“Discovery” and ideology

In their introduction to Walter Cheadle’s *Journal of Trip across Canada, 1862–1863* (1931), editors A. G. Doughty and Gustave Lanctot boldly declare that “[t]his is the journal of the first transcanadian tourist.” The editors are equally categorical about *The North-West Passage by Land. Being the Narrative of an Expedition from the Atlantic to the Pacific, Undertaken with the View of Exploring a Route across the Continent to British Columbia through British Territory, by One of the Northern Passes of the Rocky Mountains*, an earlier publication based on the trip and co-authored by Cheadle and his fellow traveler Viscount Milton. Doughty and Lanctot write that “in the title of the book, the tourist trip of the authors is raised to the dignity of an exploration. To it is ascribed a purpose of greater importance, probably as bearing a larger public appeal” (pp. 9–10). The implication is that exploration and tourism are two different things, and that one is significant and the other trivial. However, for a reader confronted with the rich and varied history of Canadian travel-writing, which includes seventy-odd years of which Doughty and Lanctot were not yet aware, it can be quite difficult to make such distinctions. Exploration and tourism, and the writing resulting from them, often overlap in a country where travelers are called upon to match the pragmatic and aesthetic principles to which they have become accustomed (and which they are determined to pursue) against extraordinary geographical, climatic, and cultural challenges. The literature of exploration and travel cuts a broad swath through histories, genres, disciplines, and readerships, and it has frequently been a place where evolving ideas about Canadian and North American identity are being played out. The study of this writing and the mapmaking associated with it instantly and dramatically modifies the notion that Canada, despite its enormous size, is essentially a narrow band of settlements strung along the forty-ninth parallel. Tracing the trade routes through the intricate river and lake systems that thread their
Exploration and travel

way throughout the northern part of the continent provides an understanding of complex historical communication networks that are not dependent on roads or railways. Many of these networks pre-date European contact, but they also illustrate how western commercial interests, appropriating Indigenous skills, established themselves along these routes and made them part of an ever-expanding mercantile network of their own. Canadian literature and culture continues to draw inspiration from the journals, letters, and reports that record these travels, among them Rudy Wiebe, *A Discovery of Strangers* (1994), Fred Stenson, *The Trade* (2000), and Wayne Johnston, *The Navigator of New York* (2002) to mention only a few.

Because exploration- and travel-writing is one of the mainstays of popular culture, typically combining large helpings of instruction and entertainment, it can easily be used for imperial, national, and other propaganda. In juvenile literature, such intentions can be especially obvious. Everett McNeil’s *For the Glory of France* (1927), for example, tells the story of Samuel de Champlain through the eyes of fictitious stowaways, “Noel Bidoux... and Robert de Boville, two French boys,” but in the wake of the tensions between English and French Canadians during World War I, the book makes sure that the English are in the picture by telling the story “as set down in English by Everett McNeil.”

Earlier in the century, the disagreements that erupted over the Boer War required similar educational action, with books like *Heralds of Empire; Being the Story of one Ramsay Stanhope, Lieutenant to Pierre Radisson in the Northern Fur Trade* (1902) including both English and French names in the title to suggest that, despite appearances, there was an *entente* of long standing that was worth preserving. On the other hand, the prolific writer Agnes Laut, who moved to the United States in search of a wider audience, included two famous American explorers in her book *Pathfinders of the West; Being the Thrilling Story of the Adventures of the Men Who Discovered the Great Northwest, Radisson, La Verendrye, Lewis, and Clark* (1904) to suit her own market. Nor were writers in the early part of the twentieth century the only ones to make such uses of the genre. As will be discussed later on, World War II, the Centennial celebrations, and the attack on the World Trade Center in New York all brought travel and travel-writing to the fore, with the specific purpose of sorting out broad questions of alliance, political and otherwise.

