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CHAPTER FOUR

The Persistence of the Nation

Literature and Criticism in Canada

> Many were born in Canada, and living unlived lives they died
> of course but died truncated, stunted, never at
> home in native space and not yet
> citizens of a human body of kind. And it is Canada
> that specialized in this deprivation . . .
> And what can we do here now, for at last we have no notion
> of what we might have come to be in America, alternative, and how make
>   public
> a presence which is not sold out utterly to the modern? utterly? to the
> savage inflictions of what is for real, it pays off, it is only
> accidentally less than human?
>
> — DENNIS LEE

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> On the morning, afternoon and evening of July 1, all Canada became, for the time-being, a single assemblage, swayed by a common emotion, within the sound of a single voice. Thus has modern science for the first time realized in the great nation-state of modern days, that condition which existed in the little city-states of ancient times and which was considered by the wisdom of the ancients as indispensable to free and democratic government—that all the citizens should be able to hear for themselves the living voice. To them it was the voice of a single orator—a Demosthenes or a Cicero—speaking on public questions in the Athenian Assembly or in the Roman Forum. Hitherto to most Canadians, Ottawa has seemed far off, a mere name to hundreds or thousands of our people, but henceforth all Canadians will stand within the sound of the carillon and within hearing of the speakers on Parliament Hill. May we not predict that as a result of this carrying of the living voice throughout the length of the Dominion, there will be aroused a more general interest in public affairs, and an increased devotion of the individual citizen to the commonweal?
>
> — PRIME MINISTER WILLIAM LYON MACKENZIE KING

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The Nation in Canadian Literary Criticism

In the decades following World War II, the Canadian federal government began an ambitious series of programs whose intention was to identify, foster, protect, and develop Canadian culture in order to assert and maintain Canadian political sovereignty. The period from 1950 to 1970 witnessed the implementation and completion of a number of projects that manifested symbolically the newfound confidence and national identity of a country that had been officially independent from Britain since 1867 but had remained in many ways "a pure colony, colonial in psychology as well as in mercantile economics."[1] As with the nineteenth-century project of a national railway (completed in 1885), which physically linked together all of the far-flung parts of Canada in order to preserve Canadian sovereignty against the threat of American expansion in the West, many of these projects involved the technological bridging and unification of Canadian space. In 1952, federally funded national television broadcasting began; 1960 saw the establishment of passenger jet service between Vancouver and Toronto; and in 1962, the Trans-Canada highway was opened, and Canada's first communications satellite, Alouette I, launched. Given the physical size of Canada, technology has always played an important part in the creation and consequent development of the Canadian nation. Maurice Charland has in fact suggested that the rhetoric of Canadian nationalism has always been that of a technological nationalism that "ties Canadian identity, not to its people, but to their mediation through technology."[2] While technology has never ceased to be an important element of Canadian nationalism, the establishment of programs that dealt explicitly with Canadian culture in the period following World War II indicated that the government also felt a need to produce what might be seen as a more "organic" nationalism, a sense of national identity mediated and produced by culture rather than (or in addition to) technology.[3]

The program for postwar governmental involvement in Canadian culture was established by the influential 1951 Report on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, more commonly known as the Massey Report after its chairman, Vincent Massey.[4] In his penetrating historical study of the work of the commission, Paul Litt has written that "The commission was interested not just in culture in Canada, but in Canadian culture. As the commissioners themselves put it, their work was 'concerned with nothing less than the spiritual foundation of our national life.' They operated on the premise that their enterprise deserved

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the support of all patriotic citizens because culture was what bound Canadians together and distinguished them from other nationalities. It followed that the Canadian state had an obligation to support the cultural activities which legitimized its very existence."[5]

It is this paradoxical formulation of the intimate connection between culture and nation, and thus of the responsibilities of the nation toward culture, that fueled the government-sponsored cultural programs that grew out of the Massey Report. Culture was what gave the nation its life; a distinctive Canadian culture therefore provided the raison d'être of the Canadian nation. But the need on the part of the nation to intervene and provide funding for cultural production suggested a reverse logic: it was the nation-state that gave life to Canadian culture in order to give legitimacy to itself. The first programs established on the basis of the report's finding revealed another ambiguity. In 1951, the National Ballet of Canada was founded; the National Library of Canada was founded in 1953; and in 1957, the Canada Council, the body that would have the single greatest impact on cultural development in Canada, was established to disperse funds to worthy artistic, cultural, and academic groups. As even these few examples suggest, from the beginning of state-supported culture in Canada it is possible to see a confusion between the two senses of the term culture that Raymond Williams has identified: culture as "a noun of 'inner' process, specialized to its presumed agencies in 'intellectual life' and 'the arts' " and culture as "a noun of general process, specialized to its presumed configurations in 'whole ways of life.' "[6] The cultural programs instituted by the Canadian government primarily funded intellectual activities and the arts in a broad sense, because these were seen to reflect, express, or in some other way embody a whole Canadian way of life, even if few Canadians have the opportunity to enjoy the National Ballet or to ever make use of the National Library.[7]

The influence of the Massey Report and of the Canada Council on literary production in Canada was considerable. As late as 1984, B. W. Powe was able to write that he knew "no novelist, poet or essayist, no university or writer's program, who has not had support from the omnipresent Council or its provincial counterparts."[8] Government support of individual writers, journals, presses, and conferences made possible the "explosion" of Canadian writing in the 1960s and 1970s:

> Writers were sought for Writers-in-Residence programs at Universities; credit courses were introduced; teachers were hired and given CANLIT books: *Course Count-*

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> *down: A Quantitative Study of Canadian Literature in the Nation's Secondary Schools, Something for Nothing: An Experimental Book Exposure Programme*, and *CanLit Teacher's Crash Course Kit;* magazines with titles like *Delta, Descant*, and *Exile* flourished; new names were heralded, like Hodgkins, Ondaatje and Musgrave; trade magazines like *Books in Canada* and *Quill and Quire* enlarged in circulation and importance; small publishers expanded, like Talonbooks (British Columbia), NeWest (Alberta), Oberon, Coach House, Anansi (Ontario), Fiddlehead (New Brunswick); the Writers' Union, the union des ecrivans québécois and the League of Canadian Poets was formed . . . institutional support grew in influence, from the CBC (radio especially, with shows like "Anthology"), to the separate Provincial Arts Councils . . . and awards—awards *galore*, The Governor General's Award, the Seal Books $50,000 First Novel Award . . . the Books in Canada First Novel Award, the Gerald Lampert and Pat Lowther Memorial Awards for poetry, to name a few out of dozens.[9]

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Government funding was just as important to the enterprise of literary criticism. Financial support from the Canada Council (and later the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada) was essential to the operation of university presses and to the organization of virtually every major academic conference and association in Canada. Robert Lecker has argued that, through its direct support for the New Canadian Library paperback series, which first made "classic" and contemporary Canadian texts widely available to high school and university students, and through its substantial support for the production of the very first *Literary History of Canada* (1965), the federal government invented *ex nihilo* the canon of Canadian literary texts that would occupy much of the literary critical energies of this period and that would define the field of Canadian literature in the decades to follow.[10]

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It should not come as a surprise that, in the context of the concerted effort to support not just "culture in Canada" but "Canadian culture," Canadian literary criticism during this period would come to be underwritten by what Lecker has called a "national-referential aesthetic" (MR 4). Especially as expressed in the work of the "thematic critics," a term most commonly identified with the critical writing of Margaret Atwood, John Moss, and D. G. Jones, the literary analysis of Canadian texts was for a period dominated by a desire to locate what was essentially or particularly *Canadian* about Canadian literature.[11] Just as the Massey Report emphasized the need to support the culture on which the nation depended, so, too, Canadian literary critics focused on those features of Canadian literary texts that could be the basis for a specifically and identifiably Canadian

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mode of writing. It was agreed that such characteristics could only be seen as elements of the text's *theme*, since, as Northrop Frye pointed out, "what the Canadian writer finds in his experience and environment may be new, but it will be new only as content: the form of his expression of it can take shape only from what he has read, not from what he has experienced;"[12] formally, literature in Canada mimicked European and American models. For Atwood, this was the theme of "survival," for Moss the "garrison mentality" first identified by Frye in his conclusion to the *Literary History of Canada*, and for Jones the perpetual search for "national identity" itself. The unspoken assumption of this kind of criticism was that the writing produced in the nation must of necessity thematize the conditions of possibility of the nation itself; in this sense, Canadian literary criticism has long been dominated by a much simpler version of the "national allegory" that Fredric Jameson has ascribed to third-world texts in general.[13] This led these critics to valorize literary texts that expressed nationalist ideas and themes; other texts, especially experimental texts, were seen as exceptions to general national literary characteristics or were, through the expenditure of enormous amount of critical labor, domesticated and rendered into nationalist objects, as Donna Pennee has shown in her analysis of the critical reception of Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook*, which has been identified as the first Canadian modernist novel.[14]

The search for thematic similarities that underlie literary production in Canada—that produce, in other words, the particular "Canadianness" of Canadian texts—has since the early seventies been energetically challenged from a number of different perspectives. In what has been called a "seminal attack,"[15] Frank Davey has criticized thematic criticism for its failure to "do what the criticism of other national literatures has done: explain and illuminate the work on its own terms, without any recourse to cultural rationalizations or apologies."[16] An emphasis on the formal, literary qualities of the text, as opposed to the supposedly "extraliterary" factors of history and nation, has also been the basis of calls for more theoretically motivated readings of Canadian literature, as exemplified in the collection *Future Indicative*, and in the work of critics such as Barbara Godard, Sylvia Söderlind, Barry Cameron, and Michael Dixon.[17] More recently, postcolonial critics such as Diana Brydon have criticized thematic criticism for effacing the connections and parallels between Canadian writing and writing in other regions and nations that have similarly labored under the legacy of colonialism.[18] Finally, critics who have wanted to emphasize the multiplicity of "Canadas" that

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the identification of a singular national identity would obliterate have criticized the emphasis in thematic criticism on a static notion of national identity that fails to take into account the work of immigrant, ethnic, Native, and women writers.[19]

Out of these various challenges to the supposed hegemony of thematic criticism—a hegemony that has, at least in part, been invented by its critics in order to give additional urgency and weight to their criticisms[20]—has emerged a widely accepted periodizing schema for Canadian literary criticism and (since these are closely connected in Canada) for Canadian literature as well. It is a periodizing schema that mirrors the one offered by Said for postcolonial literature in general. There is, first, a nationalist phase of Canadian literature and criticism: a crude, perhaps necessary phase of cultural self-assertion that is now seen as definitively superseded. In its place, there is a more savvy, self-confident criticism that does not see the need to produce in the field of literature a national culture consonant with the demands of the Canadian state. For example, in his examination of sixteen novels written after 1967, the year of the Canadian centennial, Frank Davey suggests that they announce collectively "the arrival of the post-national state—a state invisible to its own citizens, indistinguishable from its fellows, maintained by invisible political forces, and significant mainly through its position within the grid of world-class postcard cities."[21] In addition to worries about a complicity with the governmental agenda to create a national culture, there is then another reason for leaving the "national-referential aesthetic" behind. Since the community that was once named "Canada" has been dissipated by various globalizing or modernizing forces, there no longer exists *any* national referent to which the national-referential aesthetic might connect.

For Davey, this has consequences not simply for the study of contemporary novels of the "post-national" period but also for the interpretation of *all* the texts of Canadian literary history. Davey suggests that nationalist readings of Canadian literary texts, which purport to be opposed to the abstract, universal ideology of humanist or formalist readings, also constitute an ideology that has diverted attention away from "the political dimensions of literature."[22] He writes that "all nationalist readings of Canadian literature are in a general sense 'political'. All attempt to construct links between the literary text and the cultural one, to show the literary as contributing in some way to the formation of the cultural."[23] Nevertheless, he suggests that the national framework of such readings produces a politics that is totalizing, unambiguous, and homogenizing—exactly, in other words, what nationalism rejects in humanist readings. Nationalist readings fail

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> to observe that gender, class, region, ethnicity, and economic structures can mark texts as decisively as can nation or "world culture," that the codes of literature are shared, and produced in concert, with the other written and unwritten texts of a society, that a writer's choice of codes, or positions in relation to these codes, can again be influenced by matters of gender, class, region, ethnicity, and economic practices, and that the usual relationship between codes, as between regions, classes, genders, ethnic affiliations, and economic practices, is one of contestation and/or dominance. This contestation is frequently more intense *within* a society than it is between it and other societies—in fact, such an intensity of internal conflict is probably the distinguishing feature of a separate society.[24]

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It is thus possible to revisit the texts of the *pre*-postnational period in order to capture what the thematic critics missed: all of the complex, myriad, heterogeneous internal conflicts of Canadian society that nationalist readings have indiscriminately blurred together through various critical metaphors of national unity, however unflattering: "victim," "Wacousta," "butterfly," "garrison mentality," "bush garden," and so on.

