The Canadian Romantic Child: Travelling in the Border Country, Exploring the "Edge"

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Résumé: *Dans la littérature pour la jeunesse du Canada anglais, l'enfant est souvent un être partagé entre la nature et le monde civilisé. M. Steffler étudie cette problématique de la frontière entre civilisation et nature vierge dans quatre romans du XIXe et du début du XXe siècle. Elle examine en particulier les résonances romantiques à la Wordsworth qui transparaissent dans l'établissement du rôle de l'enfant en tant que lien entre l'espace habité, urbain ou agricole, et la nature échappant encore à l'emprise des pionniers.*

Summary: *The child in Canadian Literature is often placed as a transitional figure on the edge or border between the wilderness or natural world and civilization or human community. This article explores the vitality and importance of this border country in the actions, attitudes and influences of young characters in four early books for children:* ***Canadian Crusoes: A Tale of the Rice Lake Plains, Two Little Savages, Glengarry Schooldays,*** *and* ***Anne of Green Gables****. Examining the Wordsworthian elements of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century Romantic child in Canadian literature, the article emphasizes and traces the development of the central role of the child as the link between farm and wilderness, small settlement and forest, town and nature. The language and concepts of bioregionalism and permaculture are applied to the literary discussion of the border country or "edge."*

> An edge is an interface between two mediums; it is the surface between the water and the air; the zone around a soil particle to which water bonds; the shoreline between land and water; the area between forest and grassland.... Wherever species, climate, soils, slope, or any natural conditions or artificial boundaries meet, we have edges. (Bill Mollison, *Introduction to Permaculture* 26)

Current environmental approaches and philosophies embracing bioregionalism and permaculture stress the importance of borders or edges. According to Mollison, the activity taking place on these edges is crucial to the health of the ecosystem, with an "increased edge mak[ing] for a more productive landscape" (26). Edges are areas that must be recognized, maintained and valued, as the "critical junctions of two natural economies, here the area between foothill and forest and plains, elsewhere on the edge of plain and marsh, land and estuary, or some combination of all of these" (26). Such edges

are notable and extreme in Canadian literature in the form of the mountain and the valley, the foothills and the prairie, or the cliff and the ocean, to name but a few.[1] Perhaps the most obvious "edge," however, is the border or edge between human habitation and the natural landscape, where the natural and the artificial meet.[2] This edge between nature and community contains vital activity, which plays a part in "defin[ing] areas, and break[ing] them up into manageable sections" (27). This border country or edge has long been the province of the child in Canadian literature, who has been given the opportunity to recognize and sustain these "places of varied ecology," these "boundar[ies] between two ecologies," where productivity increases and unique species flourish "because the resources from both systems can be used" (26). The story of the child travelling in this border country and placing him- or herself in this edge is a long and continuous one, originating in our children's literature.

I

The Romantic child, in the Wordsworthian sense, is a central figure in Canadian literature. Well-known characters, such as W.O. Mitchell's Brian O'Connal, Ernest Buckler's David Canaan, and Gabrielle Roy's Christine, display many of the qualities of the Wordsworthian child as outlined in *The Prelude.* Later characters, such as Timothy Findley's Hooker Winslow, overturn and question the assumptions associated with the conventional Romantic child, particularly his or her ability to influence society. The Romantic child in *The Last of the Crazy People,* no longer a positive force affecting society, becomes a victim of that society. In works written for children and in works written for adults, in early and in contemporary literature, society is constantly measured and judged by its treatment of, and response to, this Romantic child. Although the Romantic child appears in all of our literature, the transition from the Wordsworthian child of the Lake District to the Canadian child of the Annapolis Valley and the prairie is found in the children's literature of our country. This child figure, who plays an important role as a critic, commentator, healer and victim of Canadian society, originates in nineteenth-century works and is more fully developed in the very popular regional idylls of the early twentieth century.