One of the most problematic ideological uses of exploration literature is found in the ways in which such writing asserts the invader’s claim to ownership, by stipulating that he and the metropolitan power he represents are the first to survey and therefore claim the place, thus becoming “Cartier, finder of the St. Lawrence” and “Samuel de Champlain, Father of New France” or, indeed, a “Caesar of the Wilderness” (after Radisson’s “We were
Cesars, being no body to contradict us”), a “Little Emperor” (to denote the Napoleonic demeanor of Hudson’s Bay Company Governor George Simpson), and “King of the Fur Traders.” A book tracing the origin of the place-names in the Pacific Northwest, Edmund S. Meany’s *Vancouver’s Discovery of Puget Sound: Portraits and Biographies of the Men Honored in the Naming of Geographic Features of the North-Western America* (1907) assumes the explorer’s right to appropriate a territory by giving it a name or to take quasi-sexual possession of it, as appears to be suggested in titles such as *First Crossing: Alexander Mackenzie, His Expedition across North America, and the Opening of the Continent*. Given the difficult legacy of “discovery,” strenuously disputed during the bicentenary of Vancouver’s arrival in America (which coincided with the 500th anniversary of that of Columbus), it is logical that the literature of exploration has also been a site where to begin the necessary revisions. Some of these are apparent in books describing the role of Aboriginal people in mapping the continent, such as *The Helping Hand: How Indian Canadians Helped Alexander Mackenzie Reach the Pacific Ocean* (1972) or, more sharply formulated, *The Helping Hand: The Debt of Alexander Mackenzie and Simon Fraser to Indian Canadians* (1973), both educational guides for use in high schools published with the collaboration of the Indian Education Resources Centre at the University of British Columbia. Other attempts at correcting the imperialist “thrust” of exploration have been to turn the itinerary into a naturalist and all too often elegiac enterprise, as in John Woodworth’s *In the Steps of Alexander Mackenzie: Trail Guide* (1981), sponsored by the Nature Conservancy of Canada, or Jack Nisbet’s *Sources of the River: Tracking David Thompson across Western North America* (1994).

Viscount Milton and Walter Cheadle

For a number of reasons, Cheadle’s diary is an interesting book with which to begin this discussion. It records the trip undertaken in 1861–2 by Walter Cheadle, a physician, and William Fitzwilliam Viscount Milton from Eastern Canada to the Pacific when both men were in their early twenties, but the book appeared more than sixty years after the journey. The first publication resulting from the expedition was a work co-authored by Milton and Cheadle, *The North-West Passage by Land*. Including practical information on natural resources and agricultural potential and drawing on the recommendations of the Palliser-Hind expeditions, the book was instrumental in making a case for the settlement of the prairies and of British Columbia and for bringing the West into Confederation. Its description of the rugged land and the hardship endured in traversing it were thrilling enough to make
The North-West Passage by Land a very successful publication, with ten editions published by 1901 and a French translation issued as early as 1866. The book continues to have its enthusiasts: Christie Harris’s West with the White Chiefs, a children’s adaptation, appeared in 1965; Milton’s great-great-grandson Michael Shaw Bond followed in his ancestor’s footsteps, in an expedition described in Way Out West: On the Trail of an Errant Ancestor (2001), and in 2001 reporter John Stackhouse cited Milton and Cheadle as he crossed Tête Jaune Pass, where the pair had competed in naming mountains after each other. (Stackhouse was on assignment from the Globe and Mail which had sent him on a hitch-hiking trip across the country to find out what ordinary Canadians were thinking about the future of their country. The North-West Passage by Land appears to have been something of a blueprint by which to measure the answers.)

Alluding to two key terms in the title of The North-West Passage by Land, the editors of Cheadle’s Journal sniff in their introduction that neither expedition nor exploration was involved as the route was well established by travelers “on business, exploration or duty” (p. 7), and in their biographical notes they do their best to depict Cheadle, the more robust of the pair, as a vacationing Cambridge man who, “selected to row in the University eight against Oxford,” had been “prevented by a family bereavement from taking part in the great race and securing his full blue” (p. 12). Unlike The North-West Passage by Land, the Journal not only contains very detailed notes about social life on board the Anglo-Saxon from Britain to Canada (“Breakfast 8.30, Luncheon 12, Dinner 4, Tea 7, Supper only to order”) but also a leisurely description of their return journey via the United States, during which Cheadle, after two years of deprivation, engages in much enthusiastic leering at the ladies. However, despite their reservations Doughty and Lanctot are equally clear about the all-important role Cheadle played in the undertaking, which ranged from all practical aspects of the team’s daily progress to keeping the extensive notes on which the book is based (Milton was also supposed to keep a diary but did so infrequently). Indeed, it is unlikely that the trip could have been made at all without his constant medical attention. Milton suffered from epilepsy and the Journal frequently refers to his “symptoms” or “a turn” brought on by their exertions. Cheadle often notes that they make a late start because Milton has slept in, and it is likely that his languor has a great deal to do with his illness. At the same time, Cheadle is exasperated with “Lord M.”’s moodiness and “his complaints & curses that he had ever come & wanting to stop and make a fire with every rotten stick he saw” (p. 100), not to mention the effect on their Native guides whose impatience with Milton’s capriciousness sometimes knows no bounds and requires Cheadle’s energetic mediation. The North-West
Passage by Land, by contrast, depicts Milton as never anything but mature and capable, and the relationship between the travellers as never less than collegial.