What is apparent even in the attempt to write a "post-national" criticism is the degree to which Canadian literary criticism nevertheless continues to depend on the nation. There is, first of all, a continued reliance on the nation as the defining element of the field of literary texts from which Davey draws his examples. The sixteen novels that he examines, chosen carefully it seems to represent different regions and constituencies within the nation, are all *Canadian* novels, organized and selected on the basis of their national origin and as representatives of various aspects of the national "mosaic." Davey is right: gender, class, region, ethnicity, and economic structures can mark texts as decisively as the nation, which raises the question of why the nation nevertheless remains the overall framework within which he addresses these features. This is a problem as well of Davey's earlier call for an end to nationalist criticism in *Surviving the Paraphrase*. There, too, Davey suggests that Canadian literature should be analyzed along axes other than that of the nation. The only difference is that the emphasis is formal rather than political: the need to examine the literary text itself rather than those "extra-literary" factors attended to by the "bad sociology" of nationalist criticism.[25] What he proposes as an alternative are formal studies not of literature per se, but of *Canadian* literature, without ever challenging or questioning the nationalist assumptions implicit in the division of literatures into national, natural kinds.

This might seem to be little more than definitional or epistemological hair-

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splitting on my part. Isn't it possible, after all, to simply choose to examine Canadian texts without necessarily affirming the priority of the nation in them (to read them, that is, without emphasizing the ways in which they express or affirm the nation)? It is possible for an individual critic to decide to do so and to simply pay attention to other elements of the text. This is, however, a deeply ideological choice, a decision to adopt theoretical blinders regarding the conditions of possibility of writing and reading a "minor literature" like Canada's. For no matter how forcefully it is denied, it appears that inevitably the question of the national basis of Canadian literary works anxiously reemerges. The nation appears a necessary and unavoidable element that defines the boundaries of this particular literary critical field of study: without the nation, the field of Canadian literary criticism is all but unintelligible. In "Thematic Criticism, Literary Nationalism, and the Critic's New Clothes," T. D. Maclulich has argued that "Canadian literature is inevitably a subject in which political and literary considerations overlap."[26] If the context of a literary work is removed, the situation in which its meaning is perhaps most meaningful, "hybrid literary-political categories such as Canadian literature become meaningless."[27] In other words, "some form of literary nationalism provides the only logical justification for treating Canadian literature as a separate field of study."[28] The study of Canadian literature as a separate field of study, Maclulich suggests elsewhere, "is linked with a conviction of our cultural divergence from the United States."[29] If this conviction is abandoned, then so, too, should the study of Canadian literature as a distinct branch of contemporary world literature, for, in strictly literary terms, there are far more similarities than differences between Canadian and American literary texts.[30]

There is a second way in which the nation persists even in Davey's attempt to articulate a postnational criticism. What Davey wants to attack—the "national-referential aesthetic" that has defined so much Canadian criticism—nevertheless remains central to his account of postcentennial Canadian literature. Though he introduces what might appear to be a more theoretically sophisticated reading strategy based on poststructuralist theory, the primary mediating term between the literary text and the social or political "text" remains the nation. A postnational criticism arises out of the novels that he reads because these novels indicate that, *within* the boundaries of the nation which these texts are assumed to reflect, the nation has vanished: "Specific novels may argue for a humanist Canada, a more feminist Canada, a more sophisticated and worldly Canada, an individualist Canada, a Canada more responsive to the values of its aboriginal citizens, but collectively they suggest a world and a nation in which social structures

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no longer link regions or communities, political process is doubted, and individual alienation has become normal . . . *Caprice*'s twentieth-century narrator laments a community of difference that has vanished: 'We are all Europeans now.' "[31] And yet there nevertheless remains as direct a connection between novel and nation as in the work of the thematic critics, the main difference being that what the novels after 1967 reveal are not characteristic qualities of Canadian culture and the nation, but rather that the nation has disappeared. In other words, novels continue to be seen as mimetically reflecting the national situation, even if what they reflect is that the "national-ity" of this situation has been placed in jeopardy, if not dissipated entirely.

It is under these circumstances that Davey suggests that a criticism based on a national-referential aesthetic makes little sense, for other realities are now at work: especially after NAFTA, whatever real or imagined borders may have been placed around the Canadian nation and culture have been dissolved or have become radically porous. Another way of putting this is to suggest that in the present, Canadians are not just Europeans — they are the world. To follow through to the conclusion that Davey's work points to, it seems that the price of being able to view with greater clarity the conflicts internal to the Canadian nation (race, class, gender, etc.), that the discourse of literary nationalism hides, is the end of the nation itself, in which case it is not clear in what sense these conflicts remain "internal" or are simply (more or less) local manifestations of global processes that don't necessarily need to be affirmed as "Canadian" phenomena. Postnational criticism begins from an assumption that the nation has come to an end, that ideas of community and difference have totally collapsed, and that globalization of the world has generated a homogenous world culture in which national cultural differences exist only as the subjects of theme-parks, travel books, dissertations, and utopian longing. It also suggests, perhaps inadvertently, that the Canadian nation once really did exist, that the idea of the nation once had enough currency to connect across regions or communities to create a national body whose disappearance can now be lamented.

This chapter will constitute an examination of the meanings and uses of the nation in Canadian literature and literary criticism after World War II. As in the literatures of Nigeria and the Caribbean, the period following World War II witnessed an explosion in the production of Canadian literary texts. It should already be clear that the reasons for this explosion are much different from either of the previous cases that I have examined in this study. The greater material resources of the Canadian state made it possible for the government to actively

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support and encourage the rapid growth of Canadian literature and literary criticism as a matter of government policy. Elleke Boehmer writes that in postcolonial literatures, "it was seen as the writer's role to reinterpret the world, to grasp the initiative in cultural self-definition."[32] In Canada, the active role of the state in using culture for its own "war of position" had the effect of taking on the writer's role as its own. There have thus always been worries that the aims of a nationalist literature in Canada have been co-opted from the outset, that any idea of the nation produced by or through literature merely meets the demands and desires of the nation-state. The utopian hopefulness that accompanied literary nationalism in other parts of the Commonwealth is for the most part not echoed in Canada. Instead, there is a sense that the possibility of a Canadian nation is by the middle of the century already somehow an anachronistic notion. Furthermore, unlike the Caribbean or Nigeria, the national question in Canada during this period does not primarily concern its position within the British Empire — a fact that has too often been glossed over in attempts to add Canada to the field of postcolonial studies. The main concern of the Massey Commission was to produce Canadian culture in opposition to the spread of mass, popular culture from the United States into Canada. Literary nationalism in the postwar period is directed toward an identification of the unique national characteristics of the Canadian nation either in opposition to the United States or to what the United States represents: the embodiment of the values of modernity in national form. This is not to say that there are no longer any references to Canada's colonial inheritance from Britain or that the political and cultural threat of the United States was not articulated during earlier periods of literary history. Indeed, Canadian culture and writing is still situated by many writers and critics during this period as being located "between" Britain and America.[33] Nevertheless, it is the threat of American cultural dominance — of neoimperialism and cultural imperialism rather than colonialism and imperialism — that is the most important stimulus for literary and critical examinations of the Canadian nation; neocolonialism is the starting point of literary and critical inquiry in Canada, not a fact whose gradual emergence produces a rethinking of the possibilities of literary nationalism, which is characteristic of the texts that I looked at in the West Indies and Nigeria.[34]

Unlike earlier chapters, the bulk of this one will not focus on readings of specific and exemplary literary texts, but on an examination of the nation as it has circulated within Canadian literary criticism since the 1950s. There are a number of reasons for the shift in this chapter from literature to criticism. The most

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important of these is that it is in the discourse of literary criticism rather than in the literary texts of this period that literary nationalism is seen to be a particularly pressing concern. It is the discourse of Canadian literary criticism that seems to require the production of a homogenous national space. By comparison, in his overview of Canadian fiction since the 1960s, Leslie Monkman writes that:

> What has not been acknowledged is the extent to which many of the most acclaimed English-Canadian novels of the sixties to eighties link their thematic concerns and narrative strategies to an interrogation of the revived nationalism that supported their publication and dissemination. Despite the speedy designation of his 1959 novel, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* as a "Canadian classic," Mordecai Richler would continue to take delight over the next three decades in puncturing the absurdities of flag-waving nationalism . . . Less obviously, two of the most honoured novels of the era, Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* and Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners*, raised related issues while Rudy Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear* and the fiction of Alice Munro subverted the governing clichés of both nationalism and regionalism, its inevitable concomitant in Canadian political and cultural discourse.[35]

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There is *nowhere* in Canadian fiction after World War II a national literature that aspires to write the nation into existence. English-Canadian literary texts of this period inevitably examine and articulate the differences (with varying degrees of success) that exist *within* the boundaries of the nation, paying especially careful attention to the internal colonization of Native peoples and the Québécois. While they do articulate worries about American cultural imperialism, even what are thought to be classics of English-Canadian nationalist literature, such as Atwood's *Surfacing* (1972) and Hugh MacLennan's *Two Solitudes* (1945) or David Godfrey's *Death Goes Better With Coca-Cola* (1969) and Ray Smith's *Cape Breton Is the Thought Control Centre of Canada* (1969), cast a surprisingly critical eye on the prospects of a unified, national body, and pay as much attention to the coexistence of multiple Canadas as Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* (1965)—a difficult text exploding with seemingly incommensurable modes of political, social, and cultural signification that deconstructs every concept around which the Canadian nation might be preserved. MacLennan's novel in particular exhibits the problem of trying to create the nation through the novel in the dissonance between the politics articulated in its first two sections in contrast to the last two. The marriage of anglophone Janet Methuen with the francophone Paul Tallard on the eve of World War II—a heavy-handed, symbolic union of the nation's

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"two founding races"—makes almost no sense in the context of earlier events in the novel. *Two Solitudes* begins as a remarkably insightful examination of the effects of encroaching modernity on the lives of Québécois inhabitants of the village of Saint-Marc. The position of the rural French in Québec in relation to the English-dominated business classes in Montreal is shown by MacLennan to be an explicitly colonial one. Paul's father, Anthase Tallard, a man caught between the worlds of tradition and progress, religion and secularism, French and English, is destroyed spiritually and financially by his decision to embrace the forces of modernity (through his involvement in the construction of a hydroelectric project in Saint-Marc and his support for francophone conscription in World War I). It is hard to reconcile this with Paul's eagerness to join the war effort on behalf of the Canadian nation, and with MacLennan's ecstatic evocation of the birth of the nation in the paragraph that concludes the novel: "And almost grudgingly, out of the instinct to do what was necessary, the country took the first irrevocable steps toward becoming herself, knowing against her will that she was not unique but like all the others, alone with history, with science, with the future."[36]

I need to make some caveats here regarding the claim of an enormous gap between the actual content of Canadian literary texts and the ways in which they were interpreted during this period—a rather undialectical assertion of a difference between literature and criticism that seems as if it can only be read (as subsequent critics like Davey have) as an enormous category mistake on the part of the Canadian critical enterprise. I am not claiming that there are no examples of Canadian literature from 1945 to 1970 that can be read or interpreted as nationalist texts. Such a sweeping claim inevitably invites a flood of counter-examples, whether in the form of explicit examples of attempts to found the nation within the text or as examples of sophisticated readings of texts that draw out their nationalist orientations (any text can be read as an allegory of its national context). Indeed, if by Canadian texts we mean here to include the work of Québécois writers of this period, it would not be difficult to read the entire period, from Paul Émile Borduas's *Refus Global* (1948) to the Parti Pris in the sixties, as one long exercise in nationalist writing, to which, as a negative formation, English-Canadian literary nationalism constitutes a response.[37]

If we are to limit our investigation to English-Canadian literature it is difficult to see the impulse to read literature in terms of its nationalist orientations as anything other than an imperative of literary criticism rather than as a determinate feature of the literature itself. It is, of course, difficult to separate these

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elements, especially in the Canadian situation, where a relatively small literary community has ensured that literature and criticism overlap to a considerable degree. Many of the best literary critics in Canada have also been important writers: Louis Dudek, A. J. M. Smith, Dennis Lee, Michael Ondaatje, and Margaret Atwood are but a few who have occupied both roles. Nevertheless, in Canada the concept of the nation is articulated differently within literary criticism than within literature, which is a point of difference from the other postcolonial zones that I have examined in this book. One way of formulating this difference might be to suggest that if in Nigeria and the Caribbean the nation emerged as a strategy of *writing*, in Canada it can be seen as emerging preeminently as a strategy of *reading*, which in and of itself reflects significant material differences regarding the social status of literature that renders problematic any simple extension of the mantle of postcolonialism to Canada. In the absence of a Canadian literature whose intent it was to produce the national "imagined community," it is hard not to see literary criticism as a kind of symptomatic substitute: yet another example of the technologies by which Canadian space has been sewn together—the high cultural equivalent of the Canadian National Railway.