Characters in Catharine Parr Traill's *Canadian Crusoes: A Tale of the Rice Lake Plains,* Ernest Thompson Seton's *Two Little Savages,* Ralph Connor's *Glengarry Schooldays* and L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* are the predecessors of Brian O'Connal and David Canaan. The works themselves anticipate many of the central themes and concerns of later novels dealing with the child. The success and popularity of Traill, Seton, Connor and Montgomery's novels exerted a significant influence on Canadian literature and culture, establishing a context for the continued interest in the temperament and function of the Romantic child in the Canadian landscape.

II

Works focusing on the child and the wilderness serve to illustrate the receptivity and appropriateness of nineteenth-century Canada to the basic associations

and philosophy surrounding the Wordsworthian child, and perhaps explain to a certain extent the intense and extended interest in the triumphant Romantic child, and more recently, in the defeated Romantic child, in our literary canon. For example, in Catharine Parr Traill's *Canadian Crusoes: A Tale of the Rice Lake Plains* (1852) we see in the wilderness and the farm the very obvious division and opposition between nature and society. This separation of nature and society, central to Romanticism and seen in Wordsworth's distinction between the Lake District and London, between a rural way of life based in nature and a social existence dependent upon people and institutions, is found in an extreme and very concrete form in nineteenth-century Ontario. Nature, in the form of the wilderness, differs substantially from the domestic setting, and provides the contrast between nature and society without any manipulation or exaggeration required. The border or edge in this particular context is pronounced and narrow, with very few individuals crossing it. It is an edge, however, that recognizes the dependency of one realm on the other; the farm and the wilderness need to understand and respect the needs of one another in order for either to survive.

The trio of children in *Canadian Crusoes*, Catharine, Hector and Louis, display Romantic tendencies, but Catharine in particular seems to be cast in a Wordsworthian mould. She approaches an almost mystical relationship with nature at times, and Traill's language often contains Wordsworthian echoes: "Never had Catharine looked upon a scene so still or fair to the eye; a holy calm seemed to spread its influence over her young mind, and peaceful tears stole down her cheeks" (64). The "holy calm" experienced by Catharine is comparable to the "holy calm" described by Wordsworth in his discussion of a transcendental experience:

> Oft in those moments such a holy calm
> Did overspread my soul, that I forgot
> That I had bodily eyes, and what I saw
> Appear'd like something in myself, a dream,
> A prospect in my mind. (*Prelude*, II, 367-71)

Catharine's "gazing on the calm beauty of nature, and communing with her own heart" (64) suggests a conventional Romantic relationship between child and nature, recalling such basic Wordsworthian concepts as: "From nature largely he receives; nor so / is satisfied, but largely gives again" (*Prelude* II, 267-68). The Wordsworthian receptivity to external impressions is emphasized in the character of Catharine — "Upon Catharine, in particular, these things made a deep impression" (75) — who is profoundly affected by her openness to the external world: "A peaceful calm diffused itself over her mind" (76).

Like the young Wordsworth, Hector and Catharine respond to both the sublime and the beautiful: "These children were not insensible to the beauties of nature, and both Hector and his sister had insensibly imbibed a love of the grand and picturesque" (70). Also, like Wordsworth, Catharine feels regret for the animals that are killed: "in spite of hunger, [she] could not help regretting the death of the mother bird" (45-46). Despite significant differences from Wordsworth's situation — these animals must be killed for the children's

survival and Catharine does not actually take part in their destruction — Traill stresses the theme, prevalent in *The Prelude*, of the child's guilt and regret for destroying the harmony and union of nature.