These differences become apparent elsewhere in these books as well. Along with the unusual, in the expectation of which the journey has been undertaken, the log records the daily routine which can become so numbing that days disappear without trace. Toward the end of August 1862 Cheadle writes: “Write up log. A long discussion whether it is Saturday or Sunday, decided by La Ronde in favour of former. Cook ham for Sunday dinner” (p. 50). On occasion, the diary records the tedious (“On-on-on-paddle-paddle-paddle-nothing to be seen until noon” [p. 42]) along with the wildly adventurous in ways that confusingly mix recorded speech and first-person narrative. On Friday 8 August, for example, at the beginning of their journey in the Red River country, Cheadle lists “Breakfast in La Ronde’s House,” followed by attending to Milton’s numerous ailments and to other patients (“Son got abscess in kidney. Old boy very hospitable; cold roast beef; delicious, left England at 13”), making an unsuccessful trip to the Post Office, and listening to a story about six grizzly bears which, without apparent transition, becomes a sighting of buffaloes: “Go up to them very quick, raised tail, &c., &c.” The day concludes with “Port wine & pipe with Dr. Bird” and the observation that “Things at Fort stores dear & Messiter frantic with many preparations & packings. Half breeds & drunken Indians. Tom-tom going all night” (p. 44). In The North-West Passage by Land, by comparison, the monotony is tamed by complex vocabulary and syntax suggesting that the writer remained in charge of his tasks, no matter how tedious, and that the fatigue was an insignificant aspect of an important undertaking: “The unvarying sameness of the river, and the limited prospect shut in by rising banks on either side, gave a monotony to our daily journey; and the routine of cooking, chopping, loading and unloading canoes, paddling, and shooting, amusing enough at first, began to grow rather tiresome” (p. 24). The book also “tidies up” the hierarchies, often blurred in the Journal, between the men, their guides, and the numerous Aboriginal people they meet en route, by drawing on narrative modes apparently borrowed from James Fenimore Cooper’s Leatherstocking saga. The attire of a chief is given with ethnographic precision and his “oration”–“delivered... with much dignity” (p. 66) – rendered in direct speech, featuring the stilted prose European readers had been taught to associate with North American Indians. The book is careful to enhance the link to an adventure story by creating an ambiance of stealth, complete with ominous foreshadowings and the sighting of a headless dead Indian (“full of chrysales of maggots” in the Journal [p. 202], but “filled with the exuviae of chrysales” [p. 296] in The North-West Passage),
and it provides sentimental counterpoints to all the vigorous exertions by telling the touching story of Rover the dog or lovingly describing “the footprints of the cross or silver fox, delicately impressed in the snow” (p. 117). A bothersome Irishman who attaches himself to the gullible young men and, in Cheadle’s version, frequently drives them to distraction, is efficiently transformed into the “Paddy” of English stage fame, and his presence provides the comic relief to a drama that threatens to turn into tragedy as the travelers, near starvation, stumble about in the forests of British Columbia.

