

# “Tinged with gloom and grandeur” Romanticism, Conservatism & Upper Canadian Political Culture

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Article abstract

*Scholars have discussed the role of romanticism in the condescending attitudes of Upper Canadian conservatives toward Indigenous peoples but they have yet to examine its role in the political culture of settler society; specifically, as it applies to the political ideology of Tories, the group that prevailed in bustling towns and embryonic outposts alike. Weaving together intellectual history, the history of emotions, and environmental history, this article explores the romantic tradition's salience within the mentalité of Upper Canadian conservatism. It contends that influential figures from the worlds of politics and literature repeatedly invoked aspects of romanticism over several decades in denouncing subversive phenomena and in seeking to legitimize their vision of a hierarchical society. In particular, they drew on such compelling romantic tropes as powerful emotions and the magnificence of nature in the hope of bolstering a social order predicated on elite hegemony and rank-and-file deference. This helps to shed light on one of the animating factors within the Tory tradition, a multifaceted force that, for good or ill, has played an important role in shaping Ontario's history.*

# “Singed with gloom and grandeur”

## *Romanticism, Conservatism & Upper Canadian Political Culture\**

by Denis McKim

In a 1967 essay, Hugh Hood lamented what he saw as the absence, in Canada, of a robust romantic tradition. Canadians spent the “great age” of romanticism—which, for Hood, spanned the century and a half between the American Revolution and the Russian Revolution—“clearing the land north of Brockville; thinking about building the Rideau Canal; [and] allowing British regulars, with incidental help from ourselves, to repel revolutionaries from below the border.” Focused on the mundane tasks that typified everyday existence, “[we] missed

out on every one of the great movements of ideas and feelings” associated with the multifaceted cultural phenomenon that was romanticism.<sup>1</sup>

Esteemed man of letters though he was, Hood’s remarks betray a limited grasp of early Canada’s cultural history, for romantic sentiments and impulses circulated extensively in Upper Canada.<sup>2</sup> There, a broad range of actors engaged with romanticism in a multiplicity of ways, revealing the phenomenon’s far-reaching influence that extended to the realm of politics.

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\**Ontario History*’s editor and anonymous reviewers, Frances Beer, Michel Ducharme, Colin Grittner, Jeffrey McNairn, Bradley Miller, and, especially, Sarah Isbister: thank you.

<sup>1</sup> Hugh Hood, “Moral Imagination: Canadian Thing,” in *A Guide to the Peaceable Kingdom*, edited by William Kilbourn (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1970), 29–31. Surveys of romanticism include: Aidan Day, *Romanticism* (London: Routledge, 1996); Maurice Cranston, *The Romantic Movement* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Feminism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988); Tim Blanning, *The Romantic Revolution: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2010); and Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, trans. Catherine Porter (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Upper Canada officially existed between its creation via the Constitutional Act in 1791 and its dissolution via the union of the Canadas in 1841, when it became Canada West. However, the term “Upper Canada” was widely used for a number of years thereafter. On romanticism’s influence in the later nineteenth century see Tracy Ware, ed., *A Northern Romanticism: Poets of the Confederation* (Ottawa: Tecumseh Press, 2000).

## *Abstract*

*Scholars have discussed the role of romanticism in the condescending attitudes of Upper Canadian conservatives toward Indigenous peoples but they have yet to examine its role in the political culture of settler society; specifically, as it applies to the political ideology of Tories, the group that prevailed in bustling towns and embryonic outposts alike. Weaving together intellectual history, the history of emotions, and environmental history, this article explores the romantic tradition's salience within the mentalité of Upper Canadian conservatism. It contends that influential figures from the worlds of politics and literature repeatedly invoked aspects of romanticism over several decades in denouncing subversive phenomena and in seeking to legitimize their vision of a hierarchical society. In particular, they drew on such compelling romantic tropes as powerful emotions and the magnificence of nature in the hope of bolstering a social order predicated on elite hegemony and rank-and-file deference. This helps to shed light on one of the animating factors within the Tory tradition, a multifaceted force that, for good or ill, has played an important role in shaping Ontario's history.*

*Résumé: Les chercheurs ont discuté du rôle du romantisme dans les attitudes condescendantes des conservateurs du Haut-Canada à l'égard des peuples autochtones, mais ils n'ont pas encore examiné son rôle dans la culture politique de la société des colons, plus précisément dans l'idéologie politique des Tories, le groupe qui prédominait dans les villes animées comme dans les avant-postes embryonnaires. Tissant des liens entre l'histoire intellectuelle, l'histoire des émotions et l'histoire environnementale, cet article explore l'importance de la tradition romantique dans la mentalité du conservatisme du Haut-Canada. Il soutient que des personnalités influentes du monde politique et littéraire ont invoqué à plusieurs reprises des aspects du romantisme pendant plusieurs décennies pour dénoncer des phénomènes subversifs et chercher à légitimer leur vision d'une société hiérarchisée. En particulier, ils se sont appuyés sur des tropes romantiques aussi convaincants que les émotions fortes et la magnificence de la nature dans l'espoir de soutenir un ordre social fondé sur l'hégémonie des élites et la déférence de la base. Cela permet de mettre en lumière l'un des facteurs d'animation de la tradition tory, une force aux facettes multiples qui, pour le meilleur ou pour le pire, a joué un rôle important dans le façonnement de l'histoire de l'Ontario.*

One could broadly describe romanticism as a cultural flowering—as reflected, say, in the paintings of Turner, the symphonies of Schubert, and the novels of Hugo that manifested in Britain, Germany, France and elsewhere between the late-eighteenth and, at least, the mid-

nineteenth centuries.<sup>3</sup> A more precise definition is a tougher task largely due to romanticism's flexible and inherently contradictory nature: it can be hopeful and melancholy, individualistic and communitarian, sensual and chaste.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the argument has been made that “an al-

<sup>3</sup> Scholars agree that romanticism's emergence followed the Enlightenment. Though they differ as to when it ended, the prevailing view is that this happened, contra Hood, in the mid-nineteenth century, when romanticism was superseded by other traditions, such as realism. Jacques Barzun, *Classic, Romantic and Modern* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1961), 4; Cranston, *Romantic Movement*, 147.

<sup>4</sup> Day, *Romanticism*, 4-6; 181-82; Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 1.

most infinite diversity” stands as romanticism’s main characteristic.<sup>5</sup>

To make sense of such an unwieldy entity, this article draws on the work of Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre. Rather than portraying romanticism as an unambiguous essence, they argue that it should be seen as a worldview; that is, a comprehensive outlook deriving from human beings’ yearning for an understanding of the often-overwhelming circumstances amid which they find themselves, and from the corresponding need for an intellectual mechanism capable of making those circumstances comprehensible.<sup>6</sup> Central to this worldview, they argue, is a rejection of Enlightenment rationalism and the ethos of modernity to which it is bound. Neither of these phenomena are monolithic.<sup>7</sup> Still, the Enlightenment can be understood as a quest for knowledge originating in western Europe that exalted rational thought and challenged such supposedly specious sources of information as religious dogma. For its part, modernity, which arose in the same place around the turn of the sixteenth century and attained even more influ-

ence across several continents beginning in the nineteenth century, can be seen as a combination of tangible developments such as industrialization and an intangible cultural orientation celebrating the intoxicating idea of progress.<sup>8</sup>

For their proponents, the interlocking phenomena of Enlightenment rationalism and modernity are responsible for countless positive developments, including remarkable technological innovation and soaring living standards for people the world over.<sup>9</sup> Yet they are not without their detractors. From a romantic perspective their emphasis on rationalization and mechanization can seem sterile, emotionally unsatisfying. As an alternative, romantics have emphasized powerful emotions, the magnificence of nature, and spiritual transcendence, among much else. They have done so in hopes of precipitating what Löwy and Sayre evocatively describe as the “re-enchantment” of a world that, for romantics, has undergone a jarring process of demystification due to the impact of such decidedly unromantic developments as industrialization.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background, 1760-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 6.

<sup>6</sup> David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 5-10.

<sup>7</sup> On the Enlightenment see Dorina Outram, *The Enlightenment*, Fourth Ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); and Michael Eamon, “The Quebec Clerk Controversy: A Study in Sociability, the Public Sphere, and the Eighteenth-Century Spirit of Enlightenment,” *Canadian Historical Review* 90:4 (December 2009), 609-638. On modernity see Elizabeth Mancke, “Modernity,” in *Princeton Companion to Atlantic History*, edited by Joseph C. Miller (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 342; and C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Outram, *Enlightenment*, 2-3; Bayly, *Birth of the Modern World*, 9-12.

<sup>9</sup> Steven Pinker, *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress* (New York: Viking, 2018).

<sup>10</sup> Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 14-24. Romanticism and anti-modernism have much in common. On the latter, see Ian McKay, *Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and*

The romantic worldview bulked large in Upper Canada, where it influenced various facets of society. Politics was one of them. An exhaustive exploration of romanticism's impact on the Upper Canadian reformers falls outside the ambit of this essay. Still, it bears mentioning that that phenomenon struck a chord with them, attesting to the romantic worldview's malleability. Representatives of this group, including William Lyon Mackenzie, Robert Baldwin, and Lord Durham, embraced aspects of romanticism, particularly in their private lives. When it came to public affairs, these men invoked ideologies compatible with Enlightenment political thought—chiefly civic republicanism, an ancient outlook predicated on popular sovereignty and engagement in the affairs of one's community; and liberalism, a modern perspective premised on individual freedoms, legal equality, and private property.<sup>11</sup> This is unsurprising, as exponents of Enlightenment principles, including republicans such as Thomas Jefferson and liberals such as Germaine

de Staël, had long deployed these discourses in combatting what they deemed unjust bulwarks of privilege.<sup>12</sup> Yet the reliance of Upper Canadian reformers on aspects of an Enlightenment tradition that typically left romantics cold did not prevent them from drawing on romanticism when they opined on political matters, as will be seen.

Upper Canadian conservatives, who instinctually recoiled at the radical dimension of Enlightenment political thought, engaged with romanticism as well. For readers apt to see conservatism as synonymous with stodginess and rigidity, the resonance among conservatives of a cultural tradition renowned for exuberance and spontaneity may seem improbable, if not absurd. Nevertheless, they exhibited a romantic streak that contrasts sharply with the cliché of the impossibly fusty Tory, bespeaking colonial conservatism's intellectual depth.<sup>13</sup>

By "conservatives" I do not mean members of a particular political party.<sup>14</sup> Nor do I mean advocates of the ostensibly conservative ideology that has recently

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*Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994).