The Wordsworthian influences and echoes stand out in *Canadian Crusoes*, but so does its particular Canadian setting and situation, as Agnes Strickland emphasizes in her preface to the 1852 edition. It is the appropriateness of this setting to the story, reflected in the fact that Traill's novel is based on a true story or several true stories, that lends power to this particular tale of "lost children."[3] All elements required for the myth or story of the lost child, including Indiana, the "noble savage" figure, are present in the Rice Lakes Plains of Canada West in 1837. Similarly, the natural setting removed from society, which is so necessary and often so consciously sought as an escape and a nurturer by the child in Wordsworth's *Prelude*, is present in an accessible form in the Canadian wilderness, which is only a step outside the farmyard. The Canadian landscape and lifestyle introduce two contrasting settings, separated by an obvious and vibrant edge which serves as an important transitional zone between farm and wilderness. The Romantic child, appropriately placed within nature, is forced in his or her development to contend with the schism between nature and society. This void or opposition exists in an exaggerated and highly perceptible form for Catharine, Hector and Louis. If society has to contend somehow with the wilderness of the new world, then the Romantic child is an obvious device to bridge the gap between the rationality and decorum of civilization and the freedom and energy of the natural realm. Thus the child traverses the edge between the two worlds of wilderness and farmyard, enriching and widening the rather definite and restrictive boundary, providing the movement between the two realms which defines the edge as a transitional zone.

Traill's characters obviously benefit from their exposure to the wilderness, returning to the society of the farm with the conventional qualities of such a position, identified by Hoxie Fairchild, in his study, *The Noble Savage*, as "love of the scenes amid which they live; a sense of kinship with all living creatures; exquisite sensibilities; and a moral instinct independent of, and often hostile to, analytical reason" (374). Although not developed by Traill in the novel, it is implied that the adults waiting at the farm, as well as future generations, could and will benefit from the Wordsworthian sensibility acquired by the children in their sojourn in the wilderness.

III

While Traill spends most of her narrative examining the effects of the wilderness on her trio of children, leaving their integration back into society to the reader's imagination, Ernest Thompson Seton, in *Two Little Savages* (1903), is much more concerned with pitting his trio of "lost" children against "civilization." Because the children in this novel are only "playing" at being lost, there is communication between the worlds of the woods and the farm. Essentially, Yan wants to live in harmony with nature in the style advocated by idealistic Romantic philosophy. Importantly, however, Yan, like Traill's characters, incorporates the

practical skills required for such an existence, providing a realistic level and purpose to the rather romanticized concept of living with nature. The "wolves" and "bears" cannot be ignored; there is no need to people the Canadian wilderness and woods with imaginary ghosts. The dangers and threats actually exist, providing the "lost" children with significant challenges and skills.

Like Catharine, Yan is set apart from the other children, Sam and Guy, because of his sensitive temperament. His sketching and poetry make him an object of ridicule, while his Wordsworthian openness and receptivity place him in a situation of contradiction when he feels guilt and remorse for having destroyed nature:

> I didn't mean to kill it [the Shore-lark], only *to get it*. You gather flowers because you love to keep them near you, not because you want to destroy them. They die and you are sorry. I only tried to gather the Shore-lark as you would a flower. It died, and I was very, very sorry. (98)

Although Yan, like Wordsworth, longs to respect nature, he cannot control the energy, curiosity and carelessness which often result in its destruction. Seton's description of the child's behaviour and response is realistic. Despite his capacity for destruction, Yan sincerely loves nature, and displays an open receptivity similar to Wordsworth's: "In the woods, *the silent watcher sees the most*" (345).

The boys' conscious efforts to shed all the trappings of "civilization" accentuate the difference between the woods of the children and the farm of the adults. The forest is obviously set up by Seton and perceived by the boys as a realm superior to a "civilized" society which produces criminals such as Bill Hennard. Seton stresses the simplicity and justice of the forest, even when it involves violence and danger, contrasting it with the complications and deceit of the established society. Caleb and Granny de Neuville, the two characters associated with the woods, are ostracized by society. Like "the collarless stranger," these two characters share Yan's love of nature and provide the sympathy and wisdom which Yan craves, but cannot find in his familiar society: "He was in a dream, for he had found at last the greatest thing on earth — sympathy — broad, intelligent and comprehensive sympathy" (43).

Seton's nature figures, which include hermits and witches as well as children, live in a realm far removed from society, and depend upon their understanding of, and respect for, nature in order to survive. These outcast characters, in their isolation and eccentricity, are reminiscent of the Wordsworthian solitary figure, living in harmony with nature. The mystery surrounding them contrasts sharply with the ordinary dreariness of the accepted members of society. The association of the children with these characters is instrumental in pulling the children away from society and immersing them in the wilderness.