“Incremental” narratives

The relationship of The North-West Passage by Land and Cheadle’s Journal may be unusual in its details, but it still highlights the typical textual situation of most travel-writing. Germaine Warkentin has referred to the sometimes complicated textual history involved in travel-writing as “incremental,” with several authors, different readerships and different ideological purposes to be accommodated over different periods of time. Some travelogues were published almost immediately after completion of the journey, such as George Vancouver’s A Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean, and round the World: in Which the Coast of North-West America Has Been Carefully Examined and Accurately Surveyed: Undertaken by His Majesty’s Command, Principally with a View to Ascert ain the Existence of Any Navigable Communication between the North Pacific and North Atlantic Oceans; and Performed in the Years 1790, 1791, 1792, 1793, 1794, and 1795, in the Discovery Sloop of War, and Armed Tender Chatham, under the Command of Captain George Vancouver. The book appeared in 1798, a swift three years after his return, but there are more than 200 years between Radisson’s travels in 1660 and the time they were published in 1885. In this case, the situation is complicated by the fact that Radisson, a Provençal whose allegiance to the French king was somewhat casual, also worked for the Stuarts and had learned some English. Victor Hopwood points out that the available English manuscript is distinguished by its “almost dazzling illiteracy,” the result, so he and others concluded, either of Radisson’s own imperfect grasp of grammar or the incompetence of a translator hired by the Hudson’s Bay Company, but the textual status of these documents remains the subject of scholarly debate and detective work. Readers familiar with the tortured textual history that arises out of the corporate authorship involved in producing Captain James Cook’s travels will find similar complications in the narratives of the Franklin expeditions and in Samuel de Champlain’s travelogues. Alexander Mackenzie’s journals differ greatly from the version prepared by his editor William Combe who embellished the original with the lofty tone.
that was his trademark. David Thompson, a brilliant mapmaker and humble observer, is a favorite with critics of Canadian exploration literature who praise him for his “breadth of vision and sense of wonder [that] are unique among his peers.” But, her admiration for the author notwithstanding, Germaine Warkentin’s notes often read like those supplied by Barney’s son to complement “Barney’s Version” in Mordecai Richler’s eponymous novel (1997); time and again, the annotations point out how the narrator’s memory is slipping. Settled into retirement when he began writing and with his eyesight failing, Thompson muddles dates and places, confuses people with similar names, and has difficulty keeping the time in which he is writing separate from the one he is writing about.

While these kinds of discrepancies are mostly involuntary, other inconsistencies in travel-writing are clearly intended. Because its proximity to sensationalism makes it popular, revision for profit, performed by an editor or the author himself, can be extensive, and the borderline between truth and fiction becomes blurred. Thus, Samuel Hearne’s account of the so-called “Coppermine Massacre” (1771) of a group of Copper Inuit by Chipewyan and Copper Indians features a memorable scene in which “a young girl” is killed so close to the narrator that she “twist[s] round [his] legs.” Close study of the various textual stages involved in producing this episode has made it likely, however, that its poignancy has more to do with the literary vogue of the Gothic than with historical accuracy and that the whole scene may not have taken place in this way at all. If it is difficult to follow the transitions between recorded and direct speech in unpolished journals like Cheadle’s, the task can be even more complicated when the rendition of speech becomes subject to the same kind of considerations that make it important to reassert the hierarchies between traveler and guide. Travelogues are valuable historical sources for Indigenous people’s customs and speech, including the Piegan chief Saukamapee’s narration recorded in David Thompson’s Narrative. The book confirms that “the speeches of the Indians on both sides of the Mountains are in plain language, sensible and to the purpose [and] I never heard a speech in the florid, bombastic style, I have often seen published as spoken to white men,” but phonetic transcriptions or inventive translations of oral culture can create serious misinterpretation.

Nor is language the only form of representation to consider. Travel-writing characteristically features maps, and the history of exploration hinges on the availability of reliable surveys and charts. On his way to the Arctic Ocean and the Pacific, Alexander Mackenzie frequently consulted with Native people who advised him on the location of rivers, trails, and natural obstacles and provided him with maps drawn “upon a large piece of bark,” while Simon Fraser, together with a chart of the river that now bears his name,
received a severe scolding “for venturing so far with our canoes, &c for not going by land as advised by the Old Chief on a former occasion” and for generally taking on a route to “be found impracticable to strangers, as we shall have to ascend and descend mountains and precipices by means of rope-ladders &c.” Fraser’s rendition of this dressing-down in indirect speech may be intended to convey his own exasperated amusement at being lectured, but the information undoubtedly made its way into his own evaluation of the itinerary, and maps are frequently drawn at his request. Charting became closely associated, even equated, with imperial enterprise, and because of the immensity of the assumptions, the failures were sometimes equally spectacular. Thus, Captain George Vancouver includes nautical astronomy among the developments that make the unstoppable expansion of the British Empire possible, but his own assiduous activities on the Pacific West Coast were brought up short by the unexpected appearance of the Spanish fleet, clearly engaged in a similar pursuit. As proof of their prior claim to the area, “Sen’ Galiano, who spoke a little English” produces a chart documenting their surveying activities the previous year, generously providing the greatly annoyed Vancouver with a copy. Vancouver’s chance encounter with the Spanish fleet is only one instance where explorers seem to be following hard on each other’s heels. Arriving at Dean Channel, for example, Mackenzie is confronted with news of the recent arrival of people in “a large canoe,” including a certain “Macubah” (Vancouver) and “Bensins” (botanist Archibald Menzies). Travelogues are full of cross-references to other explorers’ observations, ranging from the medical recommendations to be derived from Samuel Hearne’s digestive problems after breakfasting on tripe de roche to evaluations of Sir John Franklin’s paleontological theories, and one often has the impression of mental maps being passed on from one to the other through the hands of numerous intermediaries. Their exploits may traditionally have been depicted as those of solitary men leading the forward march of western civilization, but explorers’ narratives are crowded with voices both competitive and companionable.