<sup>11</sup> Michel Ducharme, *The Idea of Liberty in Canada during the Age of Atlantic Revolutions, 1776-1838* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 3-5; 185-86; Ian McKay, "The Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History," *Canadian Historical Review* 81:4 (December 2000), 624-25. The rise of civic republicanism preceded the emergence of the Enlightenment by several centuries. Radical proponents of Enlightenment political thought nevertheless gravitated to the civic republican tradition in combatting what they regarded as tyranny.

<sup>12</sup> Outram, *The Enlightenment*, 139-56. Ironically, such figures often perpetuated systems of oppression, including slavery.

<sup>13</sup> On literature's contribution to the dissemination of Toryism in the Maritimes see Gwendolyn Davies, "Consolation to Distress: Loyalist Literary Activity in the Maritimes," *Acadiensis* 16:2 (Spring 1987), 51-68.

<sup>14</sup> Doing so would be anachronistic, since modern political parties did not crystallize in Canada until the post-Confederation era. Also, the terms "reformers" and "Tories" did not enter popular parlance in

dominated right-wing politics for, this outlook bears a closer resemblance to a species of classical liberalism than it does to conservatism, given its devotees' belief in the nigh-limitless potential of autonomous individuals and unfettered markets. Hence the "neoliberal" moniker by which it is known. Rather, by "conservatives" I mean advocates of a traditionalist outlook associated with "Red Toryism" in Canada, "One Nation" Toryism in the United Kingdom, and "paleo-conservatism" in the United States. Bound up with a pronounced anxiety vis-à-vis sudden societal change, this perspective is geared toward the preservation of what Roger Scruton called a hierarchal "social organism." Rejecting the liberal belief in "individual autonomy and the natural rights of man," conservatives of this stamp turn liberalism's conception of how the relationship between governor and governed ought to function on its head. Instead of conceiving of the state as necessary in order to protect people's innate right to life, liberty, and property per the teachings of John

Locke, conservatives after the fashion of Scruton believe that such prerogatives flow from "a long process of social evolution," the legacy of customs and institutions without which they could not exist. Thus, whatever liberty one enjoys does not precede the creation of civil authority; instead, it is a result of a "continuing, and pre-existing social order," an organic entity rooted in the past whose branches extend indefinitely into the future. The preservation of this order—which, paradoxically, requires occasional change so that it can adapt to fluctuating circumstances—is the conservative public official's cardinal responsibility.<sup>15</sup>

In recent decades scholars have explored various aspects of Upper Canadian conservatism, including several of the ideas that circulated in colonial Tories' consciousness and their involvement in the rough-and-tumble "street politics" of the early- and mid-nineteenth century.<sup>16</sup> However, while scholars have shed valuable light on the connections between romanticism and the harmful

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Upper Canada until the 1830s. Even so, "reformers" and "Tories" will be used in this essay in reference to developments occurring before the 1830s (as well as to developments taking place after that decade) as a means of distinguishing between groups situated, respectively, on the "left" and the "right" of the political spectrum. Carol Wilton, *Popular Politics and Political Culture in Upper Canada, 1800-1850* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 12.

<sup>15</sup> Roger Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism*, Revised Third Ed. (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2002), vii; 4-15. See also Katherine Fierlbeck, *Political Thought in Canada: An Intellectual History* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2006), 45-52. One scholar argues that traditionalist conservatism is highly compatible with environmental stewardship because of its opposition to the ecologically damaging "ideology of capitalist modernity." Katey Castellano, *The Ecology of British Romantic Conservatism, 1790-1837* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 1.

<sup>16</sup> On ideas see Jeffrey L. McNairn, "Publius of the North: Tory Republicanism and the American Constitution in Upper Canada," *Canadian Historical Review* 77:4 (December 1996), 504-537 and Denis McKim, "Upper Canadian Thermidor: The Family Compact & the Counter-revolutionary Atlantic," *Ontario History*, 106:2 (Fall 2014), 235-62. On street politics see Ian Radforth, "Political Demonstrations and Spectacles during the Rebellion Losses Controversy in Upper Canada," *Canadian Historical Review*

attitudes of influential conservatives toward Indigenous peoples, they have not, as yet, investigated its contributions to the political culture of Upper Canada's settler society;<sup>17</sup> in particular, they have neglected romanticism's importance to the ideology of the colony's Tories. This group prevailed in most of Upper Canada's thirteen general elections, garnered substantial support in bustling towns and embryonic outposts alike, and played a significant role in moulding the infrastructure, legal culture, banking apparatus, and education system of what became, in 1867, the province of Ontario.<sup>18</sup>

The argument has been made that, due to its inward-looking orientation, romanticism is inherently more compatible with the politics of the right than it is with those of the left. This is the case, the logic runs, because an introspective predisposition discourages the romantic from focusing on external developments, including left-wing campaigns designed to eradicate tyranny. This interpretation seems plausible, as Upper Canada's Tories, despite drawing on a range of lit-

erary influences, appear to have drawn on recognizably romantic content with greater frequency than their reform-oriented counterparts, possibly because of the latter's penchant for emphasizing Enlightenment-inspired ideas. In view of the subjective premise on which it rests, however, the notion that conservatism is intrinsically consonant with romanticism whereas expressions of the reformist tradition are not seems difficult, if not impossible, to prove. Moreover, the fact that reformers engaged with romanticism when it came to both their private lives and their public endeavours demonstrates that Tories did not have a monopoly on that worldview.<sup>19</sup>

What is unique, then, is not *that* Tories invoked romanticism but *how* Tories invoked romanticism. A close reading of published Upper Canadian books, pamphlets, literary magazines, and newspapers reveals that a particular conception of romanticism informed colonial conservatism. Many of these works were produced during the second quarter of the nineteenth century, a time of explosive growth

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92:1 (March 2011), 1-41; and Carol Wilton, "Lawless Law': Conservative Political Violence in Upper Canada, 1818-41," *Law and History Review* 13:1 (Spring 1995), 111-36.

<sup>17</sup> Theodore Binnema and Kevin Hutchings, "The Emigrant and the Noble Savage: Sir Francis Bond Head's Romantic Approach to Aboriginal Policy in Upper Canada, 1836-1838," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 39:1 (Winter 2005), 115-38; Kevin Hutchings, "Cultural Genocide and the First Nations of Upper Canada: Some Romantic-era Roots of Canada's Residential School System," *European Romantic Review* 27:3 (May 2016), 301-308.

<sup>18</sup> Robert E. Saunders, "What was the Family Compact?," *Ontario History* 49:4 (Autumn 1957), 169-78; J.K. Johnson, *Becoming Prominent: Regional Leadership in Upper Canada* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), 138-50; S.F. Wise, "Upper Canada and the Conservative Tradition," in *God's Peculiar Peoples*, edited by A.B. McKillop and Paul Romney (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1993), 170-72.

<sup>19</sup> On the interconnectedness of private and public spheres see Carmen Neilson, "A Much-Fathered Nation: Feminist Biography and Confederation Politics," *Canadian Historical Review* 98:2 (June 2017), 356-74.

in the colony's "public sphere" and vigorous political debate over polarizing issues, notably the Rebellion of 1837-38.<sup>20</sup> Influential Tories deployed aspects of romanticism in advocating their vision of a stratified society that rejected the destabilizing tenets of republicanism and liberalism. The fact that these figures came from both political and literary backgrounds reflects the cross-pollination that occurred in Upper Canada between the worlds of governance and letters.<sup>21</sup> In numerous instances during the early- and mid-nineteenth century they emphasized strong emotions and the sublimity of nature, albeit in differing ways, in seeking to legitimate a hierarchical order based on elite control and popular subservience.<sup>22</sup> The frequency and fervour with which these phenomena were invoked attests to the salience of the romantic worldview within the collective psyche, or *mentalité*, of Upper Canadian Toryism

## II

**A**ntecedents for the intermingling of romanticism and conservatism that

occurred in Upper Canada can be found in the British Isles. Edmund Burke, the Anglo-Irish parliamentarian and public intellectual, was instrumental to the refashioning of British conservatism after the collapse of Stuart absolutism and the decisive suppression of the Jacobite supporters in 1688 and 1746, respectively. Through speeches and writings—especially his rhetorical masterpiece, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790)—Burke contributed to the emergence of a reinvigorated conservatism that abjured absolutism and embraced Britain's "balanced constitution" as a way to perpetuate hierarchy and safeguard private property.<sup>23</sup> Burke was also a pathbreaking romantic.

In his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Burke rejected the neoclassical assumption that aesthetic judgements should be based on inflexible doctrines regarding symmetry and proportion. Instead, and congruent with what became one of romanticism's principal features, he argued that human intuition was a reliable means whereby

<sup>20</sup> Heather Murray, *Come, bright Improvement!: The Literary Societies of Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002); Jeffrey L. McNairn, *The Capacity to Judge: Public Opinion and Deliberative Democracy in Upper Canada, 1791-1854* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

<sup>21</sup> On literature's capacity for illuminating history see Andrew Cayton, "The Authority of the Imagination in an Age of Wonder," *Journal of the Early Republic* 33:1 (Spring 2013), 1-27.

<sup>22</sup> On emotions see Eric H. Reiter, *Wounded Feelings: Litigating Emotions in Quebec, 1870-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019); and Keith S. Grant, "Enthusiasm and Loyalty: Emotions, Religion, and Society in British North America" (PhD Diss., University of New Brunswick, 2017). On the interplay between nature and politics, broadly defined, see James Murton, *Creating a Modern Countryside: Liberalism and Land Resettlement in British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007); and Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990).