Instead of offering a historical overview of the development of literary criticism in Canada since the 1950s,[38] what I will concentrate on is a careful, detailed analysis of a recent attempt to make sense of the legacy of literary nationalism in an effort to produce a criticism that surpasses it: Robert Lecker's *Making It Real*. In this book, Lecker considers the consequences of the rapid construction of the Canadian canon in the period following World War II and the central place of literary nationalism in producing this canon. By tracing out the central argument of Lecker's book, what I am interested in examining is the paradoxical reemergence of a literary nationalism very similar to that of the thematic critics in his very attempt to move beyond the nation as a defining feature of Canadian literary criticism. As critics such as Davey and Tracy Ware have pointed out, Lecker's characterization of the development of Canadian literary criticism is partial, partisan, and limited.[39] Nevertheless, Lecker's text is a particularly useful one to examine because it brings together all of the vexed questions of the nation in Canadian literature and literary criticism since World War II. In doing so, it (perhaps inadvertently) reveals the logic of literary nationalism that underlies all of these positions and explains the gap between literature and criticism in Canada. What Lecker's book shows is, as I have already suggested in my assessment of Frank Davey, that the nation is an indissoluble figure of Canadian literary

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criticism. But the persistence of the nation is not necessarily something to be lamented. It does not indicate that Canada remains in a state of literary or cultural immaturity, consigned forever to the first phase of literary development as outlined by Said and the authors of *The Empire Strikes Back*. I want to suggest instead that the persistence of the nation has to be seen as stubbornly holding open the possibility of a political project that has almost disappeared, however difficult and futile this project might seem to be. Against the realities of atomized subjects and the dispersed communities that emerge out of in Davey's postnational readings, the nation in Canadian literary criticism continually reaffirms the connection between literature and politics. It does so, of course, in an ambiguous way, affirming the political at one level by arguing for the autonomy of Canadian space against (American) modernity in the form of what Marshall McLuhan referred to as a "counter-environment,"[40] while at the same time, reinforcing the leveling out of all differences in an effort to produce a singular Canadian nation for Canadian literature. It is with the latter that the modern nation has inevitably been identified, as a form opposed to difference in its desire to produce manageable, rationalized citizens. But in a minor country like Canada, consigned by history, geography, and demography to the margins of the West even as it remains a part of it, the nation has to be seen as part of a dialectic that tries to preserve difference even as it destroys it.

Before turning to a direct examination of Lecker and his attempt to exorcise the demon of nationalism from Canadian literary criticism, it is important, I believe, to consider the intellectual climate out of which thematic criticism developed. George Grant and Northrop Frye have often been identified as two of the intellectual forefathers of thematic criticism. This might suggest that Grant and Frye were cultural nationalists, whose work in social and literary criticism respectively inspired the critical search for literary tropes and figures of national identity. I want to argue for a different understanding of these seminal figures in Canadian intellectual life. It seems strange to me that the work of Grant and Frye have been used to provide theoretical frameworks for the analysis of Canadian identity, both within literary criticism and outside of it. If anything, what the work of these thinkers suggests is that the question of Canadian identity—the cultural identity of the nation—arises at a time when such a question no longer has any meaning, let alone any answer. While other countries have some possibility of forming nations late into the twentieth century, both Grant and Frye suggest that Canada has none: it is too much a product of modernity to be able to create meaningful structures in opposition to it; whatever possibilities may once

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have existed for Canada to be a nation have long since melted into air. If there is a division between literature and criticism in Canada over the issue of the nation, there emerges here another division that needs to be addressed: Grant and Frye's common insistence on the impossibility of the Canadian nation versus the thematic critics's insistence on the necessity of a nationalist criticism. It is difficult to see how thematic criticism's faith in the possibility of a Canadian identity expressed through literature could have originated out of the work of these grim thinkers; it is only by addressing this question, however, that the form in which the nation has circulated in Canadian literature and criticism can be clearly understood.

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Doomed by Modernity: Grant's Canada

> In power and precise knowledge, Europe still, even today, outweighs the rest of the world. Or rather, it is not so much Europe that excels, but the European Spirit, and America is its formidable creation. — PAUL VALÉRY[41]

In the period following World War II, a period which saw the United States definitively achieve its position as a cultural, economic, and political superpower, questions regarding the continued viability of the Canadian nation extended into virtually every form of governmental and intellectual discourse. In addition to the cultural programs instituted as a result of the findings of the Massey Report, a number of programs promoting Canadian economic nationalism were also instituted during this period as a consequence of the 1957 Royal Commission on Canada's Economic Prospects.[42] At the same time, the repeated political crises of the Cold War continually raised questions about Canadian political independence vis-à-vis the United States, since Canada was rarely able to make foreign policy decisions contrary to those advocated by the United States.

The intellectual anxieties of this whole period in Canadian history find their most cogent theoretical expression in the work of the philosopher George Grant. The poet and critic Dennis Lee has written that "Grant's analysis of 'Canadian Fate and Imperialism' . . . was the first that made any contact whatsoever with my tenuous sense of living here—the first that seemed to be speaking the words of our civil condition."[43] Along with Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan, the other great theorists of the Canadian condition, Grant was among the first to take seriously the idea that Canada had become in the postwar period, little more than a de facto colony of the United States. Grant articulated the differences that

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existed between the social and political cultures of Canada and the United States at a time when there was a good deal of worry that no such substantive differences existed. He identified these differences as growing out of each country's separate place in the stream of (the history of) political philosophy. The political culture of Canada, embodying the values of a conservative tradition extending back to Edmund Burke, stood in stark opposition to the Jeffersonian liberalism of the United States. By lending to claims concerning Canada's colonial status both a vocabulary and an intellectual respectability, Grant's work became the theoretical basis for a number of literary projects in the late 1960s and 1970s whose intent was to articulate the distinctiveness of Canadian national culture, whether through the writing of literature or through criticism of this literature. It is for this reason that Powe has suggested Grant was the "spiritual leader"[44] of the thematic critics. Even if his direct influence on literary culture cannot always be pinned down, it is nevertheless clear that Grant, along with Northrop Frye, established the broad intellectual framework within which the fate of the Canadian nation was analyzed and assessed in the decades following World War II.

Having said this, it is nevertheless surprising that Grant's work should form the basis for the project of Canadian nationalism. For by the time Grant wrote *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* in 1965, he had all but concluded that the possibility of a Canadian nation was already lost to the past, if such a possibility had indeed ever existed at all.[45] Grant writes that "the crucial years were those of the early'forties . . . Once it was decided that Canada was to be a branch-plant society of American capitalism, the issue of Canadian nationalism had been settled" (LN 40–41). Grant makes explicit the link that he sees between economics and culture: "Branch-plant economies have branch-plant cultures" (LN 41). And while this does get to the heart of Grant's claims, it also oversimplifies what is a complicated account of the position of Canada with respect to modernity. Part Jacques Ellul, part Martin Heidegger,[46] *Lament for a Nation* traces out the conditions of impossibility of creating a nation late in the twentieth century. *Lament for a Nation* is not intended to be a diagnostic text that would help committed nationalists isolate the problems with forging a contemporary Canadian nation. On the contrary, it is a text that analyzes the rather unfortunate condition of being a Canadian in the late twentieth century.

It is in this sense that Grant's text constitutes a "lament" rather than a series of practical proposals. Throughout the book, he insists on seeing the disappearance of the Canadian nation as "a matter of necessity" (LN 5) or "fate." Although he criticizes the Canadian political, economic, and bureaucratic elite for their failure

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to take action to preserve Canadian values and interests and for their failure to even understand what these values consist of, it is clear that for Grant the collapse of Canada "stems from the very character of the modern era" (LN 53). The lament that Grant engages in is directed toward the past, to what Canada was and what it could have been: a different, more just version of the North American experiment. It is a lament that is "a celebration of memory" for what is already gone, as made glaring and empirically evident by the events that form the occasion for Grant's text: the Defense Crisis faced by the government of John Diefenbaker in its attempt to forge an independent reaction to American involvement in the Cuban Missile Crisis.[47]

Though the positive identity of the Canadian nation springs largely from the "negative intention" (LN 68) not to be like the American republic — which is to say that Canada has no self-identical sense of identity, which positions it as an exemplary postmodern nation in the eyes of some recent commentators[48] — the characteristics that Grant defines as belonging to Canada have remained an essential part of the self-definition of the Canadian nation and of broader intellectual discourses concerning Canadian national identity. What Canada was, or at the very least, what it promised to be, was "a more ordered and stable society than the liberal experiment in the United States" (LN 4). The chief objection to life in the United States is also one that has since become a familiar part of both popular and academic discussions of Canadian identity. For Grant, the United States embodies the eroding, homogenizing powers of modernity — the universal that opposes and destroys all particularities. It is, specifically, the breeding ground of a capitalist modernity that has become its chief export: a whole "way of life based on the principle that the most important activity is profit-making" (LN 47). Grant suggests that "a distinction between Canada and the United States has been the belief that Canada was predicated on the rights of nations as well as on the rights of individuals" (LN 21–22). How to isolate and separate these different senses of "rights" is not made clear, but in any case it is the dominant image that is important: Canada as a collective nation, the United States as a nation of individuals.

As an alternative version of the New World experiment, one that is less individualistic and so, in a certain sense, less modern, the promise of the Canadian nation is that it might preserve a space that is not limited to the individualist logic of homo economicus. But it is the impossibility of this possibility that Grant laments. "In the mass era," Grant writes, "most human beings are defined in terms of their capacity to consume. All other differences between them, like

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political traditions, begin to appear unreal and unprogressive" (LN 90). As has become especially apparent since the end of the Cold War, one of the particularly powerful effects of American modernity has been to make capitalism into the end of history; appropriating the dialectical teleology of Marxism, it is capitalism, and all of the social relations that it embodies, that takes on the role of the realized essence of humanity worked out only after a long, historical struggle. It might not be entirely correct to say that there are no other ways of organizing life imaginable. However, capitalist modernity, bolstered by a general faith in the capacities of science, has become the only form of life that can be *pragmatically* envisioned. Every other idea, including the idea of the Canadian nation, is relegated to the dusty stacks of libraries — ideas, but hardly living ones.

There are a number of reasons why Grant believes that the possibilities of Canada as an alternative, essentially nonmodern space on the new continent never came to fruition. The most important of these is the fact that Canada is itself in many ways the historical product of modernity. As he writes in "Canadian Fate and Imperialism," a later essay that recapitulates the fundamental arguments of *Lament for a Nation* in the context of American involvement in Vietnam, "Canada could only continue to be if we could hold some alternative social vision to that of the great republic. Yet such an alternative would have to come out of the same stream — Western culture."[49] Grant locates the source of Canada's strength and independence as a nation in its connection to Britain; as long as this connection existed, Canada occupied an intermediary space between the relentless modernity of the United States and the (supposedly) traditional, organic nationalities of Europe.