Yan's sojourn in the wilderness is, of course, only temporary. Seton, however, does make explicit the effect of the wilderness on the temperament and future of the child. Yan returns to his family with some insight and

confidence concerning himself: "his was the kingdom of the Birds and Beasts and the power to comprehend them" (536). Yan plans to function in society as a naturalist, and will obviously benefit from his wilderness experience in a practical and spiritual way. In a rather contrived manner, Yan will bridge the two worlds of nature and society in his capacity as a naturalist, teaching society the necessary reverence and respect for nature, and imposing some of society's art and science onto nature. Yan's comfort in the "edge," and his deliberate cultivation of that area, allow him to remain in that border country, reaching out to the places on either side of that dividing line.

Both Traill and Seton use the Romantic child as a link between nature and society; the child is "lost" by society and is only restored to that society when his or her Romantic temperament has been strengthened and developed in the wilderness. As in later pieces of Canadian fiction, the child transfers the wisdom and integrity gained through an immersion in the natural world to society, usually benefiting society to some degree. The sensitive and receptive attitude of the Romantic child thus becomes the vehicle through which the edge is activated and broadened, allowing nature to unite with, or at least affect, the "civilized" world.

IV

Ralph Connor's *Glengarry Schooldays* (1902) is not concerned with the child lost and restored. Although nature and society are contrasted, the division between the two realms is not as explicit as in Traill and Seton's works. The natural realm of the forest in this regional idyll still embraces some of the aspects of the wilderness, but because the children are not "lost," they function within both the forest and society, often attempting the type of immersion in the wilderness thrust upon Traill's characters and chosen by Seton's characters, but not succeeding in remaining isolated in that environment for an extended period of time. The children are by necessity drawn back to their everyday life of school and home, repeatedly crossing the border. The forest provides a temporary escape from the prison of the schoolhouse, and is the environment longed for and associated with the child in later years of retrospection: "A wonderful place this forest, for children to live in, to know and to love, and in after days to long for" (14). Connor initially associates the child with nature, while disassociating him or her from the schoolhouse erected and controlled by society. While in school, the boys look through cracks and holes in the walls in order to catch glimpses of

> the outer world — glimpses worth catching, too, for all around stood the great forest, the playground of boys and girls during noon-hour and recesses; an enchanted land, peopled, not by fairies, elves and other shadowy beings of fancy, but with living things, squirrels and chipmunks, and weasels. (13)

As in *Canadian Crusoes* and *Two Little Savages*, *Glengarry Schooldays* does not deal with a limited romanticized natural world, but attempts to include the dangers and difficulties of the wilderness and woods. Although the division between nature and society is still very apparent in *Glengarry Schooldays*, the

children do not comment on the opposition of the two settings. Like Wordsworth, the boys are not consciously aware of the beauties of nature; they pursue their activities while the atmosphere of the scene is secondary to the sport, or so integrally a part of the experience that it is not noticed:

> Not that the boys made note of all these delights accessory to the joys of the Deepole itself, but all these helped to weave the spell that the swimming-hole cast over them. (30)

The sensuous atmosphere of the Deepole is responsible for the powerful impressions left in the memory and the emergence of sensuous longings in later years, but is only apparent to the retrospective adult:

> Without the spreading elms, without the mottled, golden sunlight upon the cool, deep waters, and without the distant roar of the little rapid, and the soft gurgle at the jam, the Deepole would still have been a place of purest delight, but I doubt if, without these, it would have stolen in among their day dreams in after years, on hot, dusty, weary days, with power to waken in them a vague pain and longing for the sweet, cool woods and the clear, brown waters. (30)