<sup>23</sup> H.T. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1977), 42-46.

such evaluations could be made. Superficially, Burke's views on this matter bore a resemblance to those of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a radical thinker (and fellow romantic) whose political attitudes differed markedly from the tenets of Burkean conservatism.<sup>24</sup> However, where Rousseau called for the elimination of that which, in his view, stifled humanity's intuitive faculties—authoritarian institutions, traditional values—Burke insisted that these things were, in fact, vital in order to foster cultural sophistication and a discerning sense of taste. The reason? They counteracted “[ignorance], inattention, prejudice, rashness, levity, [and] obstinacy”; that is, “all those vices which pervert the judgement in other matters.”<sup>25</sup>

Burke's aesthetic sensibility informed his politics. Witness his aversion to radical efforts to promote what the Rousseaus of the world saw as inalienable natural rights. Like other conservatives on both sides of the Atlantic divide, Burke balked at attempts by radicals to proclaim and codify imprescriptible freedoms. He did this not because he was averse to freedom as such, but because he felt that a comprehensive grasp of freedom was unattainable due to the innate shortcomings of human beings. The resultant mystery surrounding such matters, in Burke's view, rendered them

sublime. Burke associated sublimity with that which is “terrible... or operates in a manner analogous to terror,” since these things are “productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.” He added that, “when danger or pain pass [by] too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight,” and are “simply terrible.” But, if one avoids them by a safer distance, “they are delightful” because of the sense of relief one experiences on account of the harm that has been avoided.<sup>26</sup> At the heart of Burke's conception of the sublime lay the power of nature, epitomized “in the gloomy forest and in the howling wilderness in the form of the lion, the tiger, [or] the panther.”<sup>27</sup>

For Burke, the sublime aura associated with lofty issues such as freedom encouraged the masses to regard them with a deference-inducing sense of awe, precluding challenges to the status quo. Radical rights campaigns, however, presumptuously dispelled the mystery by which these concerns had been enveloped, shunting them from the realm of the sublime to the domain of the prosaic, where they were ripe for manipulation, and, inevitably, abuse. The evils of such developments were hard to overstate, for they imperilled time-honoured hierarchies—Burke saw inequality as inevitable, and dismissed egalitarianism as a “monstrous fiction”—sustained within

<sup>24</sup> On the aesthetic similarities and political differences between Rousseau and Burke see Cranston, *Romantic Movement*, 52-53.

<sup>25</sup> Paul Guyer, “Introduction,” in Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), xxviii.

<sup>26</sup> Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, 33-34.

<sup>27</sup> Cranston, *Romantic Movement*, 49-50.

a conservative culture by mutually reinforcing notions of *noblesse oblige* on the part of elites and deference among the masses. The sublime mystery surrounding the nature of freedom amounted to a prophylactic against insubordination.<sup>28</sup>

Where conservative political figures such as Burke engaged with romanticism, romantic literary figures such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge engaged with conservatism.<sup>29</sup> Although the romantic movement manifested across the western world, the following discussion on the interplay between romanticism and conservatism will focus on English-speaking figures in the British Isles, Upper Canada's cultural lodestone.<sup>30</sup> More precisely, it focuses on English-language literature, particularly poetry, even though romanticism informed various forms of artistic expression. Why? Because the romantic worldview's impact on Britain's poetry was arguably more profound than it was on

other cultural traditions in that nation, including novel-writing and painting which displayed a greater degree of stylistic eclecticism during romanticism's early nineteenth-century "golden age."<sup>31</sup>

Wordsworth's youthful infatuation with radicalism gave way to a conservative disposition in adulthood. This transition coincided with an authoritarian turn in British politics after the French Revolution and the corresponding outbreak, in 1793, of war between Britain and France.<sup>32</sup> In his youth, Wordsworth had embraced the early stages of the French Revolution, welcoming it as a vehicle for popular liberation. Yet this optimism turned to scepticism owing to the chaos and brutality wrought by the Jacobins. In his semi-autobiographical poem, *The Prelude* (1850), Wordsworth reflected on the trauma inflicted on his psyche by the "reign of terror":

Through months, through years, long after  
the last beat

<sup>28</sup> Richard Bourke, *Empire and Revolution: The Political Life of Edmund Burke* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 704-5; William F. Byrne, "Burke's Higher Romanticism: Politics and the Sublime," *Humanitas* 19:1/2 (2006), 27-33.

<sup>29</sup> The term "romantic" only became an accepted descriptor for Wordsworth, Coleridge, and several other writers with similar proclivities in the 1860s, after all of them had died. Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries*, 1; 138.

<sup>30</sup> The argument has been made that romanticism's impact on the United States, while by no means non-existent, was blunted by the influence exerted in that nation by libertarianism and, paradoxically, the rather different tenets of republican political theory. Duane E. Smith, "Romanticism in America: The Transcendentalists," *The Review of Politics* 35:3 (July 1973), 303-304; Cranston, *Romantic Movement*, 145. Still, Upper Canadians of a literary bent, including ones discussed in this article, were certainly aware of romantically inclined American writers such as James Fennimore Cooper. They were also aware of continental European romantics, such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. On romanticism's trans-jurisdictional resonance see Andrew Hemingway and Alan Wallach, eds., *Transatlantic Romanticism: British and American Art and Literature, 1790-1860* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015).

<sup>31</sup> Cranston, *The Romantic Movement*, 73-74.

<sup>32</sup> Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad & Dangerous People? England, 1783-1846* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 58-68; Carl Woodring, *Politics in English Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 19.

Of those atrocities, the hour of sleep  
 To me came rarely charged with natural gifts,  
 Such ghastly visions had I of despair  
 And tyranny, and implements of death;  
 And innocent victims sinking under fear....<sup>33</sup>

This disillusionment contributed to his adoption of conservatism. In *The Excursion* (1814), he expressed dismay at the crumbling of social order across Europe as a result of the revolution. As an alternative, Wordsworth called for the restoration of ancient notions of discipline and decorum:

The discipline of slavery is unknown  
 Amongst us, - hence the more do we require  
 The discipline of virtue; order else  
 Cannot subsist, nor confidence, nor peace.  
 Thus, duties arising out of good possessed,  
 And prudent caution needful to avert  
 Impending evil, do alike require  
 That permanent provision should be made  
 For the whole people to be taught and  
 trained.  
 So shall licentiousness and black resolve  
 Be rooted out, and virtuous habits take  
 Their place; and genuine piety descend,  
 Like an inheritance, from age to age.<sup>34</sup>

Coleridge's political trajectory was similar. A conservative—indeed, reactionary—orientation replaced the radical idealism of his youth, which had found

expression in support for the French Revolution's emancipatory potential. Religiosity was central to this shift. Where early modern British radicalism had traditionally been linked to Christian figures—for example, the dissenting writer Richard Price—by the late eighteenth century it was increasingly associated with the atheistic views enunciated in such inflammatory texts as Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason* (1794). A devout Christian, Coleridge found this trend troubling... so much so that it contributed to his disillusionment with a radicalism that was thought to be waging war on religious orthodoxy. As an alternative, he celebrated Britain's feudal past and the steadying influence of England's state church. Such factors, Coleridge came to believe, had nurtured in Britain a just, stable order, one that was vastly superior to new-fangled constitutional arrangements concocted by callow ideologues. A distillation of this perspective appears in his second *Lay Sermon* (1817), in which Coleridge declared that, "To the feudal system we owe the *forms*, to the Church [of England] the *substance* of our liberty."<sup>35</sup>

Not all British romantics embraced

<sup>33</sup> William Wordsworth, *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850: Authoritative Texts, Context and Reception, Recent Critical Essays*, edited by Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979), 379.

<sup>34</sup> William Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, edited by Sally Bushell, James A. Butler, and Michael C. Jaye (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 284-5.

<sup>35</sup> The romantic Robert Southey also gravitated toward conservatism as he aged. Together, he, Wordsworth, and Coleridge were known as the "Lake Poets" due to their associations with England's Lake District. Day, *Romanticism*; 132-54; John Morrow, "Romanticism and Political Thought in the Early Nineteenth Century" in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Political Thought*, edited by Gareth Stedman Jones and Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 39-60. See also Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *On the Constitution of the Church and the State* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1972).

conservatism. In the era of the French Revolution, William Blake, whose *Songs of Innocence* (1789) is one of the earliest works of English romantic poetry, called for the creation, in England, of a utopian “Jerusalem” in which hierarchies, including the sexual hierarchy subordinating women to men, would be shattered. In the early nineteenth century, Blake was joined by another “romantic of the left,” Percy Bysshe Shelley. Despite his aristocratic background, Shelley urged down-trodden Britons to topple the oppressive regime under which, as he saw it, they languished.<sup>36</sup>

What about Lord Byron? Image-wise, he was perhaps the quintessential romantic. In Maurice Cranston’s words, Byron “was handsome in a dark and brooding way, he was ... extravagant, outrageous and the lover of many... he was lame, a lord and a fighter.” Small wonder, then, that the term “Byronic” has become a virtual synonym for “romantic.” Counterintuitively, though, the argument has been made that Byron was not a romantic at all. This interpretation hinges on the notion that his acerbic style—which arguably had more in common with satirists such as Alexander Pope than it did with the Lake Poets, Blake, and Shelley—was incompatible with the sweetness and sensitivity that suffused much romantic literature.<sup>37</sup> Whether one sees him as a romantic or not, there can be lit-

tle doubt that Byron was committed to the liberation of oppressed peoples. So devoted was he to the elimination of tyranny that he participated, and died, in an early nineteenth-century war that aimed to liberate Greece from Turkish rule.<sup>38</sup>

Given the liberationist leanings of Blake, Shelley, and, if in fact he was a romantic, Byron, one could be forgiven for concluding that romanticism was at least as compatible with reform as it was with conservatism. (Of course, much romantic writing had nothing to do with politics, a fact that was as true in Upper Canada as it was in the British Isles.) Yet Aidan Day plausibly argued that romanticism was far more compatible with conservatism than it was with the radical tradition. Of central importance to this interpretation is the belief that, on account of its emotional tendency toward inwardness, the romantic outlook instinctively eschews vigorous activity in the public realm, including thoroughgoing attempts to create a more just society. In developing his contention, Day looks to Wordsworth. Specifically, he stresses the contrast between that poet’s youthful, externally-oriented enthusiasm for the rational principles that helped spark the French Revolution.—“Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,/ But to be young was very heaven! O times.../ When Reason seemed the most to assert her rights”—and his subsequent belief that

<sup>36</sup> Cranston, *Romantic Movement*, 63. See also “England in 1819” in Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Major Works*, edited by Zachary Leader and Michael O’Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 446.

<sup>37</sup> Cranston, *Romantic Movement*, 72-73. For example, Byron called Wordsworth, a rival, “Turds-worth.”