This celebration of Canada's ties to Britain has had the effect of making Grant appear an apologist for the British imperial project — of making him seem to choose one empire over another instead of articulating some more genuine form of Canadian political freedom — and has made his arguments against modernity seem little more than a veiled attempt to protect his own position of status in a colonial hierarchy that in the 1960s was being eroded by widespread shifts in Canadian society.[50] It is hard, for example, not to see his worries about the modernizing effects of the Quiet Revolution on the Catholic character of Québécois society in this light. Yet it is a mistake to see Grant as an advocate of the regressive character of life in Québec under Duplessis or to see him as merely interested in protecting the British character of Canada. He suggests, rather, that the alternative that Canada could represent must come from outside of (American) modernity: the dominance in Québec of a hierarchical, religious way of life

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more attuned to the nineteenth century than the twentieth and the British conservative tradition that Grant appeals to are such alternatives that do not owe their patrimony to modernity. It is important to recognize from the outset that the conservative tradition that Grant is so attracted to *predates* British imperialism; as for imperialism itself, Grant sees it as responsible for modernity, and thus sees Britain as, perhaps unfortunately, "the chief center from which the progressive civilization spread around the world" (CFI 73). In this sense, British imperialism must be seen as a betrayal of British conservatism, rather than an extension of it. Since Canada is one of the products of imperialism, the ideology of "progressive civilization" appeared in Canada from the outset. Yet unlike the citizens of the United States—"the only society on earth that has no traditions from before the age of progress" (CFI 65)—English-speaking Canadians, Grant believes, continued to have "connections with the British Isles, which in the nineteenth century still had ways of life from before the age of progress" (CFI 71). Canada nurtured and maintained values and ways of life predating modernity; and it is here that its possibilities for a different way of life were preserved, though only very precariously, with more promise than possibility, since these links to an older Europe were the product of progressive forces that eventually devour all such ties.

The possibility of maintaining this kernel of resistance based on a slowly fraying connection to an English-speaking community located across an ocean was a slim one indeed. In *Lament for a Nation*, Grant compares Canada in 1965 to Poland, another country located geographically next to a superpower, whose sovereignty and culture had also been severely impinged as a result. Grant writes: "There are clearly two chief differences between ourselves and that nation. First, the Poles have an ancient culture which has shown strength in resisting new change. The new came to Poland not only as something Russian (that is, nationally alien) but also as something Marxist (that is, profoundly alien to a Roman Catholic people). In Canada, outside of Québec, there is no deeply rooted culture, and the new changes come in the form of an ideology (capitalist and liberal) which seems to many a splendid vision of human existence . . . the governments of small capitalist nations do not have the same means to protect themselves as do small Communist nations" (LN 43).

The lack of a deep-rooted culture, a culture predating modernity, combined with the temptations offered by the ideologies of progress, means that the gradual erosion of the possibilities represented by the Canada nation are inevitable. Yet even without a primordial culture to draw on, or one organized around ethnic

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or linguistic particularities, Grant suggests there are other ways of resisting foreign encroachment. During the period following the American ascension to world dominance, Grant outlines two possible forms of resistance to western imperialism. He calls these "Castroism" and "Gaullism" after each of their respective practitioners. Castroism involves the establishment of "a rigorous socialist state that turns to the Communist empire for support in maintaining itself" (LN 45). Gaullism is the practice of connecting "the nationalist spirit to technological planning and to insist that there are limits to the western 'alliance' " (LN 46).

There are limits to each of these forms of resistance, but what is most important here is the fact that Grant indicates that neither of these methods of resistance can be practiced in Canada. Grant sees Castroism as a potential politics only in situations where industrialization is desired by the majority but is prevented from happening by a capitalist empire (i.e., the United States) and its local representatives. In the period following World War II, there is no analogous situation in Canada, except perhaps in the relationship between rural, agrarian French Canadians and the English-Canadian business and political elites in Montreal prior to the Quiet Revolution. The success of Gaullism depends on the importance of nationalism as a motive among the political and economic elite of the nation. In the Canadian situation, however, Grant argues that the elite have little interest in being nationalist. Grant writes that "most of them made more money by being the representatives of American capitalism and setting up the branch plants" (LN 47). The compromised character of the African national elites that Fanon decries in *The Wretched of the Earth* is thus perhaps even more deep-rooted in Canada. With a history unmarked by a specific transformative "event" such as a definitive moment of decolonization (however artificial or momentary this might prove to be), there is in Canada nothing that could act as a historical marker against which the present state elite (i.e., whether it is worse or better than before decolonization) could be assessed. So it would appear that the possibility of a genuine Canadian nationalism — one that would be more than an expression of American/modern values over a putatively separate and independent geographic space — is blocked from every angle.

It is possible to understand the thrust of Grant's argument without having to discuss his appeal to the traditions of conservative political thought. But with Canadian nationalism being at every turn an impossibility, it is through an explanation of what attracts Grant to the conservative tradition and how he defines this tradition that any sense can be made of even a structural possibility that has

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now been lost and must be lamented. For it is, finally, in the persistence of something as tenuous as this political tradition that Canada's potential difference from the United States lies. Grant defines traditional conservatism as "the right of the community to restrain freedom in the name of the common good" (LN 64). In Canada, both the French and the English had the "belief that society required a high degree of law, and a respect for a public conception of virtue" (LN 69). This conservatism is "essentially the social doctrine that public order and tradition, in contrast to freedom and experiment, were central to the good life" (LN 71). This is in contrast to the liberalism that Grant sees in the United States, a liberalism whose roots lie in the Enlightenment. The liberal ideology of individual freedom is for Grant essentially the same as that which underlies the scientific ideology of progress and capitalism. Grant writes that "liberalism is the perfect ideology for capitalism. It demolishes those taboos that restrain expansion" (LN 47), including, of course, national boundaries.

Grant feels that it is Canada's connection to Britain that has fostered the persistence of a conservative ethos even next to the most purely liberal country on earth. It is the waning of the East-West connection in Canada, which Grant at least partially attributes to the increasing economic advantage of North-South trade, that he laments: with the passing of this connection so too passes the possibility of an independent country in the northern part of North America. One of the unfortunate side effects of this argument is that it cannot help but seem anachronistic or even racist. Canadians no longer predominantly trace their ethnic heritage back to the British Isles, and, increasingly, there are fewer and fewer whose ethnic or national heritage finds its origins in Europe at all. The global movement of peoples that has transformed Canadian society would no doubt be seen by Grant as a visible sign of a global modernity in which "Canada" has already been lost. It should be pointed out, however, that Grant is ambivalent even about Canada's relationship to Great Britain. "British conservatism," he writes, "was already a spent force at the beginning of the nineteenth century when English-speaking Canadians were making a nation . . . for all the fruitfulness of the British tradition in nineteenth-century Canada, it did not provide any radically different approach to the questions of industrial civilization" (LN 74). Grant begins *Lament for a Nation* by locating the end of Canadian nationalism in the Defense Crisis of 1962–63. By the end of the book, he seems to have argued that any of the conditions that would have made Canadian nationalism possible historically, economically, culturally, or ideologically, had all passed away a long time before. While he criticizes the policies of the Diefenbaker government and

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the Liberal government of Lester Pearson that followed, there is little that either of these governments could have done to change the Canadian situation. What limits the possibility of the Canadian nation is something more general: a modernity whose ideological temptations seem impossible to resist for a nation without ancient roots.

The problem that Grant identifies in *Lament for a Nation*, a problem that appears to be intractable, is the difficulty in modernity of attempting to maintain meaningful traditions and significant cultural differences while also desiring the material benefits associated with "progress." Especially in his discussion of Québec, it is clear that Grant understands the ideological and material power of "progress," which has a tendency to make all nationalisms appear illogical, reactionary, and dangerous. For Grant, Québéçois society has a much deeper tradition than its English-Canadian counterpart. Its Catholicism, for example, has meant that it is necessarily conservative: in Québec, "virtue must be prior to freedom" (LN 76). The dilemma faced by French Canada is that faced by all indigenous cultures around the world: "Nationalism can only be asserted successfully by an identification with technological advance; but technological advance entails the disappearance of those indigenous differences that give substance to nationalism" (LN 76). The government headed by Duplessis attempted to solve this dilemma by openly welcoming American capital while simultaneously turning matters of education and culture over to the church: a division between the spiritual and the material is a common response to the colonial situation. The result, however, was the production of new classes "ultimately more hostile to Catholicism than to capitalism" (LN 77). This is apparent in the problems faced by the avowedly nationalist governments of the Parti Québécois under René Levesque. To undo the prominence of the church that kept Québec underdeveloped, the state assumed the position formerly held by the church in matters of education and was committed to modernizing education in Québec in order to produce a French managerial elite that would wrest financial control away from English Canadians and Americans. But here, too, "The dilemma remains. French Canadians must modernize their educational system if they are to have more than a peon's place in their own industrialization. Yet to modernize their education is to renounce their particularity. At the heart of modern liberal education lies the desire to homogenize the world. Today's natural and social sciences were consciously produced as instruments to this end" (LN 79). It does not therefore seem possible to be both modern *and* antimodern; for Grant, one lives the other's death, and if local customs and practices remain, they are insig-

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nificant by comparison to the more general and dominant logic of capitalist modernity. As he writes, "the impossibility of conservatism in our era is the impossibility of Canada. As Canadians we attempted a ridiculous task in trying to build a conservative nation in the age of progress, on a continent we share with the most dynamic nation on earth. The current of modern history was against us" (LN 68).

Lament for a Nation is a rant, and as with all rants its claims are not always well-thought out or clearly articulated. In particular, Grant seems to move back and forth between the theoretical and empirical levels he deploys here. On the one hand, the text is a reaction to the increasing control and foreign ownership of the Canadian economy by Americans, which had the real effect of reducing Canadian political sovereignty in the 1950s and 1960s. It is also an assessment of the paths not taken by Canadian businessmen and politicians in defending Canadian political and social values against the encroachment of American ones, with particular reference to the experience of the Diefenbaker years, and a severe criticism of the abandonment of nationalist principles by an economic elite for whom the eradication of borders constitutes a financial advantage. On the other hand, there is a sense in which all of this more or less empirical analysis is moot. The problem is not that certain Canadian politicians or members of the business elite have played their hand poorly or have been tempted by the material luxuries promised by the American way of life, but that, given Canada's marginal position vis-à-vis the United States and the West more generally, everything that happened was inevitable, part of an historical teleology in which all resistance dissolves in the acid-bath of progress.

Grant's movement from volunteerism to determinism is not an unprecedented one; it exists, for example, in Marx's own writings on capitalism, as concretized by the theories of Mao on the one hand and Althusser on the other. What is perhaps more problematic is how much is not expressed here. For example, Grant gestures at the deficiencies of modernity and the preferability of tradition without ever being explicit about either. The conservative model that he prefers—one in which there would be great emphasis on the community at the expense of individual rights and freedoms—is asserted more than argued for, with the United States occupying the role of a figure that can be filled with almost any content, any sense of what is wrong with the world. It could be argued just as well that there are a great many problems with and limitations of an emphasis on the community over the individual. Québec under Duplessis may have represented a more organic community than that of the society south of the border. At the same time, the

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impulse behind the Quiet Revolution in Québec was not merely an uncritical acceptance of the values of modernity, but a reaction to an extremely paternalistic and class-divided social order. What is lacking in Grant's assessment of Canada's possibilities as a nation is the profound ambivalence of modernity, which is both a destroyer of tradition and a liberating force from some of the restrictive aspects of tradition.

What would count, for Grant, as the difference that makes a difference in defining the Canadian nation? It is not the preservation of "charming residual customs" (LN 21), but something more fundamental: a radically different way of organizing life and society than that which has become the global, Americanized norm. Anything less for Grant constitutes a failure to be genuinely different. Unless the nation embodies an utterly unique mode of life, it would seem that the "nation" simply becomes a way of geographically dividing the riches of the earth among sets of elites. The rhetoric that continues to persist in Canadian public life about the defining characteristics of the nation rests on the difference of its institutions from those of the United States. In particular, it is common to assert that in Canada there just *is* the sort of social democratic or even socialist tradition that values the collective over the individual. The facts would suggest that this is mainly a rhetoric that has helped to preserve the favorable conditions experienced by the Canadian elite: the amount of social spending in Canada as a portion of GDP is closer to the United States than to nations like Sweden or Denmark; and Canada as a nation has as great a division of wealth as any country in the industrialized world.[51] Grant himself is clear on the fact that institutional difference between the two countries is very minor: "Our parliamentary and judicial institutions may be preferable to the American system, but there is no deep division of principle. Certainly none of the differences between the two sets of institutions are sufficiently important to provide the basis for an alternative culture on the northern half of this continent" (LN 74).

