (1948) and *The Betrayal* (1964). If Canada is "haunted," as Earle Birney's witty "Can.Lit." has it, "by our lack of ghosts" (49) they can still be conjured up, provokingly, by Stoppler in *The Betrayal*, an Old World exile preoccupied with moral breakdown and the Holocaust. This is experienced vicariously by the reluctantly involved academic historian and Conradesque narrator, aptly named Lerner:

> Here it was, the whole horror of the recent European past, in this apartment, where on the whole I lived a peaceful, contented, relatively happy life. Here now were the old ghosts, and I was, whether I wanted it or not, involved (43-44).

Kreisel himself embraces what he calls the "double experience" or "double perspective" (Neuman 170). In the stronger, less explicit *The Rich Man*, this perspective is so subtly shaped that only the most alert and historically aware readers will discern it without the aid of such a sophisticated analysis as Michael Greenstein has given it (269-80).

An inevitable opposition for such writers as these Europeans is one between experience and innocence, harsher than the Jamesian one between sophistication and innocence, or naivete. It is patronizingly expressed in Jan Drabek's impatience with the small-town provincialism of what he calls in *Voices of Change* "the W. O. Mitchells" (Hesse 54), and more tellingly in Skvorecky's *The Engineer of Human Souls* where the narrator-exile is a university teacher whose experienced memories constantly throw up an uncomprehended secret and alien history of "[a]ssociations in time, in appearance, in theory, in the heart, omnipotent and omnipresent" (107). Yet these need not, should not, lead to simplistic oppositions, which Skvorecky generally avoids. The

ideal poetic polarities of Walter Bauer, another refugee from Nazism and, like Skvorecky, a University of Toronto professor, are corrected laconically by his translator, Henry Beissel. Commenting on Bauer's paean to the "different sun" of Canada, Beissel observes: "It is simply not true that the Canadian sun 'never knew shame.' Just ask any Indian!" (n.pag. Significantly, Beissel would later publish *Under Coyote's Eye: A Play About Ishi* in 1980.) Nevertheless, Beissel understands and indulges Bauer's inclination to idealize Canada, as others may. After Hitler's Germany, the harrowed spirit seeking renewal clutches at hope, not new reasons to despair. Bauer's "older man's" message is "Onward / the charge of the living" (45), but not only that: it is charged with his duty to witness before a *relatively* innocent nation what, as a German and a human being, he brings to his new land—the "luggage" of his people's terrible history and lapse from civilization.

The distinction to be made between the Old World and the New is one of scope and depth. Kreisel observes in *Another Country* that Canada, *relatively* innocent, has been spared "the larger inhumanities," close experience of which tempers optimism and simplistic faith in the permanence of good fortune (201). Canada, like Australia, is only conditionally a "lucky country." The Kreisels, Bauers, and Skvoreckys comprehend this and serve as witnesses, on Canadian soil and in an adopted language, to darker human potentiality. Bauer comments in Riedel's *The Old World & the New*, on the Holocaust: "the future poets—and this is not only the problem of German poets—are going to be those who will not forget Auschwitz and Belsen, and who accept the burden of history" (65). A fine example of a poet Canadian-born (but with an appropriate ancestry) who has felt compelled to write of the intolerable, beyond experience, is Eli Mandel, in his much anthologized poem, "On the 25th Anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz . . . January 25, 1970." This came, he has said, of "a continuing unease, a sense of unpaid debts, unexplained reasons, an uneasy self" (3). By contrast, Sylvia Fraser's *Berlin Solstice* is a naive unimaginative failure, marred by stereotypes and simplistic values.

However, in the past thirty years, there has begun to develop from within, among native-born Canadian writers, a true cosmopolitanism which is prepared to take, not only the European experience but even the African within imaginative reach. Outstanding among the former are Timothy Findley's European novels, *The Wars* (1977) and *Famous Last Words* (1981). The hero of *The Wars*, Robert Ross, undergoes his own and a representative Canadian's initiation into the suicidal destructiveness of an Old World from which his new one has never weaned itself; the colonial is caught up, critically, in the sterile power-play of imploding empires. The obvious contrast from an earlier unquestioning age is John McCrae's naive "In Flanders Fields," for fifty years probably the best known single Canadian work internationally; Findley, of course, digested Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. His novel is a masterpiece of empathy, compassion, and understanding, deeply imbued with his knowledge of English war writing, whose essential meaning is condensed in the quotation on the last page: "Nothing so completely verifies our perception of a thing as the killing of it" (191). In *Famous Last Words*, Findley implicitly underwrites the prerogative of the Canadian writer to deal with the modern age in a freely inventive way—"Like a twentieth-century human being," as Pound advises in Findley's own novel (79). In the contemporary mode of "historiographic metafiction" (Hutcheon xiv), Findley manipulates literature, modern history, and historical figures—Ezra Pound and Pound's Hugh Selwyn Mauberley, and the Duke of Windsor—with the seemingly omniscient control of a writer uninhibited by any sense of colonial marginality.