This immersion in the waters of the swimming hole results in the same type of experience and effects as the immersion of Traill and Seton's characters in the wilderness. The recurrence of the swimming hole for the Canadian child in literature is noteworthy as a central and symbolic moment.[4] The detailed and celebratory accounts of swimming imbue the activity with more than merely a literal or physical significance. The sensuous delights of the cool, wet swimming hole provide a striking contrast to the dust and desiccation of the prairie, town or farm during the summer. The immersion seems to involve a shedding of the dryness and lifelessness of the land in favour of the vitality and energy of the water. The embracement of this sensuous richness also suggests an exploration of feelings beneath the surface — the subconscious, the unconventional, the sexual, the creative — areas basically ignored or repressed by society. The act of swimming, like survival in the wilderness, involves a freedom from normal physical restraints; symbolically, it suggests an escape from the limitations and formality of society, and a triumph over the pettiness and superficiality of that world. It involves a synthesis and fluidity, which break down the barrier aspect of the border, softening the edge and initiating interchange between the worlds separated by that boundary.

Hughie, like Catharine and Yan, is set apart from the other children due to his sensitive response to the forest: "To Hughie, the early morning invested the forest with a new beauty and a new wonder" (108). Hughie's viewpoint becomes the exemplar of the responsive and sensitive mind: "But today he [Billy Jack] saw it [the forest] with Hughie's eyes, and felt the majesty of its beauty and silence" (109). Hughie, who is "sensitive at every pore" (194), is drawn towards the sensuous richness of the woods: "the sympathetic silence of the trees, the aromatic airs that breathe through the shady spaces, the soft mingling of broken light" (194). His reverential attitude — "Hughie felt as if he were in church" (108)

— is communicated to the others, for whom "the mystery and wonder of the forest" (109) have never been apparent. Here we see the influence of the family and community on the world of the forest in Hughie's transfer of "church" feelings to his response to the natural world. His upbringing within society, and within his family as the minister's son, has provided him with the means to respond to nature with an appropriate reverence. Through the child, the transference and influence from one realm to the other flows both ways, creating a true transitional edge.

The influence of the Romantic child in Connor's novel is more specific and direct than the potential influence implied in Traill and Seton's works. Hughie's outlook plays a significant role in the life of the adult character, Craven. Craven's decision to enter the ministry is inspired by his response to Mrs. Finch's death. When Craven states that "It was Hughie sent me there [to the scene of Mrs. Finch's death]" (335), he is obviously talking about more than just the physical location. Craven's description of his rapport with nature while driving to the Finch's house is reminiscent of Hughie's mystical relationship with nature:

> At any rate, during that drive nature seemed to get close to me. The dark, still forest, the crisp air, the frost sparkling on the trees — it all seemed to be part of me. (335-36)

Craven's admissions that "there are times when one is more sensitive to impressions from one's surroundings than others" (335), and that at certain times he seems "to have a very vital kinship with nature" (335) recall the sensitive and responsive mind of the child. Hughie's general attitude seems to be responsible for Craven's state of mind, which provides a receptivity to nature and a powerful response to Mrs. Finch's death: "All through the night and next day the glory lingered around me. I went about as in a strange world" (339). The influence of the Romantic child is not lost or merely implied; its effect on Craven has far-reaching effects on the society he will serve. A sense of "childlike" communion with nature remains with those characters who, according to Connor, are set apart from society due to their moral superiority. The adult, unable to traverse the border country, is influenced and inspired by the child, who as a messenger between the natural world and the community, is at home in the edge between the two, inviting and cultivating the synthesis of resources from both worlds.

V

L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) is also concerned with the division between nature and society, but the lack of the wilderness setting forces the Romantic child into an even more prominent position than the children in Traill, Seton and Connor's work. The hazier distinctions between nature and society and the resultant blurring of the edge or border result in the internalization of the division within the child, so that the frequent movement of the child between the two realms on a physical level is accompanied by the mental and emotional conflict of the values inherent in each setting. The settings

become secondary to the character of the child, within whom the tension between nature and society plays a decisive role in the development into adulthood. The child herself displays the qualities of freedom inherent in nature and the wilderness, and tames or develops those qualities as she confronts aspects of "civilization" and society. In a sense, the child embodies and internalizes the edge or border. The progress of the Romantic child in terms of society's acceptance or rejection of her Romantic qualities comments indirectly on the society and characters responsible for her development.[5]