Frye's Modern Century

> I remember glancing through Herbert Marcuse's book, *One Dimensional Man*, and wondering what he would have made of the modern world if he had to live in a one-dimensional country.
>
> — NORTHROP FRYE[52]

The logic of Grant's lament, a lament over the inevitable loss produced by modernity, would seem to eviscerate the Canadian nation as a viable, positive project

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around which to muster one's forces. In Grant's analysis, nationalism in Canada is a spent force, an impossible project. If Grant occupies the position of "spiritual forefather" to thematic criticism, this might suggest that the nation would not occupy an important position in Canadian literary criticism. And yet the very opposite has been the case. In Canadian literary criticism, the nation has become the concept around which every other consideration revolves and to which every discussion turns. As we shall see with Lecker's criticisms later in this chapter, in literary critical readings of Canadian texts the necessity of locating or identifying unique national characteristics originates from a much more prosaic reading of the relationship between text and context that does not always raise larger questions about Canada's relationship to modernity in the way that Grant does. There seems to be an enormous amnesia about the radical conclusions suggested by Grant's work, or, at the very least, it is perhaps Grant's volunteerism that has been emphasized to the detriment of his more deterministic proclamations.

This same kind of misreading has been at work in the interpretation of the other figure who has exercised an enormous influence on the course of Canadian literary criticism in the period following World War II, Northrop Frye. Lecker has written that "the publication of the *Literary History of Canada*, in 1965, was a signal event that transformed the making of Canadian literary history and permanently altered the country's critical and creative landscapes" (MR 191). Frye's conclusion to this volume, which "introduced an influential theory about the evolution of Canadian literature and about the shifting modes of representing this evolution" (MR 191), has in turn been its most important and most widely-read section; it has been the source of critical projects that take their inspiration from it and those that position themselves in direct opposition to it. In either case, it has become an unavoidable text, the Urtext for the critical analysis of Canadian literature. What I want to argue briefly here, before moving on to my specific analysis of the function played by the nation in Canadian literary criticism, is the degree to which Grant's vision—often seen by critics as idiosyncratic, mistaken on important historical points, and overwhelmed by a Christian eschatology that he continually suppresses—is in large part shared by Frye. Frye also suggests that the era for Canadian distinctiveness has passed, even though his work has also been used as the basis for projects to locate Canada's particularity.

In his famous conclusion to the *Literary History of Canada*, Frye raises a number of points about Canadian literature that have since defined the parameters of Canadian literary criticism. In particular, he suggests that Canadian literature must be read with an eye toward the extraliterary features of the text; since "no

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Canadian author pulls us away from the Canadian context toward the centre of literary experience itself, then at every point we remain aware of his social and historical setting" (C 821–22). It is the failure of Canada to have produced a major world writer that prompts Frye's suggestion that Canadian writing is overdetermined by the context in which it is produced. This in turn leads to two different factors that Frye must attempt to account for in the conclusion. First, he offers a description of the Canadian context that explains why it has been inhospitable for literature. Second, he tries to suggest why the literature that nonetheless manages to be produced is saturated by context. It is, of course, possible to see these factors as interrelated: the inability of Canadian literature to transcend its context, that is, to become universal, moving "toward the centre of literary experience itself," makes it limited and particular, bound by context. As Frye suggests, the lack of a literary tradition in Canada means that Canadian writers borrow literary forms from other traditions; what makes these works "Canadian" can thus *only* be context (C 835). Context-bound literature is what results when formal development is arrested; thus the need for a "thematic" as opposed to a formal mode of interpreting Canadian texts.

For Frye, the facts of Canadian history have made Canada an infertile place for literature. He suggests that what has limited the development of Canadian literature is that it has been crafted within a "garrison mentality" (C 830). The history of Canada is a history of small, isolated communities—isolated from each other as much as from the United States and England—standing against an enormous, threatening, alien physical world that is always ready to annihilate them. In order to survive, such garrisons are "compelled to feel a respect for the law and order that holds them together" (C 830), since in such a landscape, the individual is lost on his own. The specific effects of this mentality on Canadian literature are not explicitly spelled out, though Frye suggests that the need to defend the garrison leads to writing that is more rhetorical than poetical and the need to deal with the environment leads to description rather than metaphor. Though much has been made of this characterization of the origins of the Canadian mentality, especially in works such as Margaret Atwood's *Survival* (1972), for Frye it appears that the real problem lies less in the literary outlook or characteristics that a "garrison mentality" produces than in the fact that "the Canadian literary mind, beginning as it did so late in the cultural history of the West, was established on a basis, not of myth, but of history" (C 835). It is possible to focus on the division between "myth" and "history" indicated here with reference to Frye's larger body of critical writing. What I want to emphasize instead is the

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"lateness" of Canada that has produced this division. It is this "belated" Canada that is all too often overlooked in Frye's text. It is overlooked, I think, because it negates the nationalist literary projects that other elements of Frye's conclusion point to: the reading, allegorically or otherwise, of the traces of the garrison mentality in Canadian literary texts, a common currency that establishes the distinctiveness of Canadian literature and thus of the Canadian nation itself; or the tracing of literary attempts to overcome this mentality, the mapping of the movement from "the stage of exploration" to that of "settlement" (C 827), the gradual maturation of Canadian literature to the point where it is no longer delimited by its origins, by its context.

The most famous sentence of the conclusion concerns the vexed question of Canadian identity. Frye writes that the Canadian sensibility is "less perplexed by the question of 'Who am I?' than by some such riddle as 'Where is here?' " (C 826). This characterization of the Canadian imagination has had a tendency to reinforce the priority of content in Canadian literature, particularly a content understood in a brute sense as the appearance of the physical world itself. As suggested by the context in which this statement is made, however, Frye's statement has always been read much too literally. The question, "Where is here?" arises in response to Canada's historical belatedness as a nation. A question that appears to refer to the dominance of space in the Canadian imagination has its origins in time. In the beginning of the paragraph that ends with the question "Where is here?" Frye writes: "English Canada was first a part of the wilderness, then a part of North America and the British Empire, then a part of the world. But it has gone through these revolutions too quickly for a tradition of writing to be founded on any one of them. Canadian writers are, even now, still trying to assimilate a Canadian environment at a time when new techniques of communication, many of which, like television, constitute a verbal market, are annihilating the boundaries of that environment" (C 826). What emerges as a threat to Canadian identity and to the possibility of a unique Canadian literature is a global modernity that is putting an end to whatever connection may have ever existed between Canadian writing and its environment. Canada's colonial situation, which has made it throughout its history a country "treated by others less like a society than as a place to look for things" (C 827), has not made it a place amenable to the production of literature, which is "born in leisure and an awareness of standards" (C 827). But just as important is the historical timing of the project of the Canadian nation, which as Frye suggests elsewhere, begins at the same moment as the modern itself.[53]

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Frye returns to this theme at the end of the conclusion when he characterizes the differences between Canada and the United States by reference to two American paintings: Erastus Salisbury Field's *Historical Monument of the American Republic* (1876) and Edward Hicks's *The Peaceable Kingdom* (1830).[54] Frye sees these paintings as representing two different visions of civilization. Field's painting offers "an encyclopaedic portrayal of events in American history, against a background of soaring towers, with clouds around their spires, and connected by railway bridges. It is a prophetic vision of the skyscraper cities of the future, of the tremendous will to power of our time and the civilization it has built" (C 846–47). Hicks's painting, which predates Field's by almost half a century, offers a different vision of the New World whose "mood is closer to the haunting vision of a serenity that is both human and natural which we have been struggling to identify in the Canadian tradition" (C 848). The Canadian tradition is connected to a depiction of a premodern world, a world in which machinery and technology have not yet definitively asserted their place in historical development: "Here, in the background, is a treaty between the Indians and the Quaker settlement under Penn. In the foreground is a group of animals, lions, tigers, bears, oxen, illustrating the prophecy of Isaiah about the recovery of innocence in nature. Like the animals of the Douanier Rousseau, they stare past us with a serenity that transcends consciousness. It is a pictorial emblem of what [Fredrick Philip] Grove's narrator was trying to find under the surface of America: the reconciliation of man with man and of man with nature: the mood of Thoreau's Walden retreat, of Emily Dickinson's garden, of Huckleberry Finn's raft" (C 848).

These are not visions of the New World that can coexist side by side. For what makes Field's prophecy of America's technological will-to-power possible is the end of Hicks's vision of America-Canada. That this end is already near in 1830 is announced by the narratives Frye invokes to describe this vision of a genuine reconciliation of man with man and man with nature—the physical and mental "flights" from the dominant mode of American life in Thoreau, Dickinson, and Twain. The "quest for the peaceable kingdom" in Canadian letters has met a similar end in the worldwide expansion of the technological will-to-power of the American republic, which has rendered anachronistic the idea of the "nation" understood as an organic community of people linked by a common history that is somehow "expressed" through culture. In the conclusion to the first major literary history of Canada, Frye is thus forced to write a requiem to all future national literary projects: "The writers of the past decade, at least, have begun to write in a world which is post-Canadian, as it is post-American, post-British, and

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post everything except the world itself. There are no provinces in the empire of aeroplane and television, and no physical separation from the centres of culture, such as they are. Sensibility is no longer dependent on a specific environment or even on sense experience itself" (C 848).

Frye's articulation of the place occupied by Canadian literature and culture within modernity in this conclusion is hardly an idiosyncratic position within what might be seen as his broader cultural nationalism. It is, rather, a recurrent theme of his work. In the preface to *The Bush Garden*, a book which collects Frye's writings on Canadian literature, he turns directly and immediately to the question of Canadian identity. This discussion is somewhat more nuanced than that in the conclusion to the *Literary History of Canada*. First of all, Frye explicitly makes a connection between identity and space. He writes that "the creative instinct has a great deal to do with the assertion of territorial rights. The question of identity is primarily a cultural and imaginative question, and there is always something vegetable about the imagination, something sharply limited in range."[55] One of the consequences of this limitation on the imagination is that identity cannot be seen as a *national* question, but at most as a *regional* one. In his best imitation of nineteenth-century European geographers, Frye notes that the numerous cultural and empirical geographies of Canada produce equally numerous points of imaginative identification: the farmland of Southern Ontario, for example, produces a different imagination from the one that the wilderness and mountains of the interior of British Columbia produce. The issue of identity, which is thus regional, has to be separated from the issue of unity, "which is national in reference, international in perspective, and rooted in a political feeling."[56] For Frye, it is in terms of this distinction between identity and unity, between region and nation, that the effects of modernity on the Canadian identity have to be assessed. While identity is primarily regional in nature, Frye admits that there exist national forms of identification as well; at the same time, he claims that national identity is necessarily "negative." It is negative not because it eliminates internal, regional differences, but because, unlike the space of regions, the space of the nation is inevitably modern in a way that corrodes identity. Frye writes that "in our world the sense of a specific environment as something that provides a circumference for an imagination has to contend with a global civilization of jet planes, international hotels, and disappearing landmarks—that is, an obliterated environment. That obliterated environment produces an imaginative dystrophy that one sees all over the world, most dramatically perhaps in architecture and town planning (as it is ironically called), but in the other arts as well. Canada, with

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its empty spaces, its largely unknown lakes and rivers and islands, its division of language, its dependence on immense railways to hold it physically together, has had this peculiar problem of an obliterated environment throughout most of its history."[57] It is in the perpetual tension between unity and identity—the tension that constitutes federalism in Canada—that Frye finds the essence of the word "Canadian." Correspondingly, it is only when this tension is dissolved that the problems of Canadian national life emerge: "assimilating identity to unity produces the empty gestures of cultural nationalism; assimilating unity to identity produces the kind of provincial isolation which is now called separatism."[58]

Canada's difficult position with respect to modernity also forms the basis of Frye's lectures in *The Modern Century* (1967).[59] Prophetically, what Frye describes in this seldom cited text is the "condition" that would later come to be known as postmodernity: a world dominated by the circulation of simulacra, the waning of the "real" and of depth, the ceaseless play of surfaces, the primacy of desire and seduction as modes of the contemporary subject.[60] This nascent reading of the postmodern is, however, admittedly limited. The vocabulary in which Frye discusses these features of the present remains linked to the modern, existentialist discourse of alienation and the critique of "progress for the sake of progress," placing *The Modern Century* in the company of other works of the 1950s and 1960s such as William Whyte's *The Organization Man* and Vance Packard's *The Hidden Persuaders*, Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*, and Norman O. Brown's *Love's Body*.[61] While the text as a whole offers a general indictment of a degraded present, Frye's specific aim is to assess the possibilities of Canadian culture in the context of larger, global changes in which the ideology of progress has triumphed, producing widespread feelings of individual alienation as a result. Frye presented these lectures in February 1967, at the beginning of Canada's centennial year. In this context, part of his aim seems to be to counteract from the very outset the euphoric discourses surrounding Canadian culture in 1967 that would culminate in the celebration of the World Exposition in Montreal.[62] In opposition to discourses that see a narrative of Canadian cultural maturity in the passage from colony to nation, Frye suggests here that it is "quite clear that we are moving towards a postnational world, and that Canada has moved further in that direction than most of the smaller nations . . . today Canada is too much a part of the world to be thought of as a nation in it."[63] It is the consequences of this claim for Canadian culture that Frye explores at length in the three essays that make up *The Modern Century*.