Other English-Canadian writers have been distinguished for their capacity to reach out to "the other." One little known work, recently reissued by the Oberon Press, is exemplary. *The Wise Traveller* is a travelogue of a month spent in China in 1905 by the curious and intelligent Margaret MacLean; she later did pioneering educational work at the Royal Ontario Museum. She acutely anatomizes the Anglo-Saxon expatriate: a "vastly superior person; nothing in the country is good enough for him . . . yet he stays here and squeezes every cent he can out of the country while abusing it and its people" (31). She knows better: "Everywhere at

hand there was something, if only one's eyes were opened to see" (71). It would seem that we have changed little vis-à-vis "the other" over almost a century. A comparable undervalued work is Ray Smith's inetertextually challenging "speculative fiction" *Century* (1986) set in Europe of the *fin de siècle* and Isherwood's 1920s.

Margaret Laurence in her African writing exemplifies the inter-racial conscience at its keenest. She eschews the spurious innocence of the Canadian outsider in Somaliland and the Gold Coast during the last years of British rule. The white burden of imperial guilt is one that, though sharply critical from her "colonial's" viewpoint of English postures of superiority, she herself is prepared in *The Prophet's Camel Bell* to assume:

> I did not then know how much the Somalis resented the Christian conquerors, or if I suspected it, I felt somehow that I would be immune from their bitterness, for did I not feel friendly towards them? Surely they would see it.
>
> But they look at me from their own eyes, not mine . . . . The hands [of the beggars] would not always be stretched out in blessing over the giving of the easily spared coin that made life possible today but [not] tomorrow. (34-35)

Laurence sought to understand the Somalis as "their own eyes" saw the world. Her first published book, *A Tree of Poverty* (1954) collects versions of Somali folk poetry and prose. Her later African fiction, *This Side Jordan* (1960) and *The Tomorrow-Tamer* (1963), set in the Gold Coast, which as Ghana became the first independent English African colony, is remarkably balanced in characterizing the white imperialist and presents African characters, attitudes, and states of mind, both traditional and colonized, with a rare empathy. Her "inside" sense of Africa was hard-won in a spirit of humility and genuine enquiry. Her own concern and achievement may be expressed in what she herself wrote of the Nigerian novelist, Chinua Achebe, whose leading theme she discerns is "human communication and the lack of it. He shows the impossibly complicated difficulties of one person speaking to another, attempting to hear—really to hear—what another is saying" (*Long Drums* 124).[3]

The writings I have so far mentioned have enlarged Canadian literature with presences from the world elsewhere; they express,

to borrow a phrase which has been applied to Pierre Trudeau's foreign policy, a "concerned internationalism." A willingness, a capacity to hear another or, in the language of racial or colonial relations, "the other," is urgently demanded by our present condition. Canada, most recently the Third World's best friend, has found itself thrust in the world's eye as a colonizing nation, suggesting uncomfortable parallels with South Africa. The native people's blockades were universally publicized; international human rights observers and even Archbishop Tutu became involved.

"Here," complained Catharine Parr Traill in 1836, "there are . . . no legendary tales of those that came before us"—and she did not mean the indigenous peoples—but if recent Canadian writers are questioned, it will be found, as has been the case in South Africa, that a respectable number of them have spoken for the native "other": notably, Howard O'Hagan, Rudy Wiebe, George Ryga, Peter Such, Robert Kroetsch, Wayland Drew, George Bowering, David Williams, and most recently Leslie Hall Pinder in *On Double Tracks* (1990). In their work, effort has been made to rehabilitate the aboriginal peoples as having possessed authentic but suppressed modes and visions of life—including the Beothuks of Newfoundland, gone beyond reconciliation. With the growth of new native voices, such as the playwright Tomson Highway, their ancestral culture and myth are being recreated and another international element enters Canadian literature: the recrudescence of aboriginal and colonized peoples, from which, like much else that fractures centripetal images of identity, Canada is now far from immune. The superior image of white Canada formerly nourished in school textbooks, which distanced the natives, as "bloodthirsty tribes" and "fiendish redmen" are being deconstructed; instead, the founding fathers are remembered, in Dennis Lee's phrase from "Civil Elegies" as "Indian-swindlers" (369).