As far as Wordsworthian echoes and influences are concerned, they are so apparent and appropriate in Montgomery's work that Elizabeth Waterston automatically uses the term "spots of time" for Montgomery's own childhood recollections (199), and says that *Emily of New Moon* "is an intriguing though unpretentious version of Wordsworth's *Prelude*" (212). The transcendental experiences of Anne are not limited to the wilderness or the woods, but can be triggered by ideas, art, religion or the most unexpected stimulus. The sensitive and imaginative response of the child, although often associated with nature, is certainly not limited to that realm. Inherent in the child is the ability to respond in an imaginative and transcendental manner; the child is not required to be lost and nurtured in the wilderness in order to develop such an imaginative and sensitive outlook. The qualities acquired by such an immersion in the wilderness are ever-present in Anne, who has obviously never survived a wilderness experience, like Catharine and Yan, or, like Hughie, confronted a bear! Montgomery focuses her attention not so much on how the child acquires the admirable qualities lacking in adults, but on the conflict between the child and adult, and, more importantly, on the influence of the child on individual adults in her community.

Anne of Green Gables begins with the figure associated with the oppressive and repressive elements of Avonlea society: Mrs. Rachel Lynde. Mrs. Lynde's power and influence affect all elements of society and even extend to nature; not even the brook can pass her house without the appropriate respect for society's norms and values: "but by the time it [the brook] reached Lynde's Hollow it was a quiet well-conducted little stream, for not even a brook could run past Mrs. Rachel Lynde's door without due regard for decency and decorum" (1). Obviously, Mrs. Lynde's judgement on "everything that passed, from brooks and children up" (1) is going to have its effect on Anne, who is associated with the source of the river "away back in the woods of the old Cuthbert place" (1) where "it was reputed to be an intricate, headlong brook ... with dark secrets of pool and cascade" (1).

The need of Montgomery's characters to escape from the restraints of society is apparent in the emphasis placed on Anne's imagination, resulting in Wordsworthian "spots of time" which anticipate Brian O'Connal's "feeling," and David Canaan's "sun-shiver." Typical of a transcendental experience, these moments are unexpected, rare and brief; in addition, they defy description and the child lacks power or control over them. Anne's understanding of her mystical moments is not easily articulated: "anything royally beautiful" inspires a "queer funny ache" (20). Although the transcendence of the physical

world is often inspired by an external stimulus, Anne invites and aids the escape through the use of her well-developed imagination. She is not only receptive to the external impressions which take her out of herself, but has developed those aspects of her temperament and imagination which allow her to instigate and enhance the experience. Anne's relationship with the natural world is based on a Wordsworthian "receiving and giving" interchange with nature: "An auxiliar light / Came from my mind which on the setting sun / Bestow'd new splendour" (*Prelude* II, 387-89). This Wordsworthian ability to experience "unconscious intercourse" with the natural world is presented by L.M. Montgomery as a quality naturally associated with the child. In order to acquire the sensitive nature and moral superiority of the Romantic child, Anne is not required to meet a mentor like Indiana as does Catharine, learn the survival techniques mastered by Yan, or encounter a bear in the style of Hughie. Sensitivity and moral superiority are inherent in Anne due to a temperament that encourages mystical and transcendental moments. Hence the lack of emphasis on the wilderness, and the focus in the child herself of the conflict previously symbolized by the opposed settings of society and nature. The opposition and stimulating activity found in the border country, on the edge, are ever-present in the character of the child herself.