<sup>38</sup> Blanning, *Romantic Revolution*, 55-73.

true freedom could only be achieved through sustained introspection—"Oh, who is he that hath his whole life long/ Preserved, enlarged, this freedom in himself?—/ For this alone is genuine liberty." Romantic interiority, from this vantage point, is incompatible with the zeal for external transformation that epitomizes the reformist's mindset. Authors of romantic literary works who advocated radical change in the public domain were therefore exponents of a politics that comported not with the introverted spirit of romanticism, but instead with a "late Enlightenment" sensibility that quested to reconfigure society along egalitarian lines.<sup>39</sup>

### III

Whatever one makes of Day's argument, romanticism and conservatism proved highly compatible in Upper Canada. Yet romanticism was hardly anathema to the colony's reformers—far from it. The radical reformer William Lyon Mackenzie, for instance, was enamoured of Robert Burns, bard of Scottish romanticism. Tellingly, Burns' poems were excerpted in the pages of Mackenzie's *Colonial Advocate*, and Burns' tender depictions of the common folk of Scotland (e.g., "Cotter's Saturday Night")

may have contributed to Mackenzie's fondness for the "honest yeoman" of Upper Canada.<sup>40</sup>

Romanticism also influenced the moderate reformer Robert Baldwin. This may seem odd, since Baldwin's grey public persona comes across as the very antithesis of romantic dynamism and eccentricity. But in his private life he displayed deeply romantic tendencies, testament to his "almost obsessive interest in women and love" evidenced in the amorous poems he wrote in his youth. It can also be seen in the bizarre instructions he left to members of his family tasking them with making an incision in his abdomen after he had died that would resemble the caesarian-section scar on the corpse of his beloved wife, Eliza, who had perished nearly twenty years before during childbirth. So romantic was this figure that he has been described as Upper Canada's "real-life" answer to Heathcliff, the fictitious romantic antihero from Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*!<sup>41</sup>

The liberal colonial administrator Lord Durham cut a romantic figure, too. An aristocrat who suffered from crippling headaches and experienced tragedy in his private life—four of his children died prematurely—Durham, in his biographer's words, "carried himself with

<sup>39</sup> Day, *Romanticism*, 131-35; 175-82. See also Jon Mee, "Coleridge, Prophecy, and Popular Politics in the 1790s," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 60:1/2 (1997), 185.

<sup>40</sup> R.A. MacKay, "The Political Ideas of William Lyon Mackenzie," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 3:1 (February 1937), 6; Ian Duncan, "Edinburgh and Lowland Scotland," in *The Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature*, edited by James Chandler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 159-64.

<sup>41</sup> Michael S. Cross and Robert L. Fraser, "'The waste that lies before me': The Public and Private Worlds of Robert Baldwin," *Historical Papers* 18:1 (1983), 164-83; Heather Murray, "'And every Lawyer's Clerk writes Rhyme': Robert Baldwin as Poet, York, 1819-20," *Canadian Literature* 188 (Spring 2006), 63-84.

a fine dignity which could [transform] itself on occasion into a brooding cloud, an exquisite charm of manner, or a blaze of passionate enthusiasm or indignation.” To say that his manner accords with the archetypal image of the mercurial romantic would be an understatement.<sup>42</sup>

When it came to their contributions to Upper Canadian politics, reformers whose personal lives bore the imprint of romanticism relied on discourses—republicanism and liberalism—associated with an Enlightenment tradition whose emphasis on rational calculation ran counter to the raw emotions characteristic of the romantic worldview. On the eve of the rebellion, for example, Mackenzie issued a draft constitution that was plainly indebted to republicanism. The document’s emphasis on popular sovereignty is illustrative. It asserts that “all powers not delegated by the Constitution [to other branches of the government] remain with the people,” and acknowledges “the elected legislative branch as the seat of all power.”<sup>43</sup>

As for Baldwin, although he is usually associated with a modern liberal orientation that differs in significant ways from the “neo-Roman” thrust behind

civic republicanism, he invoked the latter ideology in critiquing the rise in Upper Canada of a market-based economy.<sup>44</sup> (That he did so demonstrates that one could draw on both viewpoints.) For Baldwin, the existence of a paternalistic landed gentry dedicated to the promotion of communal welfare—a key tenet of civic republicanism—could offset the malign influence of a laissez-faire system that threatened to dissolve social bonds that had drawn Upper Canadians together.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, Lord Durham availed himself of the principles of liberalism in his famous *Report on the Affairs of British North America* (1839). Consider his support in that text for the assimilation of French Canadians into British North America’s Anglo-Protestant majority. Where critics charge that this recommendation sprang from Francophobic “racism,” comparatively sympathetic observers maintain that it derived from a liberal desire to free Lower Canadians from the yoke of feudalism under which they had supposedly toiled since the seventeenth century, and grant them the same “rights and freedoms” as their English-speaking counterparts west of the Ottawa River.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Chester W. New, *Lord Durham: A Biography of John George Lambton, First Earl of Durham* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), 72. See also Bruce Curtis, “‘The Most Splendid Pageant Ever Seen’: Grandeur, the Domestic, and Condescension in Lord Durham’s Political Theatre,” *Canadian Historical Review* 89:1 (March 2008), 55–88.

<sup>43</sup> Ducharme, *Idea of Liberty*, 116. See also Benjamin T. Jones, *Republicanism and Responsible Government: The Shaping of Democracy in Australia and Canada* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014), 62–63.

<sup>44</sup> On the “neo-Roman” tradition see Quentin Skinner, *Liberty Before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1–57.

<sup>45</sup> Michael S. Cross, *A Biography of Robert Baldwin: The Morning-Star of Memory* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2012), 191–92.

<sup>46</sup> Janet Aizenstat, *The Political Thought of Lord Durham* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s

Significantly, however, reformers' enthusiasm for Enlightenment-inspired doctrines did not preclude deploying romanticism when they discussed politics. The writings of Alexander McLachlan, a Scottish-born poet who emigrated to Upper Canada in 1840, are indicative. Known as the "Burns of Canada" because of his palpable fondness for hardscrabble settlers, McLachlan criticized conservatives and championed reform-oriented entities in his thoroughly romantic works.<sup>47</sup> Accordingly, he denounced John A. Macdonald as "an old debauchee," and celebrated the iconic British liberal William Ewart Gladstone in the following way: "He treads the path the great have trod, / Retains, mid jeer and ban, / Faith in the Fatherhood of God, / And Brotherhood of man."<sup>48</sup>

Whether because of the introverted tendency identified by Day or not, romanticism resonated deeply with an Upper Canadian Tory constituency that, for decades, opposed reformist campaigns in favour of responsible government and the secularization of the Clergy Reserves, among other initiatives. Members of this group invoked romantic tropes—partic-

ularly unchecked emotion and sublime nature—time and again over the early and mid-nineteenth century, often within the same works. (This is not to suggest that romanticism was solely concerned with these phenomena; as mentioned, the romantic worldview was highly diverse and expressed itself in a multiplicity of ways.) In addition to reflecting their aesthetic inclinations, conservatives' poetic enlistment of strong feelings and breathtaking environmental circumstances performed a political function: it served, rhetorically, to justify elite authority and denigrate threats to the status quo. Aspects of the romantic worldview therefore buttressed the Tory ideal of a hierarchical society that would be impervious to the corrosive effects of liberalism and republicanism.

Powerful emotions were intrinsic to romanticism; indeed, one scholar has argued that the romantic tradition can be understood, fundamentally, as a "cult of feeling" that supplanted the Enlightenment's comparatively dispassionate "cult of reason."<sup>49</sup> This aspect of the romantic worldview featured prominently in literary works written by the conserva-

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University Press, 1988), x; 5-6. See also Fernand Ouellet, "John George Lambton, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Durham," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 7, <[http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/lambton\\_john\\_george\\_7E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/lambton_john_george_7E.html)>, accessed 28 July 2019.

<sup>47</sup> Mary Jane Edwards, "Alexander McLachlan," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 12, <[http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/mclachlan\\_alexander\\_12E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/mclachlan_alexander_12E.html)>, accessed 22 June 2020.

<sup>48</sup> Alexander McLachlan, *The Poetical Works of Alexander McLachlan...* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1900), 95-96; Edwards, "Alexander McLachlan." For other examples of reformers bringing a romantic sensibility to bear on colonial politics see James L. Hughes, *Sketches of The Sharon Temple and of its Founder, David Willson...* (Toronto: York Pioneer Historical Society, 1918?), 12-13; and Charles Durand, *Reminiscences of Charles Durand of Toronto...* (Toronto?: Hunter, Rose, 1897), 213-14.

<sup>49</sup> Blanning, *Romantic Revolution*, xvi. See also Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 41. Of course, Enlightenment-inspired thinkers were hardly uninterested in feelings, as Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) makes clear. It also bears mentioning that, notwithstanding

tive teacher, Anglican cleric, and Family Compact fixture John Strachan.<sup>50</sup> Notwithstanding his reputation for doctrinaire rigidity, Strachan was a prolific poet enamoured of romanticism. Most of his poems were written during the decade that followed his emigration, in 1799, from his native Scotland to Upper Canada. Among Strachan's eclectic literary influences were those titans of Scottish romanticism, Burns and Walter Scott. The emotionally unrestrained tenor of romanticism can be discerned in Strachan's "Ode," a poem written in 1803 that discusses the pangs of nostalgia experienced by Scots immigrants destined for North America as they approach their new home:

In silent joy at first we stand –  
The sailors think the harbour nigh –  
But seeing now th'expected land,  
Our spirits sink; we faintly cry:  
"Lo! yonder lies the gloomy coast.  
Alas for Caledonia lost!"<sup>51</sup>

Strachan saw literature as a means of furthering his political agenda, a tool for consolidating conservatism's influence. Accordingly, he weaponized verse in hopes of insulating Upper Canada and British sovereignty over it from what

he regarded as the insidious republicanism emanating from the United States.<sup>52</sup> Take, for example, his "Verses Addressed to Mr. Jackson," a sentiment-drenched poem written for a British diplomat stationed in the United States before the War of 1812. It likens the United States to ancient Corcyra, a one-time colony whose clash with its erstwhile imperial ruler, Corinth, helped precipitate the Peloponnesian War:

Behold Corcyra's hateful race  
Their parent Corinth spurn;  
To plunge their Sires in black distress  
Their rankling bosoms burn.  
Like them, Columbia's Statesmen gnaw  
Their British Sires with serpent jaw.  
The wish to cramp the Parent State  
Regardless of her glorious cause  
For justice, freedom, equal laws,  
As well's their own impending fate.

Elsewhere in the poem Strachan maligns citizens of the United States as "cursed children," and attributes their animosity toward Britain to "trembling [envy]" and "poisoned hearts."<sup>53</sup> Such remarks evidence Strachan's penchant for using powerful emotions—hate, envy—in denouncing a raucous American republic that, like other Tories, he reductively equated with "anarchy in Politics & infi-

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their anti-modern outbursts, romantics were indelibly shaped by the modern circumstances—commercial, technological—against which they railed. Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 13; Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 21.