Shadow-texts

The Milton-Cheadle narrative moreover falls into the special category of a “shadow-text,” in which one version exists in contrapunital relationship to another, adopting a textual mode and revealing aspects of the journey and its participants that were probably not meant for publication to begin with. The classic “shadow-text” is Bronislaw Malinowski’s self-obsessed A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term (1967), published twenty-five years after his death, which revealed the famous anthropologist of Argonauts of the
Western Pacific (1922) as a lecherous hypochondriac who loathed the subjects of his study. Although the Diary may be an extreme case, travel-writing features many such companion texts and Canadian literature is no exception. Because a shadow-text may reveal unflattering or even scandalous aspects of a public person that the official record is eager to suppress (and Milton’s petulance but also his illness would have fallen into that category at the time The North-West Passage by Land was published), considerable sleuthing may be required to ferret the missing information out. One particularly complex case is that of George Simpson, Governor of the Hudson’s Bay Company, his wife Frances, and his country-wife Margaret Taylor. Simpson’s reports of his numerous travels, conducted at frenzied pace the length and breadth of HBC trade routes, including Peace River: A Canoe Voyage from Hudson’s Bay to Pacific . . . in 1828 (1872) and Fur Trade and Empire: George Simpson’s Journal. Remarks Connected with the Fur Trade in the Course of a Voyage from York Factory to Fort George and back to York Factory 1824–1825 (1931), belong to the classics of Canadian exploration and travel literature, as does his Narrative of a Journey round the World, during the Years 1841 and 1842 (1847) in pursuit of expanding HBC interests in the Sandwich Islands and Russia. His “Character Book,” with sharply observed sketches of the factors, traders, and clerks at York Factory and not intended for publication, did reveal an unofficial side of a closely guarded official when it appeared many years after his death, but it is his relationships with women that have been the darkest “shadows” in his texts. The “Journal of a Voyage from Montreal, thro’ the Interior of Canada, to York Factory on the Shores of Hudson’s Bay,” serialized in 1954 in the Beaver (a history magazine founded by the HBC in 1920), describes the journey to her new home of the eighteen-year-old Frances, the cousin whom Simpson married in 1830 while on a two-year leave in Britain. However, there is no written record by Margaret Taylor, a Métis who had borne Simpson two sons and whom he had left in the care of senior HBC employees while he was away with the understanding that their relationship would be resumed when he returned. But with Frances installed in the Governor’s mansion, Taylor was married off to voyageur Amable Hogue and tongues wagged: “The Govr’s little tit bit Peggy Taylor is . . . Married to Amable Hogue . . . what a downfall is here . . . from a Governess to Sow.”18 Taylor’s missing voice has since been supplied by her descendant, filmmaker Christine Welsh, whose documentary Women in the Shadows (1991) and memoir “Voices of the Grandmothers” (1991) are both subtitled “Reclaiming a Métis Heritage.”19 Some of the most stirring footage in Welsh’s film occurs when she is shown around the Governor’s house, taken to the flat rocks near York Factory where some of the HBC men, including George Simpson, carved their names, and when she looks around the
overgrown cemetery heaved up by the permafrost, with elaborate tombstones marking the “important” graves.

