



## Special Collections

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**Hugh MacLennan**

**Biocritical Essay**

**by**

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When Edmund Wilson first looked into MacLennan's essays in 1960, he encountered "a point of view surprisingly and agreeably different from anything else...in English..., a Canadian way of looking at things which had little in common with either the "American" or the British colonial one and which has achieved a self-confident detachment in regard to the rest of the world." Wilson proved himself MacLennan's ideal reader, for by that time MacLennan's primary aim - as expressed in many an essay and speech - was to set the local stage on which the nation's dramas might be enacted before an international audience. The achievement of this aim can be measured by the wide sales his seven novels have enjoyed inside and outside Canada, the large number of languages into which his books have been translated, and the direct and indirect tribute paid him by the many Canadian authors who have either acknowledged or displayed his influence.

Ironically, MacLennan's espousal of fictional nationalism began as an "experiment" in his first published novel *Barometer Rising* (1941). Previously, both his education and his experience had conspired to set him along a quite different track.

Born the only son of an austere Scots Presbyterian doctor and a musical, artistic mother in Glace Bay, Nova Scotia on 20 March 1907, he was expected to become a professional in the field of Classics which his father had long cultivated as a hobby. With texts from Eton College, Dr. MacLennan subjected his son to extra study at home, making it clear that Honours Latin and Greek at Dalhousie University, a Rhodes Scholarship and attendance at Oxford University lay ahead. Not without difficulty nor without resentment, MacLennan contrived to fulfil these ambitions, graduating in 1928 from Dalhousie with numerous athletic achievements, the Governor General's Gold Medal for Classics and a Rhodes Scholarship for Canada-at-large.

At Oriel College, Oxford, a provincial among English men better trained in classical studies, MacLennan

slaved over the extremely rigorous course of studies called Honour Moderations and Literae Humaniores. During his vacations, he travelled widely throughout the north of England, Scotland, and on the Continent - to France, Switzerland, Italy, Greece and Germany. He found Germany most congenial, not only because he was studying German at Oxford, but also because he found in Freiberg a welcoming family. From the security of their home he soaked in impressions of the landscape and the political developments that eventually culminated in the Second World War. Partly because he recognized that he could not obtain the firsts in Classics his father expected, but partly too because he had artistic ambitions which derived directly from his mother, he began to write poetry with an eye to publication.

In temperament unable to relate to the poetry which had begun to emerge after the Great War - poetry which he condemned as being too "cynical" - he declared his preference for the romantic and observed in his own writing a tendency to be mystical. He blamed his failure to publish his poems on the Depression, and turned from poetry to fiction. Emulating Hemingway, he began what he hoped would be a major international book about war and social change, siphoning off valuable energy from his formal studies just as his final exams at Oxford took place.

Coming down from Oxford in 1932, MacLennan half-heartedly agreed to follow his father's advice that he take a graduate degree in classics at Princeton University. Once there, he found the fastidious Germanic school of scholarship so foreign to his abilities that he began to rebel against his father's iron will. He abandoned both the orthodox Christianity and the Conservative politics of his family and immersed himself - like many young men of his generation - in the controversial theories of Karl Marx. This rebellion found support in Dorothy Duncan, a strong-spirited American woman whom he had met on the ship back from Oxford in 1932. Dorothy also had ambitions to write, saw in MacLennan a potential artist, and assumed the advisory role of editor on his current novel. Without giving his studies the time they needed, he just barely completed the Ph.D. in 1935, writing his thesis with a decidedly Marxist bent on Oxyrhynchus, the ancient Egyptian town. Although the novel he had begun at Oxford failed to find a publisher, he embarked on a second one set in the United States with Dorothy's encouragement.

He was humiliated to discover that the only job he could find in 1935 was one he could easily have taken with his B.A. from Dalhousie - that of teacher in Lower Canada College near Montreal. Despite the onerous tasks expected of him, MacLennan wrote long into the night to fulfil his hopes of publishing a novel that would earn enough money to support himself and Dorothy. Although he was financially able to marry her in 1936, it would be almost a decade before his artistic hopes would be realized. The Canadian market was a dismal prospect for any national writer: Canada was still importing almost 98 percent of all books, in striking contrast to Britain and the United States, both of which were producing about 80 percent of their own books. The failure to publish his second novel in 1937 was a stunning disappointment. The final blow was the death of his father two years later, an event that robbed him of the pleasure he might have had in proving himself as a writer to the man whose ambitions in classical studies he had disappointed. So strong were his feelings of loss that he wrote half a dozen letters (now in the Calgary collection) to his father during the six months that followed his death.