In the second lecture, "Improved Binoculars," Frye takes up the issue of

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culture and cultural autonomy most directly. The views that Frye expresses here are more considered and complicated than those offered, for example, in the "Preface" to *The Bush Garden*, even though they may come chronologically earlier. The body of the lecture is a wide-ranging analysis of the "modern" and its meaning in both popular and high art. Frye suggests that "modern" names an "international style" in the arts that is now ubiquitous and inescapable. For Canadian culture, "complete immersion in the international style is a primary cultural requirement . . . anything distinctive that develops within the Canadian environment can only grow out of participation in this style."[64] This would appear to be anathema to any possibility of Canadian cultural autonomy. But if Canada was born at the moment of the modern itself (which Frye marks as 1867), what needs to be asked is what cultural autonomy would Canada have in any case. Frye suggests that the difficulty with this problematic, one in which the notion of cultural specificity (as in the concept of so many "national cultures") must seem of necessity to be aligned against the international character of the modern, is that the idea of culture that it implies remains connected to that of the Romantic idea of folk. Frye writes that "culture, it is often said, in contrast to economic and political developments, is local, regional, and decentralized, as dependent on an immediate environment as a fine wine or a delicate and traditional handicraft like peasant costumes. The first step in the creation of an indigenous culture, therefore, is a firm boundary line, and the next step is the cultural equivalent of high tariffs against foreign influence."[65] While in some limited cases, it might be possible to create such a firm boundary line, it does not seem to make sense to see Canadian culture in this way, especially as Canadian literature and culture have been formed by modern, international styles. Canadian cultural nationalists who continue to see Canada through the lens of Romantic notions about the relationship of culture to definite, determinate spaces, risk misunderstanding the nature of contemporary Canadian cultural forms.

In light of the various formulations that Frye advances about the possibilities of Canadian culture and literature at the end of the century, it is hard to see him as the forefather of a cultural-nationalist literary criticism. As with Grant, Frye appears to occupy the opposing position, arguing repeatedly that there is no specifically *Canadian* literature if this is understood as naming more than the body of texts that can be itemized in national (the space of the nation here being delimited by the state) literary histories. Indeed, what Frye seems to be pointing to is the long-standing presence in Canadian literature of what Timothy Brennan has recently characterized as a "cosmopolitanism" in the texts of postcolonial

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writers.[66] So another figurehead of thematic criticism has been brought low: first Grant, then Frye. This is not to suggest that thematic criticism should therefore be pronounced dead on arrival—a cultural nationalist practice in a country whose logics of origin cannot possibly sustain such a practice except through bad faith and self-deception. Rather, what needs to be assessed is how the nation functions in thematic criticism and in Canadian literary criticism more generally. How is it possible that a nationalist criticism could have been born out of such anti-nationalist discourses as those of Grant and Frye? I will approach this question through an analysis of Lecker's attempt in *Making It Real* to do away with a nation that stubbornly refuses to be eliminated from the examination of Canadian texts. There are, therefore, two questions that need to be addressed. First, why is it that the nation seems to be an essential aspect of Canadian literature and criticism, especially in the decades immediately following World War II? Second, what are we to make of the persistence of the nation in the discourse of literary criticism in the context of the (apparent) impossibility of the Canadian nation?

The National Text: Canadian Criticism and the People

Withholding the status of "authentic" colonialism from countries such as Canada. . . makes it harder for all Canadians to identify and combat the particular kinds of postcolonial experiences they are currently undergoing as they watch their economy shrink, jobs disappear, and cultural sovereignty erode.

— DIANA BRYDON[67]

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There is a contradiction or a gap that has to be explained. On the one hand, Canadian literary criticism, especially of the period from the 1950s to the mid 1970s, but extending up to the present, has been underwritten by a literary nationalism that seeks to make intelligible the special and specific attention to Canadian texts as *Canadian* texts. On the other hand, the work of the intellectual forefathers of contemporary Canadian criticism express forcefully the view that it is no longer sensible to speak of a specifically Canadian sensibility or culture. How and why is it then that the nation became *the* central object of Canadian criticism after World War II? Why has a determination of the "Canadian" qualities of Canadian literature remained an essential element of literary criticism in Canada? Why do the fragile and porous boundaries of late twentieth-century geography retain a primacy in the writing of literary history and criticism in

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Canada, even when Canadian literary texts are themselves more cosmopolitan than nationalistic in their outlook?

It seems that as long as the fiction of the nation remains essential to the discussion of Canadian fiction, it is impossible to move away from one version or another of a theory of cultural particularity expressed in the form of the nation, and thus in the literary works that originate in the nation. The question of origin predominates, and consequently literary history remains, in Foucault's sense of these terms, historical rather than genealogical, a teleological story whose origin lies in the native soil. Questions about the "Canadianness" of the text inevitably lead back to narratives about the organic relationship of the community to the earth. This has had very unusual results in Canada. For example, Canadian novelists have often written the history of the country through the body of Native Canadians, incorporating the extended historical relationship of indigenous peoples with the land into their own (generally much shorter) history in Canada, in a process that Margery Fee has described as a "literary land claim."[68] This occurs in official government accounts of Canadian history as well, in which the ethnic diversity of the present Canadian nation is shown to be first exhibited in the numerous Native groups existing in a space that is retrospectively identified as already being Canada.[69]

The persistence of the nation as a theme of Canadian criticism might thus be seen as having had a deleterious effect on the development of Canadian criticism, an effect of arresting it in its tracks and leaving it out of step with the criticism of other, more mature literatures and criticisms. It is for this reason that the need for Canadian criticism to "grow up" has long been an aspect of many of the arguments for abandoning the nation in the consideration of Canadian texts, as reflected by the work of Frank Davey, Barbara Godard, Barry Cameron, Michael Dixon, and others, who have wanted to improve Canadian criticism by introducing the comparatively abstract, universalizing language of contemporary literary theory. From the vantage point of these critics, the period of nationalist criticism seems to have been a mistake that can be rectified by the introduction of new concepts or theories. Yet it is not clear whether it is really so easy to get rid of the nation in Canadian criticism or, for that matter, if it is even desirable to do so. The view taken by many critics that the period of national criticism has been superseded and should give way to other critical tropes and figures reflects a misunderstanding of the structural function of the "national-literary referent" in the practice of literary criticism itself in Canada. Once again, as in the literary fields of the other areas that I have examined in this study, the conjunction of

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"nation" and "literature" has a different meaning from the one that is normally assumed, one whose ultimate reference is to the possibility of a certain mode of intellectual practice more than it is to the identity that constitutes the impossible nation called Canada. The very first thing to note is that the nation is not here a sign of a struggle *for* something called "Canada," whose content and referents must thus be located and identified, but rather a struggle *against* what Grant and Frye see as inevitable: the erosion of the community, its atomization and dispersal into the broader circuits of global capitalism. It is by turning the insights of Frye and Grant against themselves, by making what they claimed was impossible still possible, by turning their definitive statements about the present into dire predictions of the future, that the negative becomes positive — if not for the nation as a whole, then at least in the practice of literary criticism.

This other meaning of the nation emerges perhaps unwillingly out of Robert Lecker's own attempt to do away with what he sees as the debilitating nationalist restraints on Canadian criticism. In *Making It Real*, Lecker undertakes a wholesale challenge to the assumptions that he believes have guided the study of Canadian literature from the 1950s onward. What characterizes all of the various positions that Lecker takes in this book is an odd kind of negativity: a virulent criticism of the mistakes of these guiding assumptions, with at best an ambiguous sense of what should replace them. As I will show in my analysis of the first three (and most substantive) chapters of the book, Lecker wants to do away with a criticism guided by nationalists assumptions, only to have the nation return once again as the sole rationale for Canadian literary criticism; as it returns, however, the real meaning of the nation with respect to Canadian literature and criticism is revealed. What Lecker attacks is the use of the nation as the ultimate referent for the literary text's content and meaning; what returns is the nation as the figure in and through which the problematic relationship of the intellectual to the collectivity is posed. The latter sense of the nation is what in fact underwrites and makes possible the attack on the former; confusions and uncertainties arise only when these two senses are conflated, as they frequently are by the thematic critics *and* their antinationalist opponents.

Making It Real is an extension of an earlier book that Lecker edited entitled *Canadian Canons.*[70] The essays in *Making It Real* all deal with some aspect of the canonization of Canadian literature and the problems relating to the Canadian canon. If there can be said to be a guiding question in Lecker's book, it is why there was no debate in Canada that corresponded to the canon debates that took place in the United States in the 1980s. Lecker's critics have complained that

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what he raises as a problem is really a nonproblem, an introduction of a set of foreign literary concerns into Canada in order to raise the author's standing in both international and Canadian literary circles. Frank Davey has claimed as much in his attack on Lecker for publishing the book's first essay, "The Canonization of Canadian Literature," in *Critical Inquiry* rather than in a Canadian journal, a decision that Davey can see only in terms of Lecker's desire to expand his cultural capital.[71] It is perhaps a little too easy to dismiss Lecker's essay as yet another example of the Canadian "colonial cringe": an airing of Canada's deficiencies to an approving imperial audience, whose critical practices are thereby confirmed as being on the cutting edge of history. What is important for my purposes is not so much the question of the canonization of Canadian literature, but the way in which the question recasts a much older set of questions concerning the place of the nation in Canadian literature into a new form. Since the canon and the nation are not precisely the same thing, this new form has a tendency to obscure and disguise the real questions that are being probed and pondered. This is no doubt the reason that Lecker is forced to make what are apparently contradictory claims about the importance and relevance of the canon in Canadian literature, contradictions that he tries, with only partial success, to smooth out in the book's introduction. The way in which the problem of the Canadian canon is initially posed, for example, has its own set of imbedded contradictions: the state of Canadian criticism is compared with an international standard that (supposedly) represents the "state of the art" of modern literary critical concerns and questions; at the same time, it is assumed that the body of literature with which this criticism concerns itself—"Canadian literature"—has its own autonomy and internal logic: the idea of the nation itself.

In the book's first essay, Lecker writes that "it is startling to realize that Canadian literature was canonized in fewer than twenty years" (MR 28). He identifies three main events that were significant in the rapid invention of the Canadian canon, which further act as indices of various stages in the development of this canon. The first of these is the establishment of the New Canadian Library paperback series in 1957, a heavily funded government initiative that would make Canadian literature more widely available to high school and university students and to the general public. W. J. Keith has written that the series "represented a crucial step—I would say *the* crucial step—in demonstrating the existence of a mature Canadian literature and in making possible its extensive study in schools and universities."[72] Given the importance of this series in establishing the canon, Lecker expresses shock in a later essay in *Making It Real* that the criteria for

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including books in the series depended largely on the aesthetic sensibility of its general editor, Malcolm Ross, and on sales and marketing considerations (MR 154–72): in the place of identifiable and clearly articulated literary values, the genesis of the Canadian canon was chance and commerce.