<sup>50</sup> G.M. Craig, "John Strachan," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 9, <[http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/strachan\\_john\\_9E](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/strachan_john_9E)>, accessed 6 May 2021.

<sup>51</sup> Wanda Campbell, ed., "Poetry by John Strachan," *Canadian Poetry*, <<http://canadianpoetry.org/library/early-writing-in-canada/early-canadian-long-poems/strachan/>>, accessed 22 June 2020.

<sup>52</sup> Wise, "God's Peculiar Peoples," in *God's Peculiar Peoples*, 40-41.

<sup>53</sup> "Verses Addressed to Mr. Jackson" in Campbell, ed., "Poetry by John Strachan."

delity in Religion.”<sup>54</sup>

The Scottish-born poet George Gillespie took a similarly emotional tack. After celebrating northern North America’s “majestic mounts” and “bright constellations” in “Lines on Canada” he mournfully mentions the “tears” shed by Upper Canadian women who had lost sons and husbands to the “dire civil war” of the Rebellion. In another poem addressed to a compatriot Gillespie employs a Burns-like tone in blaming Mackenzie for the upheaval wrought by that conflict:

Rebellion’s blast here wildly blew,  
And caused stagnation, that is true,  
And in its net entangling, drew  
The reckless in;  
Rests on Mackenzie’s head I trow,  
A world o’ sin.

Gillespie proceeds to describe Mackenzie as an “ettercaup [*sic*], and pest,” laying bare his contempt for the radical firebrand.<sup>55</sup>

Susanna Moodie (née Strickland), too, employed emotionally charged language in denouncing subversive forces. Romanticism profoundly influenced this literary icon. In *Life in the Clearings* (1853), Moodie described herself as a “true daughter of romance,” and asserted

that “next to the love of God, the love of nature may be regarded as the purest and holiest feeling of the human breast.... [There] is no doubt,” she continued, “that those born and brought up among scenes of great natural sublimity... imbibe this feeling in a larger degree, and their minds are more easily imbued with the glorious colouring of romance.”<sup>56</sup> (The importance of nature to the Tory understanding of romanticism is discussed in greater depth below.) Her sister, Catharine Parr Traill, attested to Moodie’s romantic leanings. She noted that Moodie’s temperament, consistent with a volatile tendency often associated with romanticism, oscillated unpredictably between euphoria and depression. For good measure, she declared that Moodie’s mentality was “romantic, tinged with gloom and grandeur.”<sup>57</sup>

Although her political attitudes were neither monolithic nor static, Moodie expressed views that could justifiably be seen as conservative. This tendency was particularly pronounced in her writings on colonial society. In addition to criticizing what she saw as the insufficiently deferential behaviour in Upper Canada, of the “low-born Yankee” and “Yankee-fied British peasantry,” Moodie wrote

<sup>54</sup> Wanda Campbell, “Introduction,” in “Poetry by John Strachan.” Upper Canada’s Tories availed themselves of anti-Americanism and attempted to monopolize loyalty in seeking to impugn the British *bona fides* of their reform-oriented adversaries, especially after the War of 1812. David Mills, *The Idea of Loyalty in Upper Canada, 1784-1850* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1988).

<sup>55</sup> George Gillespie, *Miscellaneous Poems* (Toronto: G.W. Gillespie, 1843), 10; 57.

<sup>56</sup> Susanna Moodie, *Life in the Clearings* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1959; orig. 1853), 2-4. See also Moodie’s poem “Oh Can You Leave Your Native Land. A Canadian Song” in *Canadian Literary Magazine*, April 1833.

<sup>57</sup> Carl P. A. Ballstadt, “Susanna Strickland,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 11, <[http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/strickland\\_susanna\\_11E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/strickland_susanna_11E.html)> accessed 2 May 2018.

Susanna Moodie, *National Library of Canada*  
NL15557.



candidly about her belief in the inevitability and righteousness, of hierarchy.<sup>58</sup> She conceded that “all men, morally speaking, are equal in the eyes of their Maker.” But she hastened to add, à la Burke, that “some may be called by his providence to rule, and others to serve.... Some master spirit,” she elaborated, “will rule, and the masses will bow down to superior intellect, and the wealth and power which such minds never fail to acquire.”<sup>59</sup> While it is unclear quite why she felt this way, a viable explanation attributes these views to Moodie’s “respectable” metropolitan background. The status-conscious gentility of her upbringing in Suffolk, England, the argument runs, contributed to Moodie’s support for time-honoured customs and institutions, fuelling her suspicions regarding disruptive phenomena, notably the French Revolution and British Chartism. Consequently, she was apt to be “anti-democratic and to see the devil’s hand in republicanism.”<sup>60</sup>

Moodie’s romanticism accorded with her conservatism. Take, for example, the patriotic odes that she wrote in the era of the Rebellion. This event, Moodie explained, stoked her “British spirit.” “[As]

I could not aid in subduing the enemies of my beloved country with my arm,” she explained, sounding like a latter-day Elizabeth I, “I did what little I could to serve the good cause with my pen.”<sup>61</sup> Despite her self-effacing remarks, Moodie’s works helped launch her literary career, as they found favour with editors who subsequently published her poems in journals such as *The Literary Garland*.<sup>62</sup> They also helped her husband secure a job as Sheriff of Hastings County in the uprising’s aftermath. Colonial officials explicitly acknowledged that the appointment owed much to their gratitude to Mrs. Moodie’s poems, which they praised for arousing the patriotic ardour of the populace.<sup>63</sup> These circumstances furnish tangible evi-

<sup>58</sup> Susanna Moodie, *Roughing it in the Bush; or, Life in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1989; orig. 1852), 198.

<sup>59</sup> Moodie, *Life in the Clearings*, 278-79.

<sup>60</sup> Robert L. McDougall, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *Life in the Clearings*, xiii-xiv.

<sup>61</sup> Moodie, *Roughing it in the Bush*, 413.

<sup>62</sup> On colonial literary publications see Thomas Brewer Vincent, Sandra Alston, and Eli MacLaren, “Magazines in English,” in *History of the Book in Canada*, vol. I, edited by Patricia Lockhart Fleming and Yvan Lamonde (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 240-49.

<sup>63</sup> An example would be “An Oath of the Canadian Volunteers.” Moodie, *Roughing it in the Bush*, 414-15.

dence of Moodie's staunch defence of the Upper Canadian status quo amid a radical uprising, and of romantic literature's capacity for shaping public affairs.<sup>64</sup>

In "An Address to the Freemen of Canada," Moodie urged Upper Canadians of British birth and descent to combat the rebels, whom she denounced in an emotionally unrestrained idiom that was as unequivocal as it was scathing. Spurred by "an outpouring of enthusiasm" that she found "impossible to restrain," Moodie conveyed undisguised contempt for what she saw as the insurgents' unconscionable disloyalty:

What though your bones may never lie  
Beneath dear Albion's hallow'd sod,  
Spurn the base wretch who dare defy,  
In arms, his country and his God!  
Whose callous bosom cannot feel  
That he who acts a traitor's part,  
Remorselessly uplifts the steel  
To plunge it in a parent's heart.<sup>65</sup>

Moodie struck a similar chord in "On Reading the Proclamation Delivered by William Lyon Mackenzie, On Navy Island," a response to the republican constitution issued by the rebellion's leader. The following stanza encapsulates the exasperation she experienced as a result of what she saw as Mackenzie's ill-

judged adoption of the radical precepts that underpinned revolutionary uprisings across the Atlantic World:

Liberty! Freedom! — how our bosoms glow  
With honest indignation, when we hear  
Your sacred import basely misapplied,  
To sanction deeds of such a monstrous die.<sup>66</sup>

Another ode, "The Burning of the *Caroline*," amounted to a paean to the "gallant" conduct of Andrew Drew. This British naval officer and settler was largely responsible for the destruction of the *Caroline*, the American vessel that had supplied Mackenzie and his associates on Navy Island, the destination to which they had fled after the rebellion's farcical first phase. Blending enthusiasm for Drew's putative heroism with transparent disdain for republicanism, she wrote:

To thee, high-hearted Drew!  
And thy victorious band  
Of heroes tried and true  
A nation's thanks are due.  
Defender of an injured land!  
Well hast thou taught the dastard foe  
That British honour never yields  
To democratic influence, low,  
The glory of a thousand fields.<sup>67</sup>

The intense emotion conveyed in Moodie's works—which, as we have seen, excoriated those who challenged British

<sup>64</sup> Michael Peterman, *Sisters in Two Worlds: A Visual Biography of Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill* (n.p.: Doubleday, 2007), 91; Carl Ballstadt, "Secure in Conscious Worth: Susanna Moodie and the Rebellion of 1837," *Canadian Poetry* 18 (Spring/Summer 1986), 88-98; Charlotte Gray, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Lives of Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill* (Toronto: Viking, 1999), 145.

<sup>65</sup> Moodie, *Roughing it in the Bush*, 413-14. Similar sentiments regarding disloyalty are expressed by the anonymous authors of poems in the *Kingston Gazette*, 25 September 1810, n.p.; and *The Casket*, 16 June 1832, 116-17. See also John Breakenridge, *The Crusades and Other Poems* (Kingston, C.W.: J. Rowlands, 1846), 101-112.

<sup>66</sup> *Palladium of British America*, 17 January 1838.

<sup>67</sup> Moodie, *Roughing it in the Bush*, 425-28.

rule, and exalted those who defended it—is fundamental to the conception of romanticism that occupied such a prominent position in the Tories' collective consciousness.