It was the perspicacious Dorothy who drew her husband out of this apparent deadlock. Although he had deeply wanted to write novels on a large scale with settings located at the vortex of international events, he now came to see that there was a fictional vacuum in Canada which he might well fill. Dorothy pointed out to him, on a summer trip through Nova Scotia, the absence of a well-established school of Canadian fiction such

as already existed in poetry (the Confederation Poets) and art (the Group of Seven) and suggested: "Why don't you put all this part of Nova Scotia in your next book? ....Nobody's ever going to understand Canada until she evolves a literature of her own, and you're the fellow to start bringing Canadian novels up to date." Dorothy herself was trying to supplement their sparse bank account by writing a guide-book about Canada aimed at American tourists. Taking her advice to heart, MacLennan put aside his idea of writing a novel on the great themes of Europe or the United States in the manner of a Hemingway or a Sinclair Lewis, plotted out a tightly knit story set in Halifax with the 1917 explosion as its climax, and wrote the novel that marked the turning point of his career.

*Barometer Rising* drew on MacLennan's own personal recollections of wartime Halifax and the explosion that had so traumatically levelled the town in 1917. With the Second World War underway, the theme was a timely one, and in using it MacLennan actually adapted his earlier concerns to a specifically Canadian locale. Although the vortex of world events was indisputably elsewhere and the traditions of English fiction and publishing located outside the country, for one blinding moment at least, the centre of wartime action had been Halifax, Canada. MacLennan's story concerns a group of characters who represent different attitudes to war. To the megalomaniac Colonel Wain, war is wonderful, a thrilling "power-bonanza" which he can turn to his own profit. To Neil Macrae, the novel's protagonist, it is a terrible violation of civilization. Shell-shocked and disoriented, Neil returns to Halifax to seek out the woman he has left behind, Colonel Wain's daughter, the ship-designer Penelope, who has meanwhile borne him an illegitimate child. Dr. Angus Murray, an older man who has been invalided home in the war in the same way MacLennan's father had been, is an outspoken pacifist who patiently courts Penelope without success. Penny's younger brother, Roddie, is shocked by what he sees after the explosion, just as MacLennan had been at the same age. The explosion blasts all these characters into new relationships with each other and simultaneously throws Canada into a new relationship with Britain. That relationship is now no longer colonial, but "non-committal"; as Neil describes it, "if there were enough Canadians like himself, half-American and half-English, then the day was inevitable when the halves would join and his country would become the central arch which united the new order."

To Canadian readers *Barometer Rising* seemed to express, as no Canadian novelist had yet done, the nationalism that had blossomed gradually over the past two decades. The Statute of Westminster in 1931 had formalized the autonomy Canada had won by her increasingly prominent role on the world stage. Now, exactly a decade later, reading this novel afforded not only Canadians but also English and American audiences their first opportunity to glimpse Canadian life in a Canadian city complete with street names and landmarks. Critics in Canada found the book "as Canadian as maple sugar." In the *New York Times* a reviewer claimed, "Both in conception and workmanship it is first class....Mr. MacLennan has scored a bull's eye first shot." For many readers and critics, the novel has remained MacLennan's best. Edmund Wilson, for example, singled it out as "a landmark in Canadian writing but also...[an] authentic classic." Ironically, the novel's author had merely experimented with a national setting; for the most part, his education, experience and interests lay elsewhere. But the advice of his American wife had been sage. Less than two months after its publication, *Barometer Rising* was doing as well in Canada as the envied Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*; in Britain and the United States it also sold well. By 1945 it had sold over 100,000 copies all told.

Understandably delighted that her decade-long confidence in her husband's talent had at last been justified, Dorothy began the scrapbooks and record book of contracts, sales figures and income (all of which are held in the Calgary collection) that she would maintain meticulously until she became too ill to do so in the mid-fifties.