Even so, Lecker identifies the core literary value of the Canadian canon as being a "national-referential aesthetic" (MR 4). He claims that the value of the "classics" included in the canon formed between the publication of *The Literary History of Canada* in 1965 and the Calgary Conference on the novel (the second and third important events in the production of the Canadian canon) "was a function of their ability to represent nationalist currency through a displaced formal equivalent: mimesis" (MR 37). Lecker argues that the canonical texts of the short Canadian literary tradition are those that have identified the Canadian nation, explicitly naming it in time and place or producing it through descriptions of its people and its geography. He identifies the tendency to critically praise realist texts that deal with the nation as originating very early in the history of Canadian criticism: nineteenth-century critics believed that "fancy" was inappropriate for a new literature and argued that Canadian writers should focus on producing an "inventory" of the new nation (MR 30–31). Even if this has been a feature of Canadian criticism from the outset, Lecker is particularly critical of the work of Northrop Frye and of the thematic critics, which he sees as almost single-handedly responsible for increasing the focus on the nation, thus creating the current problems of Canadian criticism.

In his conclusion, Frye suggests that what the *Literary History of Canada* makes clear "is the obvious and unquenchable desire of the Canadian cultural public to identify itself through its literature" (C 823). Though Lecker takes this as a manifestolike proclamation by Frye about the desirable form of Canadian literature, it should be noted that Frye is here simply stating what has been the case with Canadian literature, a literature that has been for much of its history "as innocent of literary intention as a mating loon" (C 822). Lecker is correct, however, when he sees in the work of the thematic critics D. G. Jones, Margaret Atwood, and John Moss, a development of Frye's ideas in the direction of a criticism that is a little more than a displaced form of nationalism. For these critics, the chief value of literature was its ability to produce cultural self-recognition through the establishment of "a relation between national consciousness, literary history, and a kind of idealized mimesis" (MR 32). Ever since, writing considered valuable enough to be included in the canon has been limited to texts that are, in one way or another, explicitly nationalist. Lecker suggests that the reasons for the

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obsessive interest in nationalist-mimetic texts grows out of the anxiety about the identity of the Canadian nation: to see the nation represented in the literary text is to assure that the nation exists, and so it is not surprising that postwar critics focused on nationalist texts to the exclusion of all else given the tenuous identity of the Canadian nation.

There are a number of problems that Lecker has with this version of the canon. There is, first, the lack of attention in Canada to the metatheoretical question of the values informing the canon. Lecker claims that in other national literatures—though he really seems to mean by this mostly American literature—the assumptions that are essential to the production of a canon have been or are being challenged. In Canada, however, literary-critical business continues as usual. Lecker suggests that the reason why the canon has not been questioned is that Canadian critics are interested primarily in defending the field of Canadian literary studies as it currently stands; this defensive posture has the effect of making Canadian criticism an anachronism in the world of literary criticism. Second, the nationalist canon has a tendency to marginalize significant works of Canadian literature that do not fit the prescribed national-referential aesthetic, either because they do not thematically deal with the Canadian identity and nationhood or because they are formally experimental or innovative instead of the preferred form for nationalism, realism.

These first two points are significant mostly with respect to struggles over the definition of the character and composition of literary criticism and history in Canada. There is one further objection that Lecker has against the nationalist canon erected in Canada that returns us to the nation in a new way. Lecker complains that the Canadian canon was the creation of the *academy* rather than of a larger reading public. As such, it cannot help but reflect the values and interests of academics, including the vexed question of national cultural identity itself. Lecker takes the words of the well-known Canadian critic W. J. Keith as indicative of the overall attitude of the critical establishment toward the canon: "In a candid digression, Keith notes that if academics refused to determine which works were classics, problems would ensue, for 'who would decide the question of what is a permanent part of our literature and what isn't: the publishers? the booksellers (including those who control the chain book stores)? the popular reviewers? the writers of literary gossip-columns in our newspapers? The prospect is disturbing.' It is 'disturbing' because the idea that anyone but academics could pronounce on the value of literary works amounts to an invitation to anarchy. The 'general reader' knows nothing. At all costs, control must remain

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within the established school and the traditions it has created in order to validate itself and perpetuate its judgements" (MR 42).[73] The result is the production of a canon that has "missed" the nation, that fails, in other words, to reflect anything but the narrow interests of a group of specialists. For Lecker, the problem with this is that the function of the literary canon *should* be to reflect the nation; ironically, the "national-referential aesthetic" fails to do just this.

There are problems with the way in which Lecker understands the process of canon formation. The key insight concerning the canon shared by many of the American critics he cites—John Guillory, Annette Kolodny, Jane Tompkins, and Barbara Hernnstein-Smith—revolves around a realization of the essential arbitrariness of the canon. What these critics hope to do, if it is in fact possible to assign a common purpose to such an ideologically diverse group of thinkers, is to challenge the "natural" character of the canon in order to revise or amend it, or to drain it entirely of its ideological and rhetorical power—its claims to define the essence of a nation or a people. The arbitrariness that Lecker laments with respect to the formation of the Canadian canon is in fact true of all canon formation: *none* of them embody national values in the way he supposes. As with the nation itself, the questions concerning the canon relate to how it transforms artifice into nature. There is another problem with Lecker's understanding of the Canadian canon. Tracy Ware has argued that Lecker's portrayal of a canon dominated by nationalist texts in fact misrepresents the real character of the Canadian canon. He suggests, contra Lecker, that "The Canadian canon has always been fluid: the available anthologies are so inclusive that no course can exhaust their possibilities, and different instructors and institutions use and even construct very different anthologies. Thus Canada has all of the uncertainty but none of the dogmatic resistance necessary for a "delegitimation crisis." Canonical interrogations "have not deconstructed the monolith in any way similar to the way it has been deconstructed in other countries—read 'in the United States'—because there is no monolith here."[74] Ware's criticisms notwithstanding, the conclusions that Lecker draws on the basis of his interrogation of the Canadian canon are innocuous enough. He ends "The Canonization of Canadian Literature," by suggesting that more critical attention should be paid to how the canon was formed. The alarm that he expresses about the construction of a canon dominated by nationalist texts is in the end somewhat tempered. He does not call for a definitive end to nationalism in the canon, but encourages a careful consideration of the values that Canadians want to inform the canon. These may *still* be nationalist values. Lecker simply points out that they don't necessarily have to be:

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the necessity that has accompanied the nationalist canon is only a matter of the vagaries of literary critical history.

There is thus already some confusion about the status and meaning of nationalism and the nation in Lecker's book. At first, it appears that nationalism, expressed in terms of the canon, is to be resisted at all costs; by the end of the first essay, it has returned. The relevance of the nation remains framed by the question of the canon, but it has shifted slightly, so that there emerges a distinction between a *genuine* and a *false* literary nationalism. The "genuine" national literature emerges from the people, the false one that currently defines the Canadian canon is violently imposed on the nation by academic critics. The second and third chapters of *Making It Real*, "A Country without a Canon?" and "Privacy, Publicity, and the Discourse of Canadian Criticism," deal explicitly with this division and its consequences for the reading, writing, and interpretation of Canadian literature.

In what might at first seem to be an abrupt and startling about face, in "A Country without a Canon?" Lecker makes the claim that there is *no* canon in Canada. In many ways, this essay constitutes a response to Ware's claims on behalf of the Canadian canon and its essential "fluidity" and malleability. What Ware sees as a positive feature of the Canadian canon, Lecker sees as evidence of the deep problems with Canadian literary criticism. Instead of asserting that there is a canon and that it is scarred by nationalism, Lecker now asks the questions that he sees as emerging out of Ware (and Davey's) criticisms: "What does it mean to be a country without a canon? How does the absence of a canon affect our sense of agency and difference? How does such an absence colour our notions of community, time, and place? Is there any way in which such an absence marks a loss, or gain?" (MR 53)

These questions are meant to prompt an investigation into the significance of the canon for the nation, and more generally of the significance of literature for the nation. In order to support the hypothesis that there is no canon in Canada, Lecker utilizes a distinction between "canonical" and "curricular" value. Following Virgil Nemoianu, Lecker defines curricular literary works as " 'those that are chosen to be taught in class, to be included in anthologies . . . for utilitarian reasons, to satisfy some needs—political, ethical, practical . . . curricula are, in a sense, negotiated accounts between the definitional and hegemonic features of a given historical time and place and the broader and inchoate canonical domain proper.' "[75] By contrast, in defining the meaning of "canonical" value, Lecker invokes Charles Alteri, whose "positivist model proposes that canons provide us

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with concepts of authority that allow us to resist local and current abuses of power . . . canons promote the recognition of moral categories and therefore have an ethical dimension . . . canon, culture, community; they are all entwined" (MR 54–55). Lecker concludes that "in Canada we have a shifting but identifiable curriculum that is often misread as a canon" (MR 55). Canons are the outcome of numerous forces that democratically mediate between highbrow and lowbrow and are in a sense made up of "popular" works that are "heterogeneous and nonelitist" (54). By this measure, *all* of what supposedly pass for "classic," canonical texts in Canada (for instance, all of the texts of the Canadian literary tradition rapidly invented by the New Canadian Library series in the 1950s and 1960s) cannot claim to be canonical: they have "no claim to public interest," nor do they "mediate between popular and academic demand" (MR 55). As an example of the lack of a Canadian canon, Lecker cites the difference between public and academic views on the status of Sinclair Ross's *As for Me and My House*. He suggests that "while the novel may appear on course curricula throughout the country, and while much has been said about its ostensible excellence, it is not a canonical work. The average, well-read person within the public has never heard of it. In fact, many well-read people within the academy have never heard of it" (MR 55).

For Lecker, the consequences of the absence of a canon in Canada are dire. For it seems that in the canon what is represented is nothing less than (in typical Romantic fashion) the soul of the nation. The literary canon thus assumes in Lecker's essay an enormous and important role with respect to the nation. Indeed, it seems that it *is* the nation, which is why Lecker feels able to claim that "in the absence of a canon, a number of social constructs attached to canonical ideals will also vanish: consensus, community, social responsibility, and ultimately ethical challenge . . . while the country without a canon may be free, plural, ahistorical, and self-conscious of the material conditions that account for its contingent status, it may also be a country without moral conviction, without the means of recognizing difference, without standards against which ethical choices can be judged" (MR 57). A country without a canon is therefore a country that cannot claim to be a nation. As Lecker argues—and the language of Benedict Anderson's "imaginary community" is repeatedly invoked throughout this essay in describing the nation and literature—the canon is "one of the imaginary constructs through which nations articulate their dreams and values" (MR 63). If Canada doesn't have a canon, and Lecker seems to feel that it doesn't, then it desperately needs to "imagine" one; otherwise, the country called Canada risks descending into the ethical and moral wasteland that countries who are not also nations

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(supposedly) find themselves in. Lecker admits that it may be a lot to ask "that a country as young and regionally diverse as Canada might be expected to produce even one truly canonical text" (MR 56). What he seems to be absolutely certain of, however, is the direct connection between the literary value embodied in the canon and the values of the community embodied in the nation.

One further transformation of Lecker's original points regarding the nationalist basis of the Canadian canon needs to be looked at. For it is only in the third essay of *Making It Real*, "Privacy, Publicity, and the Discourse of Canadian Criticism," that the connections between the nation and literature that underlie Lecker's attack on nationalist criticism become clear. At the heart of the distinction between the canon and the curriculum lies the distinction between the public and the academy. What passes for a canon in Canada — the set of "classics" established by the academic-government-publishing triad — is for Lecker insufficient in yet another way than simply by the fact that it is too weak (more curricular than canonical) to produce or reflect any of the shared values that a nation should possess. The fact that Canada has no canon is also or even primarily due to the professionalization of literary criticism in Canada over the past forty years, which has meant that it no longer speaks of or embodies the values of the public — the only values that could make up a genuine canon.