An obscure figure today, John Hawkins Hagarty was probably the most widely read resident poet in Upper Canada during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Most of his works initially appeared in the Anglican publication *The Church*, often under the *nom de plume* "Zadig." However, his poems were reproduced in journals across the colony, with one of them—"Arise, arise"—appearing in at least nine publications within six months of its original appearance.<sup>68</sup> The extensive circulation of this poem attests to the vibrancy of Upper Canada's print culture, which was integral to the male-dominated public sphere of a colony that boasted numerous literary societies and one of the world's highest literacy rates.<sup>69</sup>

A romantic emphasis on affect permeates Hagarty's *oeuvre*. An example would be his "Dirge, On the Burial of the Soldiers Killed at Prescott," a commemorative poem written in honour of those individuals who died defending Upper Canada against invaders at the Battle of

the Windmill, a conflict that occurred toward the end of the Rebellion:

On with the burial, on!  
With music sad and deep –  
In the earth's green breast is a glorious rest,  
Where the soldiers' dust may sleep!<sup>70</sup>

Hagarty, who achieved distinction as a judge in the second half of the nineteenth century, was politically conservative, as the foregoing poem intimates.<sup>71</sup> For further evidence one need look only to his "Prayer for the Church of Upper Canada," which appeared in *The Church* in August of 1838. He denounced the United States during a period in which Canadian rebels who had sought refuge in that nation launched cross-border attacks in conjunction with American sympathizers. (The Battle of the Windmill was a consequence of one such assault.) A devout Anglican, Hagarty portrayed the United States as a hotbed of atheism and religious fanaticism. In doing so, he foregrounded negative emotions such as envy and, implicitly, excessive pride:

Be with us Lord! our foes are near,  
The envious of our church's weal,  
The atheist's cold unearthly sneer,  
The wild sectarian's rabid zeal.<sup>72</sup>

Such extreme, unsettling traits were

<sup>68</sup> Mary Lu MacDonald, "Three Early Canadian Poets," *Canadian Poetry*, <<http://canadianpoetry.org/volumes/vol17/macdonald.html>>, accessed 5 May 2021.

<sup>69</sup> Paul Rutherford, *A Victorian Authority: The Daily Press in Late Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 31; Murray, *Come, bright Improvement!*; McNairn, *Capacity to Judge*. Upper Canada's public sphere was also dominated, predictably, by white-skinned people.

<sup>70</sup> *The Church*, 15 December 1838, 101.

<sup>71</sup> Graham Parker, "Sir John Hawkins Hagarty," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 12, <[http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/hagarty\\_john\\_hawkins\\_12E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/hagarty_john_hawkins_12E.html)>, accessed 5 May 2021; MacDonald, "Three Early Canadian Poets."

<sup>72</sup> *The Church*, 25 August 1838, 37. See also A.J. Williamson, *Original Poems on Various Subjects...* (Toronto: W.J. Coates, 1836), 13-14.

inimical to the orderly, serene ethos that Hagarty and other conservative backers of the state-supported English Church took pains to cultivate in Upper Canada. And he emphasized a positive emotion—hopefulness—in articulating his conviction that a heavenly sovereign would assuredly protect Upper Canada’s loyal populace against irreligious republican assailants:

But while the godless scoffers mock,  
While open foes with hatred burn,  
Our hope is on th’ eternal rock—  
King, Father, God, to Thee we turn!<sup>73</sup>

Much like Strachan and Moodie, Hagarty looked to one aspect of the romantic worldview—powerful emotions, whether positive or negative—in advocating the perpetuation of Upper Canada’s conservative status quo.

Sublime nature was another component of the conservative conception of romanticism.<sup>74</sup> For centuries the idea of the sublime had been linked to phenomena that elicit overpowering reactions or, in Longinus’s words, “[throw] an audience into transport.” Largely as a result of Burke’s *Enquiry*, it also came to be associated with a “passion for terror and gloom” among writers and artists. Changing attitudes toward nature were integral to the evolving understanding of the sublime.

Beginning in the late eighteenth century, observers across the north Atlantic world increasingly reassessed irregular natural phenomena—mountains and valleys, waterfalls and thunderstorms—that had been viewed, in Patricia Jasen’s words, as “unpleasantly frightening, unattractive, or even demonic.” Contributing to the popularity of sites such as the Scottish Highlands and Niagara Falls as tourist destinations, this conceptual shift had much to do with cultural producers’ rejection of neoclassical aesthetics and their adoption, instead, of a Burkean enthusiasm for nature that seemed ineffably overwhelming, sublime.<sup>75</sup>

As with strong emotions, Upper Canadian-based Tories invoked the transcendent power and beauty of nature in hopes of entrenching elite dominance. The result was what could fairly be described as a “tory sublime.” Examples can be gleaned from the remarks of Francis Bond Head, Upper Canada’s lieutenant governor from 1836-1838. During his time in the colony, Head displayed a conservative political outlook on numerous occasions. For example, he denounced Upper Canada’s reformers, many of whom were unimpeachably loyal, as “republicans” for advocating responsible government; he dispensed with the

<sup>73</sup> *The Church*, 25 August 1838, 37

<sup>74</sup> To be sure, reform-oriented writers celebrated natural sublimity. But they seem to have refrained from mentioning politics when doing so. See, for example, David Wylie, *Recollections of a Convict and Miscellaneous Pieces* (Montreal: R. & C. Chalmers, 1847), 158-59.

<sup>75</sup> Patricia Jasen, *Wild Things: Nature, Culture, and Tourism in Ontario, 1790-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 8-9. See also Neil S. Forkey, *Canadians and the Natural Environment to the Twenty-First Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 68-69. Not all accounts of sublime Upper Canadian nature were politically charged. For an apolitical example see, *Canadian Literary Magazine*, April 1833, 24-31.

official impartiality of his predecessors by publicly endorsing toryism amid the heated election of 1836; and he dismissed respected individuals from public office simply because they expressed sympathy for the reformers' cause.<sup>76</sup>

Head was also a romantic. Prior to his administrative tenure in Upper Canada, he attained modest success in Britain as a writer whose narrative flair and penchant for celebrating nature bespoke a romantic disposition. Testifying to the compelling character of the romanticism conveyed in Head's works, Coleridge himself praised "the Anglo-gentlemanly, sensible, and kindly mind [that broke] forth everywhere" in his pages.<sup>77</sup>

Head's romanticism dovetailed with his conservatism, as he utilized sublime nature in attempting to legitimate conservative authority and promote popular deference. His remarks on the part played by religion in restraining what he saw as the dangerous, ill-founded sense of autonomy entertained by immigrants to British North America are illustrative. "For a short time after their arrival," he wrote, these newcomers unwisely persuade themselves that "there is something very fine in... having apparently got rid of all the musty materials of 'Church and State.'" Sloughing off religious principle and duty, they rejoice "in the novel luxury of being able to dress as they like, do as they like, go where they

like." However, "judgement," the immigrant's "best friend," soon reveals "that... 'liberty and equality,' like other resplendent substances," are not altogether unalloyed. In unmistakably Burkean terms, Head invoked the transcendent power of Upper Canada's environment in seeking to demonstrate that the immigrant was not, in fact, self-sufficient: "the thunder of heaven... the intense cold, the magnificent colouring of the sky... [have] imparted to him... that there is something very fearful as well as fallacious in the idea of any human being... being 'independent.'" Such circumstances laid bare for immigrants their powerlessness in the face of nature and, by extension, the omnipotence of God. A supporter of the Church of England, Head felt that they prompted immigrants, prudently, to re-engage with religion. (That Head preferred the orderly Christianity of Anglicanism to the disruptive evangelicalism espoused by Upper Canada's radical dissenters went without saying.) From his perspective, the untamed environment equipped immigrants with a salutary reminder of their subordination to a force greater than themselves, an outlook that meshes with the Burkean belief in the necessity of ordinary people deferring to sublime hierarchies.<sup>78</sup>

Head also deployed environmental imagery for political purposes in 1836 during a clash between himself and

<sup>76</sup> S.F. Wise, "Sir Francis Bond Head," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 10, <[http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/head\\_francis\\_bond\\_10E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/head_francis_bond_10E.html)>, accessed 9 May 2018; S.F. Wise, "Introduction," in Sir Francis Bond Head, *A Narrative*, edited by S.F. Wise (Toronto: McLelland & Stewart, 1969), xi-xxxi.

<sup>77</sup> Binnema and Hutchings, "The Emigrant and the Noble Savage," 116.

<sup>78</sup> Francis Bond Head, *The Emigrant* (London: John Murray, 1846), 39-40.

members of Upper Canada's legislative assembly. The catalyst for this confrontation was his unwillingness to consult with members of the colony's executive council on "all matters" relevant to colonial governance. Although his position was legally sound—the Constitutional Act did not require the lieutenant governor to solicit the councillors' views so frequently—Head's perceived haughtiness prompted all six members of the council to resign. Members of the assembly, who were at least as indignant as their counterparts in the executive council, responded to Head's behaviour by voting to "stop supply"; that is, to deprive his government of revenues on which it depended, but which the assembly had the right to withhold.<sup>79</sup>

In his "Reply to the Electors of the City of Toronto," Head drew on nature in lamenting his acrimonious relationship with these legislators. "In the flourishing Continent of North America," he wrote, "the province of Upper Canada now stands like a healthy young tree that has been girdled, its drooping branches mournfully betraying that its natural nourishment has been deliberately cut off." The assembly's decision to stop supply, in other words, threatened the colony's very survival. These circumstances, Head wrote, elicited "deep feelings of melancholy."<sup>80</sup> The dying organism conjured in his remarks differed markedly from the thriving trees found in Upper

Canada's majestic—indeed, sublime—forests. The tree's plight can thus be seen as an allegory for what he felt was the negative impact that the insubordinate legislators' actions had on the colonial community over which he ruled.

Head waxed lyrical vis-à-vis nature yet again in reflecting on the dramatic circumstances surrounding the Rebellion's outbreak. He recalled that, after having been awakened "at midnight on the 4th December [1837]" and informed that a "large body of rebels" were descending on Toronto, he made his way along King Street to a makeshift base. As he did so, "the stars were shining bright as diamonds in the black canopy over my head," while "the air was intensely cold, and the snow-covered planks which formed the footpath of the city creaked as I trod upon them." Meanwhile, "the principal bell of the town was... in an agony of fear, and her shrill, irregular... voice strangely [broke] the serene silence of night," crying out "*Murder! Murder! Murder! and much worse!!*"<sup>81</sup> For Head, ensuing developments—whereby rebels were dispersed and their base, Montgomery's Tavern, was destroyed—were as reassuring as the preceding ones were upsetting. No sooner had government supporters begun their assault on the aforementioned structure than the rebels within it began "exuding from the door like bees from the little hole of their hive, and then in search of the honey of safety

<sup>79</sup> Wise, "Sir Francis Bond Head."

<sup>80</sup> Francis Bond Head, *The Speeches, messages, and replies of His Excellency Sir Francis Bond Head....* (Toronto: H. Rowsell, 1836), 54.