Since *Barometer Rising* had been an experiment that worked, MacLennan at once turned his attention to repeating his success in another novel. Again he wrestled with the means by which a novel could be both "Canadian" and universal. The answer seemed to lie right at his feet in the current political and social tensions in Quebec. As MacLennan saw it, if there was going to be a Canadian literature, there had to be a strong sense of Canada instead of the group loyalties he observed as typical of the different ethnic groups in the country. Just as individuals seemed ready to acknowledge allegiances to the Canadian nation rather than to the petty interests of the local group or province, so, he hoped, the nations currently at war in Europe might be persuaded to lay down their arms in the larger interests of mankind. "I see Canada as a bridge," he wrote to a friend, "a bridge with the ends unjoined. I don't believe there can be a synthesis until the ends are joined. I am trying to go ahead on the assumption that the failure of our people even to understand the necessity of joining the ends of the bridge is responsible not only for our own national schizophrenia [the French-English split], but breakdown as well. In that state of 'becoming' [a nation] I seem to detect the possibility of a universality for a writer who attempts to write out of the Canadian scene." In 1943 he obtained a Guggenheim Fellowship and spent the year in New York writing his novel.

The title *Two Solitudes* aptly implied MacLennan's aim. Taken from a letter of Rainer Marie Rilke's, it was a definition of love: "love consists of this, that two solitudes protect, and touch, and greet each other." If French and English in Canada could manage this kind of respectful love, then perhaps the various nationalisms in Europe that had led to war could be transformed into peaceful coexistence.

MacLennan again used his characters - this time a much more varied group than in *Barometer Rising* - to dramatize his theme. His protagonist is Paul Tallard, a writer like himself who at the novel's end sits down to write the first truly "Canadian" novel. In all that goes before this - in Paul's home life and outer experience - MacLennan demonstrates a nation taking shape to the point at which a national literature becomes possible. A large part of the novel is devoted to Paul's father, Athanase Tallard, who is of the generation which sees the potential for viable nationhood but which cannot come to grips with it emotionally. For MacLennan, situated as he was in a boys' private school, the key in the evolution of nationhood is education. Athanase, seigneur of the tiny Roman Catholic preserve of Saint-Marc in rural Quebec, is emotionally chained by his religious upbringing, even though he toys with an atheistic manifesto. His first wife, a devout French Catholic has died, leaving him a fiery French Canadian nationalist, Marius, as a son. His second wife, the earthy English Protestant Kathleen, is Paul's mother. Athanase sees that Paul receives a "scientific" education in English to complement his French Canadian early childhood. The novel's villain (generally agreed to have been based roughly on Prime Minister William Lyon MacKenzie King) is Huntly MacQueen, a predatory English Canadian industrialist who exploits the tensions between English and French for personal gain, moving in characteristically to purchase land from Athanase to set up a factory.

MacLennan's timely treatment of the conscription issue in *Two Solitudes* (1945) was one of the many reasons for its immediate popularity. The novel was sold out by noon of the day the first reviews appeared. Reviews were ecstatic; many Canadian critics treated the book as "the Great Canadian Novel", while American reviewers saw in it a sort of "case book" of many aspects of life north of the border. As one reviewer put it: "Here is the substance of Canada, her countryside, her cities, her conflicting cultures, and, above all, her people. We move comfortably among them, knowing them for our own, yet, if it were translated into, say, Russian, it could be read over there with something of the pleasure we have in reading *War and Peace*."

For the rest of the year, *Two Solitudes* maintained a position on bestseller lists in the United States and Canada. Negotiations were underway almost at once for a number of translations. North American sales in the first year topped 50,000, and sales continued steadily after that. At last MacLennan was able to resign his teaching position at Lower Canada College, to depend on income from writing alone.

Despite the indisputable popular success of *Two Solitudes*, the novel was seriously flawed, as later critics less dazzled by its timely content were able to see. MacLennan had come closer to reflecting the complexity of life in this novel, sensing that *Barometer Rising* with its neat plot had been too "limiting". But somehow its encyclopedic range had gotten out of hand and its focus blurred. On the one hand, MacLennan had attempted a semi-autobiographical "portrait of the artist as a young man"; on the other hand, he had deliberately imitated John Galsworthy's *Forsyte Saga* in chronicling the interplay of history and the personal lives of a few inter-related families. Consequently, as some reviewers noticed and later critics confirmed, the protagonist of the book seemed to be Athanase Tallard, not his son, Paul. Soon after the novel was released, MacLennan confessed that he had submitted his manuscript too soon: impatient to free himself from his onerous teaching duties, he did not give the novel the final rewrite he knew it needed. Regardless of these flaws, the book accomplished what he had hoped it would. It was a bestseller which, as he put it, "put something like solid ground under my feet."