The substantive part of this long essay traces the way in which "the discourse of Canadian criticism was gradually removed from the public sphere" (MR 70). The turning point of what Lecker describes as the "industrialization" and academic privatization of literary criticism occurs in the period between 1958 and 1965 — the beginning of the period marked by the appearance of the New Canadian Library that allowed Canadian literature to be turned into an academic field studied at universities, the end by the publication of the *Literary History of Canada*, which signified the consecration of this field and it confinement to specialists. To show the effects of the change, Lecker examines the first conference on Canadian literature, held at Queen's University in 1955. This was not a strictly academic conference, but included writers, publishers, editors, librarians, and booksellers, and was "designed to ensure public access" (MR 74). Lecker sees the importance placed on the inclusion of a diverse group of literary professionals and the public-at-large in the debates and discussions at the conference as an example of the fact that the early rhetoric of Canadian criticism "was about much more than making the Canadian writer or Canadian literature accessible to the public. It was also about the political value associated with such publicity" (MR 73). At the Queen's conference at least, it was felt that "the dissemination of a

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national literature was essential to the recognition of community on a national scale. In other words, the publicity of the nation's literature both formed and publicized the nation" (MR 76).

Beginning in the mid 1950s, this literary nationalism, which Lecker sees as one that perhaps too unproblematically "valorized the transparent equation between critical discourse and nationalist political action" (MR 73), began to be transformed into the basis for the professionalization of the study (and reading) of Canadian literature as part of what he describes derisively as a "state-supported public relations campaign" (MR 82–83). The nationalist, thematic criticism that Lecker saw dominating Canadian criticism up to the present in "The Canonization of Canadian Literature" becomes here simply a phase of professionalism that has culminated in the ascension of theory in Canadian literary criticism, with a result of a further isolation of Canadian literature from the public. On the one hand, "the movement toward privatization allowed the discourse to lose its monologic, nationalist, and hegemonic focus. But the movement away from nationalism was also divisive, both for the social order and for the individual involved in that order" (MR 71). It is for this reason that Lecker claims most Canadian literary critics are uncomfortable with the social positions that they now occupy, since "they are haunted by the idea that criticism is responsible to the public—to the nation" (MR 71).

It would be interesting and useful to critically assess the whole of Lecker's discussion of the professionalization of Canadian literary criticism, but to do so would distract from the point of looking at Lecker's examination of the place of the nation in Canadian literary criticism since the 1950s. While the nation and nationalist criticism in the first essay of *Making It Real* constituted a problem that had to be dealt with, what we are left with here is a sense that the real problem with Canadian literary criticism is that it is *not nationalist enough*. Critics have an important role to play with respect to the nation; it is a role that the professionalization of the academy has not allowed them to play. In the narrative that Lecker presents concerning the professionalization of literary criticism in Canada, it is significant that the thematic critics are now positioned as the last critics to struggle with "the tension between public and private discourse" (MR 86). Atwood's *Survival*, for example, is described as "the expression of a poet who feels victimized by privacy . . . Atwood, an ex-academic, sees the academic walls closing in on Canadian literature. She wants to break the trend toward privacy. She wants a public" (MR 86). By contrast, Canadian criticism is now characterized as private and self-involved: it should be speaking to the public as a whole—to and of the

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nation, in other words—but instead it confines itself to small intellectual coteries. Lecker encourages critics to become public once again. What this seems to mean is that they must perform the essential function that *only* critics can perform with respect to the Canadian nation: produce the public *for* literature, and by so doing, produce the nation that is the culmination of the values embodied and expressed in Canadian literature. And what could this be except the very "Canadianness" of Canadian literature, expressed now not through the academic lens of the thematic critics but through a sense of the values of the public? It is not easy to see the difference.

Nation(al) Politics

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In the sometimes contradictory positions on the nation that Lecker articulates in *Making It Real*, something important emerges in the anxious reappearance of the nation in the form of a call for a more public criticism. In one of the many summaries of his position that he produces in the introduction, Lecker writes: "If one objects to any formulation of the nation as an entity that can be described—that is *worth* describing—then one has to fall back on a pluralist vision of the country that sees it as a conglomeration of competing forces and centres of power. This is the view endorsed by much contemporary Canadian theory. But if one promotes this view, there is no reason to describe the conglomeration as *Canadian*, and no need to speak to the Canadian public (or students) about it. Only if there is something identifiably Canadian is it worth asking what that identification is all about. Contemporary Canadian literary criticism refuses to speak from where it lives. Yet it still lives—here. This is not just any place. It is a specific place" (MR 9). In what sense can it be said that Canadian literary criticism lives "here," in Canada, as opposed to existing at the intersection of numerous lines of influence that neither necessarily originate in Canada nor are even identifiably "national" in their determination? While this view of the lines of force that produce the contemporary nation is in some sense "right," Lecker's comments also point to an inescapable fact: it *is* only some conception of the nation that makes Canadian literature a meaningful category, and not just in terms of the divisions that have been established between various national literatures; the nation is essential to whatever politics might be imagined for Canadian criticism in the connection of literature to the public. I can't help but wonder if it is not precisely what most contemporary critics have seen as the *immaturity* of Canadian criticism that has already made it potentially more political than is

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usually thought to be the case. In many ways, the need to think about the function of criticism and literature in the context of the nation has meant that criticism in Canada has long had to worry about the construction of the institution of literature and has had to approach literature as more than an autonomous, self-enclosed practice whose relationship and importance to cultural life are self-evident and unquestionable. This is true of the thematic critics' attempt to make sense of the essence of the Canadian identity as expressed through literature, as much as it is of Lecker's attempt to challenge the supposed hegemony of the particular "national-referential aesthetic" that thematic criticism embodied.

Of course, the centrality of the nation in Canadian criticism has also proved to be parochial and has tended to reinforce a notion of the national literatures as "natural kinds" in a way that has placed limits on effective criticism. While an overly simplistic connection between literature and nation of the kind expressed especially by nineteenth-century critics[76] can be limiting, it should be recognized that it can also be productive; since the category of national literatures has not proved to be very easy to abolish, it is the potentially productive aspects of such a category that may prove important to examine and use. Critics who have chosen to reevaluate thematic criticism, such as T. D. MacLulich, have begun, perhaps without even realizing it, to do just this. MacLulich claims that "Canadian literature is inevitably a subject in which political and literary considerations overlap";[77] removed from their social context, "hybrid literary-political categories such as Canadian literature become meaningless,"[78] that is to say that the contexts that enable the production and circulation of texts necessarily arise in any meaningful study of Canadian literature. While I do not wish to claim an alliance with MacLulich's own particular brand of literary nationalism and while I have my own theoretical reservations about the possibility of locating and identifying the influence of "context" on the text (a procedure that can quickly deteriorate into the most reductive forms of biographical or sociological criticism), what MacLulich identifies in the hybrid category of "Canadian literature" is a dialectic in which each term works continuously to undo the presumptions of the other. That this literature is "Canadian" raises the question of how literature might, or indeed must, be understood as related to broader nonliterary social and political forces, since it is only there that the meaning of "Canadian" can be established, however provisionally. Asking this question also means that one must become aware of the fact that literature is itself constituted within the circuits of ideological operations of which the belief in the ahistorical autonomy of the literary is itself one of the chief and most powerful examples. At the same time, the inevi-

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table lack of identity between works of literature and the national identities that they are supposed to express or participate in reveals the "Canadian" itself to be an ideological construct of some considerable power, even at a time when the influence of the nation is supposed to be on the wane. The fluidity and malleability of "Canada" has, for example, continually produced a sense of the nation that is able repeatedly to mask, under the sign of the "good, caring nation," all sorts of historical and social travesties, such as the unprecedented concentration of wealth and power in a very few hands, the degree to which Canadian society is beset by racism, and the repressive aspects of the state apparatus revealed in the response to the antiglobalization demonstrations in Windsor and Québec City.

The inevitability of having to return continually to the nation in the case of a peripheral country such as Canada rests on the fact that it is only some concept of the nation that enables a sense of national-cultural difference that can potentially be read as a political difference. The sense that it is archaic, pointless, or ideologically suspect to define and defend national characteristics may be theoretically sound. The alternative, however, which is one form or another of internationalism or cosmopolitanism (which now goes by the name of globalization), has a tendency to shelve political struggle (such as the struggle for national sovereignty) and, perhaps unintentionally, to legitimate mass media and cultural imperialism by tacit acceptance. This is a point that has been repeatedly made in other national contexts throughout this century by thinkers as various as Sun Yat-Sen, Fanon, and, more recently, by the Brazilian cultural critic Roberto Schwarz. One solution might be to think of the nation as a potential space for political activity, while at the same time unthinking the unitary vision of the *polis* that it has often implied. This solution has become well recognized, I think, by a number of critics of Canadian literature, who have formulated a similar dialectic with respect to the nation. Lecker himself writes that "the problem today is how to write literary criticism that is postnational and national" (MR 6). With respect to postcolonial criticism, Diana Brydon argues that "the goal throughout is a commitment to establishing and sustaining difference: the differences that make Canada Canada, and the differences that continue to challenge the national formation of an immigrant, capitalist culture."[79] In the work of Neil ten Korteenar, this dialectic takes a new form in which the terms of this postcolonial confrontation with the nation is itself seen as "nationalist in inspiration."[80] This is a claim that can only renew the critical encounter of criticism with the nation. It is perhaps here, in a continual, unending dialectic of literature and the nation, that there remains a politics in the literary critical study of Canadian texts: a politics of the nation and

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Szeman, Imre. Zones of Instability : Literature, Postcolonialism, and the Nation.
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of a place for difference that might distinguish Canada from all other places on the globe.

The sense that the nation might be a positive feature within Canadian literary criticism has, however, to be tempered by the problems that arise in Lecker's "Privacy, Publicity and the Discourse of Canadian Criticism." One of the flaws in Lecker's account of the industrialization of Canadian criticism is that it overestimates the importance of literature in defining the soul of the contemporary Canadian nation; it also offers too limited an analysis of the forces that created a "private" literary criticism in Canada. Lecker's analysis is one-sided. He sees the problems of Canadian criticism originating entirely within the realm of the literary-critical field itself, which means that solutions to the problem—making criticism *and* literature more public—are also expected to be found within the field. For Lecker, it simply comes down to a matter of choice: critics need to become nationalists anew in order to maintain the possibility of a Canadian nation.

Lecker believes that literature can resist the spread of Americanized popular culture into every crevice of Canadian culture. It seems that it is literature alone that is imagined as able to prevent the Canadian community from being stripped of its particularistic charms—whatever these might be. What Lecker seems to be unwilling to admit is that the industrialization of Canadian literature is less a disease than a symptom of a larger "illness" that has already thoroughly lodged itself in the body of the Canadian nation. This is, of course, the "contamination" of the Canadian nation by modernity that Grant and Frye viewed as a fait d'accompli by the time that nationalist criticism began its life in Canada. In part because the professional interests of the literary-critical field in Canada (the study of a specifically Canadian national literature) intersected with a broader set of political and social concerns—the threat of Americanization, the institution of state-sponsored programs of cultural nationalism—thematic criticism seemed content to misread or ignore warnings about the "belatedness" of Canadian nationalism. The professionalization of Canadian criticism since the 1950s should be seen as an index of how a certain notion of the Canadian public, and of the relevance of literature to the definition of the essence of this public, has shifted and changed in such a way that no shift in the practices of Canadian criticism can hope to redress this separation of the public and literature. Another way of putting this is to remember what it was for Grant and Frye that would be a sufficient difference to make a difference in the definition of the Canadian nation. For Grant, this was a substantively different way of life, bolstered by a set of

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original and intellectually distinct social and political institutions; for Frye the appearance of a unique literary *form*. There seems to be nothing in the character of Canadian literary criticism, either in its understanding of literature, the relationship of literature to the nation, or the character of the nation itself, that seems to suggest it has found what Grant and Frye were looking for. And so its hope for the nation relies on a division that we can now see as fundamental in the literature of the postcolonial situations that I have looked at here: in the absence of a unique national language, literature becomes the spiritual refuge of a nation under constant threat from modernity. Or more precisely, since in Canada literature refused to undertake this particularizing function, the nation's soul had to be safeguarded *and* produced by literary criticism itself.

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