<sup>81</sup> Head, *Emigrant*, 168-70.

flying in all directions into the deep welcome recess of the forest.” The tavern then found itself engulfed in “a mass of flames, whose long red tongues... flared high above the roof.” For Head, the incineration of the rebels’ lair elicited “joy,” not least because it luridly demonstrated that the “yeomen and farmers of Upper Canada had triumphed over their perfidious enemy, ‘responsible government.’”<sup>82</sup>

A romantic conception of nature was similarly central to the conservatism of John Beverley Robinson. That this lawyer, MLA, and judge who served as one of the pillars of the Family Compact viewed the natural world through a romantic lens can be seen in lines of verse that he wrote in 1816 amid a “poetical fit” experienced during a sojourn in England. They were elicited by, and written for, Emma Walker, the young woman whom Robinson eventually married. (Amorous love and the romantic worldview are eminently compatible.) Regarding the environs of Lake Windermere, one of the bodies of water to which the term Lake Poets refers, Robinson declared:

Where hills and dales and meads are seen,  
Like Albion’s in eternal green,  
Say—do’st though ever rise to cheer  
A brighter scene than Windermere?<sup>83</sup>

Further evidence of Robinson’s romantic view of nature can be seen in an address that he gave decades later to the

Canadian Institute, an organization dedicated to promoting scientific endeavour. The chronological gap between these statements brings into focus romanticism’s abiding influence on Robinson’s psyche. Ignoring Indigenous peoples and their sophisticated, sustainable interactions with nature both before and after the onset of settler colonialism, the address focused on what Robinson saw as the transcendent power of the Upper Canadian “wilderness.” “For its inaptitude for cultivation,” he observed, the colony’s remote regions are “likely to continue in [their] primitive state” indefinitely. Rather than lamenting these territories’ apparently limited potential for economic development, though, Robinson enthused that they displayed “to the lover of nature, and to the inquirer into her works, her romantic woods, rocks and rivers... mosses, insects, and all her wonders, animate and inanimate in their aboriginal state, undisturbed and unaffected by the operations of man.”<sup>84</sup> Robinson added that, “in future times,” owing to the inevitable growth of “civilized life” in Canada’s cities, “it will be... a great charm of this country that nature, on so vast a scale, can be seen in all her majesty and freshness” in hinterland settings.<sup>85</sup>

As with Head, Robinson’s romantic view of Upper Canada’s environment buttressed his conservatism. According

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 178–85.

<sup>83</sup> Patrick Brode, *Sir John Beverley Robinson: Bone and Sinew of the Compact* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 35–36.

<sup>84</sup> A.A. den Otter, *Civilizing the Wilderness: Culture and Nature in Pre-Confederation Canada and Rupert’s Land* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2012), xviii.

<sup>85</sup> John Beverley Robinson, *Canadian Institute, established 1849....* (Toronto: Thompson, 1854), 11.

to Robinson's biographer, "he shared the social and political prejudices of the eighteenth century [Robinson was born in 1791]. The... gentle-born, had a natural right to govern; the lesser-born... had a duty to obey."<sup>86</sup> Sublime natural circumstances, particularly the cultivable regions of Upper Canada, were of paramount importance to Robinson's vision of a graded society in which "the landed gentry ruled the common yeomen." Central to his conservative ideology, Robinson's romantic understanding of Upper Canada's natural environment found vivid expression in his pamphlet *Canada, and the Canada Bill* (1840). In it, Robinson described Upper Canada as a veritable Eden: "[it is] a country of large extent, with a soil unsurpassed in fertility, a climate that admits of the cultivation of the finest wheat... with the advantage of navigable waters running through it, and around it, in a manner that cannot be seen without admiring so beautiful an arrangement of nature." Elsewhere in the document he observes that "the chain of lakes and rivers, from Lake Superior downwards, composes the noblest inland channel of fresh waters on the globe"; refers to the "majestic course" of the St. Lawrence and the "noble river Ottawa"; and describes Upper Canada, overall, as a "magnificent territory."<sup>87</sup> Rejecting both

the egalitarianism of Upper Canada's rural radicals and the social fluidity tacitly endorsed by the colony's fledgling urban bourgeoisie, Robinson championed a static, stratified agrarian economy led by the purportedly disinterested gentlemen who comprised the elite—himself and other members of the Family Compact, who fancied themselves a "gentry."<sup>88</sup> Central to this vision, which contrasted sharply with the Enlightenment-inspired view of progress propounded by the colony's reformers, was a natural world whose characteristics Robinson saw in palpably romantic terms.<sup>89</sup>

Strachan, who had been Robinson's teacher, fused a romantic view of nature with a conservative conception of politics in "Verses Written August 1802...." The poem lavishes praise on Britain for facilitating the tranquility and prosperity enjoyed by loyal Upper Canadians: "To her we owe that peace delights our plains,/ That joyous plenty through the hamlet reigns." Under Britain's benevolent auspices, settlers transformed "dismal wilds" into a thriving agrarian society in which, alongside other salubrious circumstances, "gentle Spring assumes her annual toil/ And balmy roses in gardens smile." Strachan's description of the overpowering gratitude experienced by loyal colonists who found themselves and their

<sup>86</sup> Brode, *Sir John Beverley Robinson*, 68. See also Terry Cook, "John Beverley Robinson and the Conservative Blueprint for the Upper Canadian Community," *Ontario History* 64:2 (June 1972), 79-94.

<sup>87</sup> John Beverley Robinson, *Canada, and the Canada Bill....* (London: J. Hatchard, 1840), 20-22.

<sup>88</sup> McKim, "Upper Canadian Thermidor," 258.

<sup>89</sup> Robert Lochiel Fraser, "Like Eden in Her Summer Dress: Gentry, Economy, and Society: Upper Canada, 1812-1840" (PhD Diss., University of Toronto, 1979). On progress see Daniel Samson, *The Spirit of Industry and Improvement: Liberal Government and Rural-Industrial Society, Nova Scotia, 1790-1862* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008).

environment flourishing under British rule can be seen as the first example in a Canadian long poem of what D.M.R. Bentley calls a “pioneer sublime”:

That swains returning as the day declines  
Exult o’er prostrate oaks and burning pines,  
A pleasure greater than the conqu’ror knows,  
Whose doubtful triumph cost ten thousand  
woes.<sup>90</sup>

Tellingly, the settlers’ “pleasure” is beyond the comprehension of the putative winners of the Revolutionary War. By no means confined to Strachan’s imagination, “Verses” was recited by two of Strachan’s students as part of an examination. This requirement testifies to Strachan’s determination to inculcate Tory principles in the minds of pupils who eventually comprised Upper Canada’s ruling elite.<sup>91</sup>

William Kirby’s writings furnish further proof of the intermingling of a romantic attitude toward nature and political conservatism in “old Ontario.” His romantic bent can be discerned in *The U.E.: A Tale of Upper Canada* (1859), a long poem influenced by Scott’s “Waverley” novels that reaches its crescendo during the Rebellion with a struggle between villainous insurgents and he-

roic loyalists.<sup>92</sup> Kirby’s description in that work of the dramatic changes wrought by autumn’s arrival bespeaks the romantic sensibility that informed his writing:

The changing forests in a gorgeous blaze,  
Of glory, end their transient summer days.  
The flush of fading verdure, like the streak  
Of beauty on consumption’s dying cheek....<sup>93</sup>

Kirby emigrated from Yorkshire to North America in 1832, the year in which the Great Reform Act was introduced in Great Britain, broadening that nation’s franchise. One observer drolly noted that this was but the first of many instances of Kirby fleeing democratization! After initially settling in Ohio, Kirby was drawn to Upper Canada in the late 1830s by an irresistible urge to live “under the true flag of Freedom, Justice and Christian Civilization,” and an equally compelling desire “to aid in the defence of the Provinces” in the era of the Rebellions. Thereafter, he served as a steadfast “spokesman, interpreter, and bulwark of the Tory and Loyalist idea,” a role that was borne out in denunciations of “laissez-faire liberalism” and “American democracy.”<sup>94</sup>

Many of Kirby’s depictions of Upper Canada’s environment focus on cheerful

<sup>90</sup> D.M.R. Bentley, *Mimic Fires: Accounts of Early Long Poems on Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994), 75.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-70.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>93</sup> William Kirby, *The U.E.: A Tale of Upper Canada* (Niagara, C.W., 1859), 87.

<sup>94</sup> Bentley, *Mimic Fires*, 225-28; Mary Jane Edwards, ed., *The Evolution of Canadian Literature in English: Beginnings to 1867* (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), 206-219. See also Robert David Stacey, “Romance, Pastoral Romance, and the Nation in History: William Kirby’s *The Golden Dog* and Phillipe-Joseph Aubert de Gaspé’s *Les Anciens Canadiens*,” in *ReCalling Early Canada: Reading the Political in Literary and Cultural Production*, edited by Jennifer Blair, et al. (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2005), 92-98.

natural phenomena that connote wholesomeness and tranquility, such as fruitful fields. They can therefore be seen as expressions of a soothing pastoralism.<sup>95</sup> However, sections of *The U.E.*—a poem dedicated to John Beverley Robinson, “the one-time poet laureate of John Strachan’s Grammar School at Cornwall”—emphasize ominous, turbulent features of nature that could plausibly be seen as sublime. An example would be Kirby’s account of the reaction of Ranger John, a stalwart loyalist and veteran of the Revolutionary War, to the Rebellion’s outbreak after perceiving signs of violence:

Upon Toronto’s heights a fiery star  
Glares on th’ horizon like the eye of war,  
And through the startled land with bloody  
glow  
Proclaims the gathering of the rebel foe.  
He spake, and o’er the lines with rapid flight,  
A rocket rose, and vanished from the sight;  
Like many a brilliant hope that mounts the  
skies  
And in its fancied heaven fades and dies.

Subsequently, Ranger John cries aloud, and condemns the rebels’ cause: “So rise they up, and sink, in night’s dark womb,/ Our country’s curses heaped upon their tomb.”<sup>96</sup> Elsewhere in the poem, Upper Canada’s loyal defenders, in seeking to foil radical invaders, traverse the hallowed ground of Lundy’s Lane, a site where, during the War of 1812, “thirsty sands once drank the reeking gore/ Of dense battalions from Colum-

bia’s shore.”<sup>97</sup> In addition to recalling a previous instance of resistance to cross-border incursions, Kirby’s use of grisly imagery serves to underscore the significance of what he saw, in Manichean terms, as an epic struggle between good and evil.