For his next novel, MacLennan wanted above all to continue to tap the profitable market in the United States which was still much larger than the home market, but he also wanted to keep intact the "Canadianness" for which he had now become famous. As he theorized, he wished to remain a Canadian in Canada but he wanted to avoid being "regional" by joining an "American branch cycle" of literature. "A Canadian writer, like any other artist," he said, "must write out of his own background...[but] Canadians must write for the American market because it is the cultural pattern to which they naturally belong. It is their only avenue to a world audience." Realizing that present publishing contracts, which were American based, put Canadian writers at a severe financial disadvantage, he successfully negotiated a separate Canadian contract for his next book.

*The Precipice* (1948) was set partly in a fictional Ontario town, Grenville, and partly in New York and Princeton. The Grenville section of the novel was directly based on the American ballet *Pillar of Fire* which MacLennan and Dorothy had seen in 1946. As in the ballet, the central character in *The Precipice* is a woman whose puritanical upbringing inhibits her natural affections. It is Stephen Lassiter, the American efficiency expert who comes to Grenville to facilitate the take-over of a company, who is able to awaken her to physical and emotional experience. Their marriage and subsequent life in the United States gives MacLennan the opportunity to compare the history, social mores and geography of the two North American nations. In doing so, he suggests that each nation has much to offer the other: Canadians can benefit, as Lucy does, from the forthright, guilt-free attitudes south of the border; Americans, more to the point, can learn much by tempering their monstrous drive for technological power with an emphasis on the quality of life more often found in "backward" Canada. The context provided at the novel's close by the bombing of Hiroshima stands as a sobering warning that modern man, like the Gaderene swine in the Bible, may be racing towards a precipice beyond which lies destruction.

Carefully planned though his novel was to link American and Canadian audiences, *The Precipice* did not mark an advance in sales over *Two Solitudes*. Canadian critics were generally disillusioned that their "Canadian spokesman" was apparently turning away from Canadian subjects. "We can kiss Hugh MacLennan

good-bye as a distinctly Canadian novelist," one wrote. "'Two Solitudes'...was...a promise of a potentially great Canadian novelist. 'The Precipice' reduces the promise to a whisper." American critics, unencumbered by any such sense of betrayal, reviewed the novel favourably, but the condemnation of the majority of Canadian critics affected sales at home. Although MacLennan himself considered the book to be a marked advance over both his earlier novels, it has remained the least popular of his novels to date.

In order to supplement an income that income tax burdens and Dorothy's medical expenses had reduced to very little, MacLennan published some of the occasional articles he had written for various journals in a collection called *Cross-Country* (1949).

MacLennan emerged from the publication of his third novel with the aesthetic theory that the novel had a moral role to play. Despite the fact that writers such as James Jones, John Dos Passos and Norman Mailer were reflecting a gradual breakdown of social mores, MacLennan believed that "The period we are now entering will be a period of reconstruction, both in society and in the arts. Such periods are always hard for the artist, for it is incumbent on him, not on the statesman, to discover new values."

Worried about his financial state which had induced him to take on numerous articles for American and Canadian magazines, MacLennan commenced another novel. This time he would draw back from the United States and return to his own roots in Nova Scotia.

*Each Man's Son* (1951) was set in Glace Bay, Cape Breton Island, and centred on a colliery doctor like his father. The novel is both a study in Calvinism and an examination of the use and misuse of power. Hitherto, MacLennan had embodied this theme externally, locating different points of view in separate characters. Now, he presented the conflict internally. Dr. Ainslie undergoes a crisis of conscience and guilt that he has not always tempered his powers as a medical man with sufficient love. At the novel's crisis, he senses through a mystical revelation that he can and will go on to study and practice for the greater benefit of mankind. The novel's subplot involves a former Glace Bay miner, Archie MacNeil, who has become a professional boxer. Archie has abandoned his wife and son, Alan, for a number of years to batter and pummel his way to the top. Now, in his decline, he returns to find his wife with a lover. Enraged, he accidentally kills Mollie in one final act of violence, and is destroyed himself. Thus, Archie also represents the misuse of power for violent destruction, much in the manner of the Greek tragedies on which MacLennan modelled this tightly-constructed book. With appropriate nemesis, his son is adopted by the doctor.