George Ryga warned presciently in the sixties, "People who are forgotten are not forgetting. To overlook them is a dangerous delusion" (xiii). Native writers increasingly speak for themselves, enacting the Calibanesque counter-attack in the colonizer's tongue. They are reconstructing a past they will re-

cover from the "non-Native imagination . . . once," in Thomas King's words, "we discover ways to make history our own" (xii). White writers' efforts to incorporate them in their fictions may come to be seen (as has happened in South Africa) either, from a native viewpoint, as "structural racism" or as what Margery Fee claims they mean in *The Native in Literature*: "We are afraid that if we don't believe in Indians, we will have to become Americans" (30). This observation was satirically fabulated by Mordecai Richler's *The Incomparable Atuk*, though one wonders if in today's more sensitive climate that mordant comedy from 1963 at the expense of Canadian nationalism, centring upon a cannibalistic "innocent" of an Eskimo (now *Inuit*) noble savage, could find a publisher. So far, native people's writing, as has been said of Australian "aboriginality," is generous towards whites: the opportunity still remains open for reconciliation in one country between what may be seen as its own "first" and "third" worlds.

The critical reaction of immigrant writers from the actual Third World, not content with offering picturesque or nostalgic recollection of their native countries, perhaps more seriously challenges Eurocentric Canadian nationalism. White Canada is quickly detected to be racist, discriminatory, imperialistic. Terrence Craig has pointed out how Grove's criticism in the 1920s of Anglo-Saxon dominance proposed "many mansions" to accommodate the new waves of Europeans and Scandinavians—but all these mansions were white. Canada today, Grove would find, has been inundated by immigrants from "nations" he considered "too different to admit of even the dream of assimilation: Hindus, Kaffirs, Afrikanders, and Malays" (Craig 58-59).

Since the mass influx from such nations began, "assimilation" has become a discredited word; "mosaic" has been offered as an enticing metaphor for multiculturalism. Yet its sanguine myth of diversity in unity remains, M. G. Vassanji asserts in *The Toronto South Asian Review*, a white "device for assimilation" (1). Not for the more critical visibly other immigrant the confident collaborative striving to tame "a virgin land" of such as Salverson's Icelanders a century ago, in the name of "the progress of civilization and to lay the foundation for [Canada's] future greatness" (Salverson 22). They counter with quick colonial memories:

*whose civilization?* Vassanji's Afro-Asian immigrants in *The Gunny Sack*, fleeing the disorder of postcolonial East Africa for our "cold Eldorado in the north . . . had renounced the Queen's rule for a new future, abandoned hope and returned to her, still close but separated by an ocean" (249). They warn, then, to beware of *English* Canada which would have them subsume differences beneath an overriding need for unity. Yet somehow, recognized diversity must be given its many- headed due in a multicultural, multiracial state. This is no merely national dilemma today.

The emphasis can be abrasive, as in the "oppositional aesthetic" of the critic Arun Mukherjee, the disaffection of the poets Marlene Nourbese Philip and Himani Bannerji, and the angry further emigration to (of all alternatives) the United States by Bharati Mukherjee. These writers are intensely sensitive to white racism and vigilant against a seductive acceptance by the mainstream of such as Michael Ondaatje and Neil Bissoondath. Like Susan Sontag and similar critics of the Vietnam War, they fear "repressive tolerance," the old colonial divide-and-rule. Yet one finds in their own work a narrowness of understanding and vision: they cultivate an image of themselves and the Third World as invariable victim and selectively idealize the world they have left, or fled, against Western hypocrisy and materialism. They have emigrated but as if it were not by choice; they have immigrated but to find a white world they conflate with the old colonial regimes their parents endured. Their work is driven by what Barbara Harlow has distinguished as the "counter-hegemonic aesthetics" (14) of much recent Third World literature, which thus becomes in them a facet of Canada's macrocosmic identity. A symptom of this is the recent controversy aroused by the "Into the Heart of Africa" exhibition at the Royal Ontario Museum.[4] Although a searching exposé of that crime of "ignorance," in Chinua Achebe's word, committed by Western bringers of light to Africa, it was denounced by the black Coalition for the Truth about Africa as "racist" and insulting to their ancestors' memory. Such an exhibition proved premature, assuming a degree of ironic detachment and historical perspective beyond many viewers. It exposed a disturbing vein of paranoia in black immigrants; its scheduled tour of North American mu-

seums was cancelled; its creator was personally harassed at the University of Toronto and driven into a contrived leave of absence.