A synthesis of natural sublimity and conservatism can also be discerned in Hagarty’s poem “The Awakening of Conservatism.” Exemplifying the Tory sublime, this prescient ode was written on the eve of the British general election of 1841, a contest that resulted in conservatives led by Robert Peel toppling the governing Whigs led by Lord Melbourne. Attesting to the impact of developments occurring elsewhere in the Atlantic World on Upper Canadian actors, Hagarty invoked extraordinary, affecting aspects of nature—lightning bolts, ominous clouds—in breathlessly anticipating the Tories’ victory over their Whig adversaries. Wrote Hagarty:

There are lightnings thro’ the darkness—the  
brooding clouds  
Dissever,  
Swift vanishing from heaven’s blue vault, as if  
they fled for  
Ever—  
High o’er the mountains rosy peaks rich  
floods of light float on—  
’Tis sunrise on the gladden’d earth! The long  
dark night is gone!<sup>98</sup>

The poem throws into relief the penchant of Upper Canadian conservatives

<sup>95</sup> For example, Kirby, *U.E.*, 87.

<sup>96</sup> Kirby, *U.E.*, 134.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>98</sup> *The Church*, 10 July 1841, n.p.



*John Richardson*

for emphasizing staples of romantic literature—in this case, sublime environmental phenomena—while deploring reform-oriented entities.

The sublimity of Upper Canadian nature occupies an equally prominent position in James K. Liston's unapologetically elitist, stridently anti-republican long poem *Niagara Falls* (1843). In addition to rhapsodizing about the "beauties" and "awful grandeur" of "God's works sublime," Liston denounces both the United States and post-revolutionary France. In so doing, he scorns "that foul

monster... liberty republican" for persuading "men illiterate... to think/ That they were born to rule, and not to obey."<sup>99</sup> Liston highlights the status of the falls, a "Monument to Divine Power," as the majestic "boundary-line" that draws both a geographic and a political distinction between "the loyal colonies of Britain's crown" and the contemptible republic to the south.<sup>100</sup> Gavin Russell, a poet who served in the Grenville Militia during the Rebellion, also invoked the awesome power of Niagara Falls in contrasting what he saw as the nobility of Britain with the perfidy of the United States, which he condemned as a "nation of traitors." In a transparently political ode, Russell heaps praise on the military forces that "wrap the *Caroline* in flame and smoke"

And sent her hissing past the Table Rock;—  
Down, down she goes, by bellowing torrents  
driven,

That bellow on, regardless of the shock  
Which thus to hell-born sympathy was given,  
And stamp'd the power of British arms in  
heaven.<sup>101</sup>

John Richardson was another romantically inclined writer who synthesized sublime nature and conservatism.

<sup>99</sup> J.K. Liston, *Niagara Falls: A Poem, In Three Cantos* (Toronto: J.H. Lawrence, 1843), 12-19.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 25; C. Mazoff, *Anxious Allegiances: Legitimizing Identity in the Early Canadian Long Poem* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 86.

<sup>101</sup> Gavin Russell, *Thoughts and Sentiments Connected with the Invasion of Upper Canada, By a Band of Lawless and Unprincipled Men from the United States in November 1838: A Poem* (Montreal: Campbell and Beckett, 1839), 8-10; 15. See also Macdonald, *Literature and Society in the Canadas*, 170.

Richardson's romanticism is apparent in *Wacousta* (1832), a work of historical fiction reminiscent of James Fenimore Cooper's "Leatherstocking Tales" that became one of the first successful novels written by a Canadian author.<sup>102</sup> The protagonist is Reginald Morton, a brooding English aristocrat who, in the mid-eighteenth century, travels to North America in hopes of exacting revenge on Charles de Haldimar, an ex-friend and soldier stationed in colonial America to whom Morton lost his one-time fiancée. Morton, in seeking to punish his rival, assumes an Indigenous identity, becoming Wacousta. And he assists the Odawa chief Pontiac in his campaign to seize Detroit, a British-held fort his nemesis was tasked with defending. The novel is renowned for its vivid depiction of nature, evidence of which lies in Richardson's description of "[the] beautiful autumns of Canada, when the golden light of Heaven seems as if transmitted through a veil of tissue."<sup>103</sup>

This vividness may, at least in part, be the result of Richardson's Indigenous background: he was the grandson of an Odawa woman, and his mixed-race mother had experienced the assault on Detroit at first hand. Richardson may therefore have had a particularly inti-

mate connection to the regions about which he wrote. *Wacousta's* claim to being a work of romanticism is strong, as it is thought to evoke a "melancholy grandeur." This characteristic is on display in the following description of the haunting circumstances that preceded the capture of Detroit:

the utmost stillness reigned both within and around the fort; and, but for the howling of some Indian wolf-dog in the distance, or the low and monotonous beat of their drums in the death-dance, there was nought that gave evidence of the existence of the dreadful enemy by whom they [the British forces] were beset.<sup>104</sup>

(Clearly, Richardson's background did not prevent him from perpetuating stereotypes, perhaps because of internalized racism.) Additionally, *Wacousta's* roguish protagonist has been likened to figures from romantic poems revolving around the theme of betrayal.<sup>105</sup>

Examples of Richardson's conservatism abound. After fighting in the War of 1812, he served in the British military, participating in the first Carlist War in Spain. His public criticisms of the Whig government's handling of that conflict ingratiated Richardson to British Tories. Thus, he was hired by the conservative *Times* of London to return to the land of

<sup>102</sup> Carole Gerson, *A Purer Taste: The Writing and Reading of Fiction in English in Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 81-82.

<sup>103</sup> John Richardson, *Wacousta* (Ottawa: Tecumseh Press, 1998), 102.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 314.

<sup>105</sup> Cecilia Morgan, "Remembering 1812 in the 1840s: John Richardson and the Writing of the War," *London Journal of Canadian Studies* 29 (2019), 27-46; David R. Beasley, "John Richardson," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 8, <[http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/richardson\\_john\\_1796\\_1852\\_8E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/richardson_john_1796_1852_8E.html)>, accessed 9 May 2018; Dennis Duffy, *Gardens, Covenants, Exiles: Loyalism in the Literature of Upper Canada/Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 45-51.

his birth (Richardson was probably born in Queenston), from whence he was to report on the Rebellions. His subsequent literary career reveals an unflagging dedication to the Tory cause. For evidence one need look only to his *Eight Years in Canada* (1847), a non-fiction account of Canadian politics in the late 1830s and 1840s. In that text, Richardson denounces Lord Sydenham, who, as governor general in the early 1840s, integrated reformers into the executive council in an attempt to mitigate partisan tensions. For Richardson, this act was tantamount to a “great, and manifest, and irreparable evil,” since it circumscribed the power of conservatives “whose devotion to the Monarchy had saved the country” in 1837-38.<sup>106</sup>

Richardson’s fictional works yield additional evidence of Upper Canadian Tories invoking sublime nature for political purposes. As Dennis Duffy explained, the violence and chaos that feature prominently in Richardson’s *oeuvre* can be seen as the antithesis “of a social order that stresses civility, decorum and deference.” The “horror” that runs like a red thread through works such as *Wacousta* therefore amounts to a metaphorical endorsement of the orderly, hierarchical arrangement that conservatives, including Richardson, steadfastly defended in Upper Canada.<sup>107</sup> Awe-inspiring nature lies at the heart of his depiction of a horrific

North American environment that contrasts starkly with the social vision advocated by Upper Canada’s Tories. Thus, in *Wacousta*, Richardson highlights the “howling hurricane of summer, and the paralysing and unfathomable snows of winter.” Indicative of the “sublimity [of] the stupendous Americas,” such characteristics implicitly represented the destabilizing forces, including republicanism and liberalism, that Upper Canadian Tories worked strenuously to thwart.<sup>108</sup>

Striking natural phenomena also feature prominently in Richardson’s *Tecumseh, or, The Warrior of the West* (1828), an epic poem that lauds the eponymous Indigenous leader and British ally for his role in combatting American invaders during the War of 1812. The poem concludes with the following vignette concerning the mutilation of Tecumseh’s remains after his death, in 1813, at Moraviantown:

Forth from the copse a hundred foemen spring,  
And pounce like vultures on the bleeding clay  
Like famish’d blood-hounds to the corse they  
cling.

The very covering from his nerves they wring....

Predatory vultures, blood-soaked earth, and ravenous dogs: Richardson invokes such unsettling natural imagery to illustrate the treachery and cruelty of the American “hell-fiends” who slaughtered Tecumseh and endeavoured to seize Upper Canada.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>106</sup> John Richardson, *Eight Years in Canada...* (Montreal: H.H. Cunningham, 1847), 188-91.

<sup>107</sup> Duffy, *Gardens, Covenants, Exiles*, 37-54. See also MacDonald, *Literature and Society in the Canadas*, 197.

<sup>108</sup> Richardson, *Wacousta*, 102.

<sup>109</sup> John Richardson, *Tecumseh, or, The Warrior of the West...* (London: R. Glynn, 1828), 106. See also

## IV

In 1966, Gad Horowitz articulated a powerful argument regarding Canada's political culture that emphasized the utter centrality of conservatism to the country's development.<sup>110</sup> Beginning in the late 1980s, scholars of early Canada incisively challenged this interpretation in ever-expanding numbers, surely making Horowitz's essay one of the "best hated" works ever written on Canadian politics. Although their perspectives are far from homogeneous, these scholars have brought to the fore stimulating approaches that de-centre the Tory tradition and highlight the ideological heterogeneity of the pre-Confederation period.<sup>111</sup> While their works have enriched the study of Canada's politics, they have consigned Toryism, however inadvertently, to the historiographical fringe. It is unfortunate that this has hap-

pened. After all, while they may not have been as determinative as Horowitz argued, conservative forces, for good or ill, have inarguably played an important role in this country's evolution.<sup>112</sup> If we are to rectify this scholarly imbalance, we must attempt to understand the factors that have animated Canadian conservatism.

The romantic worldview, as this article has shown, was one of them. Throughout the early and mid-nineteenth century, influential Upper Canadian conservatives from the worlds of politics and literature engaged with compelling romantic tropes, particularly unbridled emotions, and the sublimity of nature, as a means of denouncing threats to the status quo and defending their vision of a society defined by elite hegemony and rank-and-file subservience. That this was so attests to the salience of romanticism within Ontario's Tory tradition.

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Robin Jarvis Brownlie, "The Co-optation of Tecumseh: The War of 1812 and Racial Discourse in Upper Canada," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 23:1 (2012), 39-63.

<sup>110</sup> Gad Horowitz, "Conservatism, Liberalism, and Socialism in Canada: An Interpretation," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 32:2 (May 1966), 143-71.

<sup>111</sup> Jane Errington, *The Lion, the Eagle, and Upper Canada: A Developing Colonial Ideology* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987); McNairn, *Capacity to Judge*; Ducharme, *Idea of Liberty*.

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