Because MacLennan so successfully created an authentic atmosphere through local colour and the dialogue of his characters, this novel appealed greatly to his Canadian readers. But sales did not reach the heights for which he aimed. After a year, only 10,000 copies had been sold, evidence of solid sales but not the windfall he needed to pay the debts that were rapidly mounting. Since 1948, Dorothy's health had deteriorated dramatically in a series of embolisms that were the inevitable consequence of several bouts of rheumatic fever during childhood. Her weak heart had made pregnancy too great a risk to take; now it threatened her life. In the absence of health insurance, MacLennan's medical bills were staggering. Despite his income from *Each Man's Son* and the many articles and essays he wrote (the best of which he published in a second collection, *Thirty and Three* (1954), he could no longer afford to support himself as a writer. After only six years of independence, he returned to teaching, this time as a part time English professor at McGill University. To his surprise, MacLennan found that he enjoyed his new job. He no longer needed to worry

about money; he found university teaching stimulating and contact with his colleagues rewarding. At a more leisurely pace, he began another novel with none of the urgency with which he had written *Each Man's Son*. During the decade of the fifties, he came into his own as an essayist, writing monthly pieces for the new magazine *The Montrealer* and other articles for major journals, and making the rounds of universities, clubs and other organizations as a lecturer. (Drafts for many of these articles and speeches can be located in the Calgary collection.) But during this decade Dorothy became seriously ill, finally dying in 1957.

*The Watch That Ends the Night* (1959) was in part the story of a woman with a weak heart - much like Dorothy. Catherine Martell and her husband, the surgeon Jerome, are both people of enormous will power whose lives exemplified the human choice MacLennan had been fascinated with from the outset: the choice between the constructive and destructive uses of power. For Jerome, the almost mythical figure who first occurred to MacLennan in a dream, this choice involves enlisting in the Spanish Civil War and abandoning his wife under circumstances that almost destroy her. For Catherine, it involves a continuing fight for life and creativity, since she is a painter of considerable talent. Both these characters are observed throughout by the novel's protagonist, George Stewart, who has not the explosive character of either. George, a semi-autobiographical character, marries Catherine after Jerome is presumed dead in the war, only to have him return at a much later date. The novel's story, which like that of *Two Solitudes* is encyclopedic in scope and relates international events to the personal lives of its large cast of characters, is really George's. His closeness to Jerome and Catherine teaches him that the power to do good and the power to do evil are inextricably linked in the human psyche. Jerome's apparently destructive force, he comes to see, is balanced by his almost mystic healing powers as a doctor; Catherine's creative exuberance has its dark underside in her vampire-like claims on his emotional strength. Reflecting his own explicit aesthetic theory that art must affirm and "within a framework of truth...make compensation for the human predicament", MacLennan demonstrates that ultimately the choice must be for the constructive use of power. As George comments: "There it was, the ancient marriage of good and evil, the goodness of this day and the compulsive evil people must see and know, but the sky dominated in the end. Pale and shining, it told me that our sins can be forgiven."

Reviews of this novel revealed that at last he was appreciated as a writer, not as a specifically "Canadian" writer. Throughout Canada and the United States, reviews were the best he had yet received, praising the novel's psychological insight, its characterization, its humour and its readability. As Robertson Davies put it, "he has gained a new mastery over the two strongest elements in his work: the storyteller and the self-explorer are one. The effect is virtually to double his stature." Sales reflected this euphoria: by the year's end it had sold 18,000 copies in Canada alone; by 1975 it had sold 700,000 copies. Numerous translations were made, and at last a financial windfall came MacLennan's way through the sale of the movie rights for \$70,000, although a movie was never produced.