Welsh’s travels in search of her ancestor and her conversations with family members who do their best to explain their silences (or, in the case of one feisty aunt, insist on their right to refuse information), are an undertaking in “relational biography,” More specifically, they are part of an emerging genre of collective memoirs in which young authors and filmmakers research the story of their ethnic backgrounds by seeking out the “ghosts” that populate their families’ histories. The Chinese cooks and workmen that Cheadle and Milton saw in the interior of British Columbia and on the coast were often widely connected with other Chinese immigrants in North America and maintained strong relationships with their families in China. In Denise Chong’s *The Concubine’s Children* (1994) and filmmaker Colleen Leung’s *Letters from Home* (2001), researchers retrace the networks that their families maintained over two continents, the journeys that had to be undertaken, sometimes with decades in between, to fulfill obligations on both sides of the Pacific, and the difficulties that resulted from racist legislation like the Headtax and the Chinese Exclusion Act. The search may be complicated by the descendant’s lack of proficiency in the language but, as in Christine Welsh’s case, faces can be powerfully effective family “archives” over several generations. The irrefutable visual evidence family resemblance provides is surely one reason why this type of family memoir and the often extensive travel associated with it have been a favorite with filmmakers.

**Mails, railways, and canoes**

As the title of Colleen Leung’s film indicates, letters were an important means of maintaining family connections and numerous published travel reports have their origin in letters home. Given the vast distances between country of origin and Canada, not to mention those within Canada itself, letters and the speed with which they were delivered reflect on the state of the available communication network at any given time and on the numerous ways in which it could be interrupted. Marie de l’Incarnation (1599–1672), founder of the first Ursuline order in North America, wrote some 13,000 letters in the thirty-odd years she lived in New France. Many of these were official letters, commenting on her order’s missionary and educational work and soliciting support from the appropriate authorities, but she also maintained an extensive correspondence with members of her family in France, especially her son Claude, whom she had left behind in France at the age of eleven. The rhythms in her writing and receiving of letters were determined by the months when the St. Lawrence was open to receive ships, by the length of
time vessels were able to spend in port, and by the time her onerous duties allowed her to lavish on her private correspondence. Letters requiring a quick turnaround because a vessel had arrived late in the season, obliging it to depart in some haste to avoid the freeze-up of the river, usually meant that a question requiring a thoughtful response had to wait till the following year. The vicissitudes of transport also affected the way correspondents composed their letters. For particularly important correspondence, letter-writers sent several copies with different vessels, and the constant possibility that letters would go missing necessitated, at the beginning of each new letter, a provisional summary of previous exchanges in order to ensure that the chain of communication – often maintained with long gaps in between – was not broken. Two hundred years after Marie de l’Incarnation, letters from home remained a keen concern with Milton and Cheadle as well, especially as services were disrupted by political events. Thus, they are greatly disappointed when “the packet from Red River via Norway House & La Corne” arrives and “the letter boxes [contained] none for Milton or myself! The rascally Sioux the cause, I presume, for only 2 or 3 letters have reached here from Red River” (Cheadle, *Journal*, p. 107). A reminder of the extensive difficulties that attended the punctual delivery of letters to ships and remote outposts or to men working as voyageurs, an annotated edition of *Undelivered Letters to Hudson’s Bay Company Men on the Northwest Coast of America, 1830–57* (2003) also provides a richly varied chorus of voices from the people who are often absent from the official accounts, in particular members of the working class and lower-middle class. These letters (if successfully delivered) furthermore circulated valuable information that would have assisted people from these backgrounds in making up their minds about whether or not to contemplate emigration.