Many of the citizens of Canada, caught up in the universal mass immigration of peoples, find themselves insecurely between two worlds. The phrase from Eliot's *The Waste Land*, "throbbing between two lives," first used in a story by Rohinton Mistry, was picked up by Robert Fulford in a *Toronto Star* piece on South Asian immigrant writing and used again in Nazneen Sadiq's novel, *Ice Bangles*. This often remarked "betweenness" can be felt positively, as by Henry Kreisel: "I had a real sense," he said in a recent interview, "of standing between two worlds and looking back from Canada to Europe, and looking from Europe to Canada" (Hesse 83). It can be an image of displacement, as Kristjana Gunnars defines it: "Multiculturalism is only a word.... The dilemma is that members of such [ethnic] communities have two histories, two memories, one of which is functional, the other not" (xvii). It can involve unresolved opposition between the New World and the one left, as in Arun Mukherjee. Or it can itself be resolutely disclaimed by Nazneen Sadiq, whose aspiring writer in *Ice Bangles* refuses "to milk her difference" (195) or by the insistence of such as M. G. Vassanji that his novel *The Gunny Sack*, set almost entirely in an East African Indian community, be accepted without qualification as *Canadian*, irrespective of "content" or the author's status as a first generation immigrant belonging to "a visible minority." Literature, such a standpoint implies, needs no national frontiers: "Canadian content" is whatever Canadians write, and the more *inter*national it is, the healthier it will be. The Guyanese Cyril Dabydeen's "Patriot" is

> . . . anxious to make Canada
> meet in me
> I make designs
> all across
> the snow (29)

It follows, then, that the seemingly unlimited extension of the frontiers of Canadian literature (Canadian-Punjabi poetry, Arnold Itwaru's *Shanti*, and Cyril Dabydeen's poetry, set in colonial and postcolonial Guyana, Gunnars' *The Prowler*, set in

Danish-ruled Iceland, Wiseman's *The Sacrifice* (Poland of the Tsarist pogroms), the Sri Lankan poet Rienzi Crusz, Vassanji's *The Gunny Sack*, Sonny Ladoo's and Neil Bissoondath's fiction of Trinidad and emigration to Canada, Rohinton Mistry's stories and recent novel of Bombay and Skvorecky's fiction of Nazi- and Communist-oppressed Czechoslovakia—the two last Governor-General's Award winners) have ensured, through the world's chances and tragedies, the growth in Canada of a literature *of the world.* The jurors who awarded The Governor-General's 1990 Fiction Prize to Nino Ricci's *The Lives of the Saints*, set almost wholly in the Italian Appenines, unreservedly acclaimed it as the work of a strong new voice in *Canadian* literature; it was followed in 1991 by Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*, set wholly in Bombay.

Yet it may be asked how can works set in Africa, Guyana, Trinidad, Czechoslovakia, Sri Lanka, India, Italy, devoid of "Canadian content," be considered part of Canadian literature? "It does not become less Canadian," M. G. Vassanji asserts in *A Meeting of Streams*, "because it is global" (3). Vassanji's own *The Toronto South Asian Review* has since its inception in 1982 accommodated both white and "ethnic" voices, and its publishing offshoot, TSAR Publications, is explicitly committed to publishing literature of "Canada and the World." An apt counterpart exists in the Australian magazine *Outrider*, recently begun (1984) in a country whose racial history and current problems are akin. Its purpose is not to "integrate" minority writers, but to change the concept of Australian literature; neither content nor race is its editor's criterion, but "quality of experience, quality of consciousness, and the quality of art."[5] It is not "Australian" or "Canadian" that needs stressing but the common word "literature."

The Australian editor's criteria are international and a literature that embraces them can no longer be set down as "colonial"—as could still be tactlessly done by a visiting English novelist interviewed last year on the CBC. No one in Britain would label the work of Salman Rushdie colonial or "ethnic"; literature's aim is to subvert such terms. It is, Rushdie has well said, "the place in any society where, within the secrecy of our own heads, we can hear voices *talking about everything in every*

*possible way*" (111). Canadian literature, in itself, now offers such a rich—and necessarily sometimes recalcitrant—range of voices. This entails risk, contributing for good or ill towards the making of Canada in the new, necessary mould shaped by a contracting world. Will there be a sufficient measure of intellectual and societal tolerance? How much openness, freedom for contending views, convictions, images can a society tolerate? This would seem to depend on its essential strength, self-surety, which was underpinned in the old nation-states by a pervasive language and culture, where "the population," T. S. Eliot conservatively thought, "should be homogeneous," with a "unity of religious background . . . and a spirit of excessive tolerance is to be deprecated" (19). Britain is no longer such a state, as Rushdie proved: the anxiety of the marginal immigrant exploded with rage at the violation of the sacred in *The Satanic Verses*, itself ironically a work that hugely comprehends that anxiety.