Two years after the death of Dorothy Duncan, the same year that *The Watch That Ends the Night* was published, MacLennan remarried. With his new bride, Frances Walker, he made a honeymoon of his research trip to the Fraser River. Claiming to feel depleted of creative energy after the massive rewriting of his last novel, MacLennan turned to non-fiction and produced, among other things, his outstanding collection of geological-historical essays called *Seven Rivers of Canada* (1961). Many critics had noted from *Barometer Rising* onward that one of his unique characteristics was his ability to bring the Canadian landscape vividly to life. Edmund Wilson, for example, had noted: "The one feature of MacLennan's novels that does seem to me new and interesting is his use of the geographical and the meteorological setting. He always shows us how

the characters are situated...in a vast expanse of land and water, the hardly inhabited space of the waste upper margin of a continent."

Eventually, however, MacLennan returned to the novel form in response to what he called "the psychic crisis" of the sixties. Everywhere, it seemed to him, social and moral structures were disintegrating. As an artist who believed that it was the responsibility of all artists to offer direction and hope in even the most distressing of human situations, he began *Return of the Sphinx*.

As the title suggests, this novel referred back to the Oedipus plays he had studied as a student of the classics. In the early sixties he had read *Sex in History* by G. Rattray Taylor who had applied Freudian psychology - especially the theory of the Oedipus complex - to history. MacLennan adopted Taylor's theory that history moved in cycles, swinging back and forth between "patrist" periods of extreme authoritarianism and "matrist" phases of excessive libertinism. MacLennan's imagination was seized at once by Taylor's analysis - especially his assertion that the modern world was deep in the throes of a "matrist" period. The situation in Quebec - where the Quiet Revolution was afoot - seemed to demonstrate this theory on a political level as well.

The novel's protagonist, Alan Ainslie, was none other than the son of Archie MacNeil from *Each Man's Son* who had been adopted at that novel's end by Dr. Ainslie. Now Minister for Cultural Affairs in Ottawa, he must face the rebellion against authority common in the sixties from both his children. His son, Daniel, is a television host who encourages the expression of inflammatory Quebec separatist opinion and who is eventually arrested on the way to blow up a downtown Montreal building. Chantal, Ainslie's daughter, has become involved with her father's oldest friend, Gabriel Fleury. This semi-incestuous relationship is paralleled by Daniel's sexual liaison with his girlfriend's mother. "Things are falling apart, the centre cannot hold", Ainslie quotes from Yeats on one occasion, and, in a image central to the novel of a huge, impersonal tidal wave that rises out of a hurricane at sea and resembles Yeats's great beast slouching towards Bethlehem to be born, a new cycle of human history is ushered in.

Both the obscurity of its Freudian origins and the timing of publication contributed to this novel's poor critical reception. Neither the *Oedipus at Colonus* nor Taylor's *Sex in History* were sufficiently familiar to the general public for MacLennan's allusions to be understood. Furthermore, the sheer coincidence that the book came out during the festivities that marked Canada's centennial celebrations induced reviewers to conclude that MacLennan had sat down to write a socio-political study of English-French relations in Quebec. Nothing could have been further from the truth. As always, MacLennan was doing his best to eschew regionalism in favour of universal themes. As he commented, "I wasn't trying to write the great Canadian novel; I took an international theme - the crack-up between generations. It could have been written about many countries, but naturally a novelist is wise to use a milieu he himself knows well." Although American critics generally reviewed the book well, noting its timely and universal nature, Canadian critics savaged it. One typically noted, "At this difficult nervous moment in Canadian history, one of our most celebrated authors has attacked our most pressing issue and produced a book that contributes nothing to politics and less than nothing to literature." Sales, understandably were lower than those of *The Watch That Ends the Night* - 11,000 in Canada and 16,000 in the United States in the first year. Although critics have continued to concur in this view of *Return of the Sphinx*, MacLennan himself felt it was better than his other novels.

Although he was hurt and discouraged by the Canadian reception of *Return of the Sphinx*, he slowly began to work on a seventh novel *Voices in Time*. The publication of a revised version of *Seven Rivers in Canada*,



retitled simply *Rivers of Canada* (1974), stimulated him to perceive life from a wider perspective. Now in his sixties, he had reached an age at which he could identify with natural history: just as Canada's river gorges marked epochs of geological time stretching back millions of years, so too his own life seemed to him like a series of "ages" marked by violent and transfiguring transitions.