The effect of the Romantic child on society, implied in Traill and Seton's work, and rather awkwardly suggested in the relationship between Hughie and Craven in Connor's novel, is celebrated in full by L.M. Montgomery. Anne Shirley relents and concedes to society to some degree, but she also manages to have some effect on those around her, and thus mould society as she herself is moulded. Her adversaries are those who attempt to curb and temper her imagination. Anne moderates her Romantic temperament somewhat, but has a "softening" influence on a number of characters, particularly Rachel Lynde and Marilla. Anne's position in the novel as unsuspecting critic and modifier of society is an attractive one. In her characterization of Anne, Montgomery has carefully included the conventional characteristics of the Romantic child, which in themselves fight against repression. The characteristics and associations of the wilderness, diametrically opposed to the values and atmosphere of society, are no longer present; thus the Romantic child, traditionally linked with the wilderness and nature, acquires the attributes of that setting which contrast with those of society. Freedom from restraint in all forms and areas of culture, religion and society are now invested in the child herself rather than symbolized by the wilderness or transferred to the child through the wilderness. The toning down of some of that freedom and imagination, accompanied by the transference of those same qualities to a community desperately in need of them, places Anne firmly on the edge, where she is the instigator and the receptacle for a border country opening up to receive influences from both sides. This border is comparable to a river that flows rather than a fence or wall that divides. The edge functions as a true transitional zone, where impulses from either side can mingle and interact; the Romantic imagination is tempered somewhat by society, while at the same time society benefits from that imagination.

VI

The Canadian Romantic child has his or her origins in the "child of the wilderness." The development of the lost child in the wilderness is fairly predictable as far as characterization is concerned. The effects of the wilderness dictate the acquisition of certain attitudes stressing connection, dependence and community; such an outlook is obviously transferable and beneficial to a society suffering from fragmentation and judgemental views. As we move from Traill to Montgomery, we see that the personality of the child becomes more central as the child him- or herself possesses a Romantic sensitivity and temperament and encourages the relationships and situations which nurture that temperament. Rather than the wilderness acting on the child and moulding him or her, we have the child developing and nurturing a personality which is often at odds with his or her society. Attention is placed on the child as an individual, rather than simply a figure who trails all the associations of the "noble savage" and the pastoral tradition.

Brian O'Connal in his final decision to become a "dirt doctor," David Canaan in his mystical moment at the top of the mountain and Roy's Christine being guided by intuition rather than reason in her search for the road to Altamont — these are powerful figures who, through experience in the border country, manage, both consciously and unconsciously, to influence individuals, the family and the community. These characters, comfortable in that border country, are the direct descendants of Catharine, Yan, Hughie, and Anne. The communities and individuals being judged by their responses to this figure of the child are remarkably similar in the earlier children's books and in these more recent novels for adults. Repression, insularity and judgemental attitudes characterize these communities of farm, village and small town. Similar as well are the conclusions of these works which to some degree celebrate the child's ability not only to retain and cultivate the Romantic temperament, but the capacity of that temperament to mitigate the ills of society.

Less idyllic are those works which parody and pervert the position and function of the Romantic child. As early as 1947, the year in which *Who Has Seen the Wind* was published, Paul Hiebert ridiculed the Romantic child in *Sarah Binks*. Timothy Findley, in the character of Hooker Winslow, creates a Romantic child tested and tried by his society in the traditional manner. The structure and tone of the work conform to the basic situations and conventions of the isolated and sensitive child, struggling with a sympathetic natural world and a society that does not understand or communicate with him. The characteristics of the Romantic child, however, have been exaggerated and twisted in the characterization of Hooker, and the traditional solitude is replaced with alienation. The type of exclusion forced on Hooker does not have the positive effects associated with the Wordsworthian child: a love of nature eventually leading to a love of community. Rather, Hooker's solitude in the border country results in an alienation that gives him insight into the horror, rather than the beauty, of his world.

Traill, Seton, Connor and Montgomery explore the temperament and function of the Wordsworthian child in the border country of the Canadian

landscape; the emphasis in our Canadian treatment has been, and continues to be, the very explicit and often dangerous divisions and borders between the wilderness and the farm, the woods and the village, the prairie and the town, the mountain and the valley, nature and the city. The Romantic child exists in and travels through that border country, that edge, attempting to deal with the disparate elements of nature and civilization. We continue to place the child on that border, precariously exploring the edge, hoping for a link or union with varying degrees of success.[6] The wilderness, initially a place of danger and horror for Traill's children, once explored, is the source of comfort and strength. Nature, if identifiable and accessible to the child, provides what the child, and often by extension, what the adult and community require. Although the wilderness explored by Traill's Catharine is extreme in its potential dangers and threats, the division or border between the farm and that wilderness is clearly defined and delineated, leaving few questions about its existence.