Is cultural internationalism Canada's alternative to a reactionary cultural nationalism preoccupied with narrow self-definition vis-à-vis an overbearing neighbour? Immigrant writers such as Kreisel, Drabek, Bauer, Hesse, and Skvorecky have had enough elsewhere of cultural nationalism. Canada is a geographical expression stretched across a borderless space where peoples as diverse as any on the globe live by chance or choice. There needs in such a nation to be a play of possibilities, yet there must also be social order, justice, and individual rights. Common values are hardest to develop, as is sharply evident in Britain, whose acute problems of social and cultural transformation may foreshadow Canada's—and "universal" has become a word beyond definition. It is too facile to rejoice in cultures learning mutual tolerance; they can also learn disapproval and dislike. One must accept as a consequence what Francesco Loriggio has called in *Future Indicative* "a tensional totality" (Moss 63). The irony Malcolm Ross claimed as "our natural mode" responding to "opposites in tension" (23) will not always take the strain (as happened at the Royal Ontario Museum). The cultural and societal status of women is just one example of an issue mere tolerance cannot wish away. Consider the aggravated plight of South Asian women

who suffer marital violence, as described recently in *The Globe and Mail*:

> They do not talk to police . . . because they fear deportation and because they feel trapped by the patriarchal structure that expects them to take abuse without complaint and to avoid bringing shame on the family. . . . Many women from other parts of the world travel to this land of golden opportunity in matrimonial and cultural cages, almost completely insulated from the new society by an inability to speak the language and by customs meant to discourage participation in their new society. (Lawrie D5)[6]

What value is multiculturalism to new Canadians such as these?

Their writers can speak for them, as some women have already done in stories and poems printed in *The Toronto South Asian Review* or *Diva: A Quarterly Journal of South Asian Women.* Such themes must be part of the universal "everything" Canadian literature will talk about in McLuhan's global village, a more diverse *Kanata*; they should not be filed in "ethnic" compartments. There is scope in these changing realities for a renewal of tragedy and comedy that cannot be deconstructed out of meaning or relevance—as, again, Rushdie has shown. English departments must play a leading role by broadening their teaching of Canadian literature beyond narrowly defined "Canadian content," even at the cost of lessening attention to the "mainstream." This means accepting that Canadian literature is irrevocably international in content and concern—no mainstream, no Anglo-French "canon."[7] Such a recognition may help to dissolve the soft apartheid of multiculturalism and alert readers to not only diverse cultural riches but real and potentially divisive cultural differences. Conflict as well as compromise makes nations. Confronting differences is inevitable but now, at least with the shared language bequeathed by colonialism, not its unequal fire-power.[8]

NOTES

1 This is one of several unpalatable facts thrust forward by Mordecai Richler in *Oh Canada! Oh Quebec!* (Toronto: Penguin, 1992: 100-102), but ignored by reviewers preoccupied with the issue of anti-semitism.

2 "Times have changed . . . . Places have changed . . . . We must dance to the tune of the stranger" (Wisemen 42).

[3] While it is true, as Terrence Craig has commented, that Laurence's view of racism is governed by "individual psychology" (114) at the expense of other factors, that is where her strength lies, in exposing the nerve-ends of individual relationships.

[4] "Into the Heart of Africa," exhibited at the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, November 1989—August 1990, should have travelled to four other North American museums into Summer 1992.

[5] These comments are mentioned in *Migration*, 80, Australian Department of Immigration, August/September 1990, page 28.

[6] See also the Special Edition of *Diva* (March 1991) and Issue 30 of *Fireweed* on "'Awakening Thunder': Asian Canadian Women" (February 1990).

[7] A newly available text that will help to redress the balance is Linda Hutcheon and M. Richmond's *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions*. There are selections from and interviews with eighteen writers. These and Hutcheon's introduction provide a stimulating initial exploration of uncomfortable facts "behind the rhetoric of tolerance that is an intrinsic part of multiculturalism" (8).

[8] This article is essentially the text of a paper delivered at the British Association of Canadian Studies Conference, Nottingham University, England, in April 1991.

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