The form and scope of *Voices in Time* (1980) was bold and jagged. Set in the future after a nuclear explosion that has wiped out all but a few of the world's inhabitants, it treats one set of characters in the years spanning the two world wars, another in the October crisis of 1970 in Montreal, and a third in the "present" - the year 2039. The linking character is old John Wellfleet who as one of the few "survivors" of the holocaust is able to attain the overview of all these characters and events necessary for the young hopefuls who have been born after the "Destructions" and now struggle to create a new society on the ruins of the old. John Wellfleet's difficulty in making sense of all the "voices in time" that have also survived in the form of letters and diaries, tapes, and videotapes is analogous to MacLennan's own struggle (or that of any artist) to transform the raw stuff of life into the coherent forms of art. Eventually he incorporates the tragic story of his German stepfather, Conrad Dehmel who has been a conscientious objector during Hitler's rise to power, and the tale of his irresponsible, media-mad cousin Timothy Wellfleet whose sensational television show carries disaster, into his own recollections to build a monumental pattern of human history in which affirmation is ultimately possible. *Voices in Time* is his most sophisticated treatment to date of the theme of man's use of power. Although, for the first time, American critics seemed indifferent to MacLennan, Canadian critics generally hailed *Voices in Time* as a masterpiece.

MacLennan's overall development as a writer can best be understood by remembering that he originally aimed to be a writer, not a "Canadian" writer. Behind all his successful novels on Canadian themes lay those two unpublished manuscripts set, in the main, outside Canada. The overnight success of *Barometer Rising* encouraged him to continue in the Canadian vein, but always he struggled to find ways of avoiding regionalism in his quest to touch universal themes. Thus, his novels in succession were experimental in the sense that he tried a number of methods to make the local scene resound with wider implications. In *Two Solitudes* he used the chronicle form to lend historical authenticity to the Canadian dilemma he thought was representative of the international situation in Europe; *The Precipice* specifically aimed to contrast and link the two North American nations which had much to learn from each other. *Each Man's Son* was conceived on a more modest scale, using tightly-knit Greek tragedy as a model for a psychological study that he hoped might transcend parochial boundaries. In *The Watch That Ends the Night* he returned to the broad canvas of *Two Solitudes*, moving parts of his action out of Canada entirely and incorporating the psychological depth of *Each Man's Son*. He also tried using the first person point of view for the first time since his early unpublished fiction. With *Return of the Sphinx* he attempted again a closely structured story modelled on Greek tragedy with deep Freudian implications. Finally, with *Voices in Time*, he set almost half of his story outside Canada in Germany as he had done with his first unpublished novel, and managed to incorporate the most far-flung sets of characters and eras he had yet attempted. His enduring central theme has been the choice facing all men: whether power is to be used for constructive or destructive ends, a theme he has treated with increasing complexity and impact.

The many essays and articles MacLennan wrote - the best of which are collected in *The Other Side of Hugh MacLennan* (1978) - are not only valuable in their own right; they have also contributed significantly to his development as a novelist. In them he dealt with a wide variety of subjects drawn from his own experience, acquiring useful practice in expressing his humour, his intense emotions, his civilized thoughts and his

intuitions. The discipline of the essay form also helped him experiment with forms. Along with Robertson Davies, he is Canada's finest essayist.

Although MacLennan is still widely admired for his national themes by his general public, and regarded with deep respect by such writers as Margaret Laurence who recognize the debt their own writing owes him, professional critics have varied in their opinions. Assessments of MacLennan's novels fall into three main categories: the acclaim which greeted his heroic accomplishments as the first "Canadian" writer, but which has scant regard for his aesthetic merit; the consolidation of a critical view in the sixties in which he was treated as important for his themes but as outdated in his methods; and a reaction in the seventies to all these views in the form of careful literary analysis of his works and more thorough investigation into the context in which he wrote.

MacLennan might well be termed the "Grand Old Man" of Canadian letters. He has won the Governor General's Award three times for his fiction (*Two Solitudes*, *The Precipice* and *The Watch That Ends the Night*) and twice for his collections of essays (*Cross-Country* and *Thirty and Three*) along with many other awards and honorary degrees. Although he has most often been seen as a "pioneer" in Canadian literature, he is more accurately a transitional figure. Like one of his favourite Roman poets, Horace, who adapted Greek poetry to Latin verse, MacLennan has tuned a new nation's lyre to the existing measures of English fiction.

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