The border country becomes difficult to identify as the distinctions between the society and the wilderness are blurred, as the urban world encroaches on the natural world, leaving sterile borders of mixed nature and civilization in the form of sprawling subdivisions and scrub farmland. These desiccated edges are no longer transitional areas inviting influences from either side; the dependency of the farm on the wilderness and the town on the woods has been compromised by society's insistence on marking strict and divisive boundaries, preventing interchange and influence, separating the civilized from the natural. Accompanying the fading and potential loss of the transitional edge is a blurring of the role of the Romantic child, as society's tendency to divide and separate different zones, particularly nature and civilization, does not cultivate or encourage the transitions and influences so central to the life of the border country inhabited by the child. This tendency to eliminate edges obviously threatens both worlds.

The rather sobering realization is the potential loss of the border country to the point that a wilderness or natural realm is no longer distinguishable. To lose that edge, or to leave that border region empty, does not minister to the holistic health of the ecosystem; and neither does it bode well for a society that has depended on and celebrated the voice and vision of the child travelling through that border country. The rich transitional edges developed and embodied by the Romantic child provide the central shape to the landscape, as identified by Mollison: "a landscape with a complex edge is interesting and beautiful; it can be considered the basis of the art of landscape design" (26). The potential desiccation or elimination of this complex edge leaves the child isolated in one realm or the other and leaves the Canadian landscape of nature and community without a basis for its design.

Notes

1. I am thinking here, for example, of the traditional, clearly defined and rather spectacular borders and boundaries in Ernest Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley*, W.O. Mitchell's *The Vanishing Point* and Alistair MacLeod's *The Lost Salt Gift of Blood*.
2. The prairies perhaps provide the most memorable and visually intense division between the natural and artificial. Who can forget the opening paragraph of *Who Has Seen the Wind*,

in which the Saskatchewan prairie "lay wide around the town, stretching tan to the far line of the sky"? This circular border separating town and prairie is, of course, typical of the small town besieged by an immense and overpowering natural world.

3. For information on Traill's interest in the newspaper accounts of lost children, see Rupert Scheider's Editor's Introduction to Traill, *Canadian Crusoes: A Tale of the Rice Lake Plains*. Ed. Rupert Scheider. Ottawa: Carleton UP, 1986.

4. See, for example, Ernest Buckler's "Baptizing Pool" in *The Mountain and the Valley* and the river in Mitchell's *How I Spent My Summer Holidays*. Munro's "Baptizing" in *Lives of Girls and Women* obviously parodies this typically Canadian literary childhood experience of immersion in river waters.

5. Montgomery's *Emily of New Moon* (1924) develops the role of the Romantic child, concentrating on the child as the developing artist/writer.

6. See, for example, the role of the Romantic child as depicted in the following works: Robert Thomas Allen, *My Childhood and Yours*; Marie-Claire Blais, *Mad Shadows* and *A Season in the Life of Emmanuel*; Harry J. Boyle's novels; Marian Engel, *No Clouds of Glory*; Hubert Evans, *O Time in Your Flight*; Sylvia Fraser, *Pandora*; Hugh Hood, *The Swing in the Garden*; Margaret Laurence, *A Bird in the House*; Kevin Major, *Hold Fast*; Alice Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*; Alden Nowlan, *various persons named kevin o'brien*; Audrey Thomas, *Songs My Mother Taught Me*. The Wordsworthian qualities of the Romantic child are still apparent, as is the placement of the child in the border country. Although nostalgic, retrospective works still place an emphasis on the child as messenger and synthesizer, the recent Romantic child seems to be more closely aligned with the boy described in Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Mortality" — "Shades of the prison-house begin to close / Upon the growing Boy" (67-68) — than with the more active and effectual child of *The Prelude*.

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