Lady Dufferin was more fortunate than Cheadle and Milton or any of the unfortunate correspondents in *Undelivered Letters*. On her arrival in Vancouver after traveling across the continent and along the Pacific coast, the perusal of forty letters, “so many from the children,” gave her “quite a headache,” although there are also occasions during the Dufferins’ tours when the Governor-General and his aides have to engage in frantic letter-writing to catch a departing ship. If *The North-West Passage by Land* helped promote the settlement of the West, the Dufferins’ tour of British Columbia in 1876 furthered the cause of those who wanted British Columbia to join the Confederation and to promote the building of a transnational railway to provide the necessary linkage. “At present the feeling here is British, but anti-Canadian, on account of the railroad, which can’t be made yet,” Lady Dufferin writes about their arrival in Victoria where the Governor-General “was obliged to refuse to go under [an arch]” with “Our Railroad or
Separation” written on it, although he recommended that turning the “S” into an “R” would solve an impasse in the protocol (My Canadian Journal, p. 200). A few years earlier, George Munro Grant, who served as secretary to Sir Sandford Fleming, engineer-in-chief of the Canadian Pacific Railway, produced *Ocean to Ocean: Sandford Fleming’s Expedition through Canada in 1872* (1873), reporting on Fleming’s travels west, by canoe, stage-coach, train, and every other conceivable means of transportation, to study a likely route for the transcontinental railroad. Fleming followed up with *England and Canada: A Summer Tour between Old and New Westminster* (1884), an assured and elegant narrative written in the knowledge that the plans sketched out in *Ocean to Ocean* had now come to fruition. This is not to say that train travel has always served the cause of Canadian unity. In his memoir *Baltimore’s Mansion* (2000), Wayne Johnston describes a train journey through Newfoundland with his passionately anti-Confederation father. The trip becomes a manic celebration of independence, doomed like the train itself which is about to yield to the more economical service by bus.

On their arrival in Canada, the Dufferins had set a maid to work fabricating a Canadian flag (“all suppose there must be a beaver and a maple-leaf in it” [My Canadian Journal, p. 2]), but there was no tentativeness in Lady Dufferin’s much-quoted description of fall in Tadoussac:

> The hills all round... are of the most lovely autumn colours, and, covered as they are with red and orange trees, they really look like flames in the distance, or like gigantic flower-gardens; for our trees are quite as brilliant as your best flowers, and if you can imagine your conservatory magnified a million times and spread over miles and miles of hill and dale, you will begin to understand how we do things in this Canada of ours. (pp. 25–6)

The description exudes the kind of panoramic grandeur that associates landscape with nationalism and was vigorously promoted by the Canadian Pacific Railway as the railroad neared completion. The CPR, especially Sir William van Horne, president (1888–99) and chairman of the Board (1899–1915), gave away free passes and commissions to artists. Painters like Lucius O’Brien and Frederic Marlett Bell-Smith took to the trains in the pursuit of majestic scenery, and some of the artists provided leading magazines like the *Week* with a running commentary on their impressions. Influenced by the American Hudson River School, these painters developed a grandiose aesthetic to go with the size of the country. These expeditions also provided an opportunity to use the camera, as an aide-mémoire to painters or as a handy substitute, resulting in such travel narratives as Lady Aberdeen’s *Through*
Canada with a Kodak (1893), which combined travel impressions with photographic snapshots.

The promotional activity of the CPR painters and the building of CPR hotels in the style of French châteaux in major scenic locations along the route of the railroad are closely connected to the advent of organized tourism that made it possible for travelers of a less adventurous inclination than Milton and Cheadle to see the country. The completion of Château Frontenac in Quebec was linked to the 1893 Columbian Fair in Chicago, and Quebec City was increasingly marketed as a substitute Europe and honeymoon destination for American couples. Here too, Lord Dufferin played a significant role. Appalled at the dilapidated state of the walls and gates of the old town, he had instigated their repair, but they had also been “improved” so as not to interfere with the traffic flow generated in part because the restoration was expected to enhance the city’s attractiveness to tourists. Subsequent Governors-General enthusiastically furthered the cause, so that at the time of the 1908 tercentenary of Champlain’s founding of Quebec, the Château Frontenac, the Dufferin Terrace in front of it, and the pictures que city surrounding them had become a flawless theatrical backdrop for the pageantry.25 Scenic spots like Niagara Falls were formalized as tourist attractions, a process facilitated by the descriptions that every visitor – from Father Louis Hennepin in the late seventeenth century to Anna Jameson on an 1830s visit to her estranged husband, attorney-general of Upper Canada – had provided of them, not to mention a “fungus” of tourist facilities (“Chinese pagoda, menagerie, camera obscura, museum, watch-tower, wooden monument, sea gardens, and ‘old curiosity shops’”).26 Like the carefully staged scenery of Quebec, Niagara Falls was also marketed as a site of Canadian and American confrontation because of its fortuitous proximity to Queenston Heights which allowed battlefield tourists “to hear the sound of guns mingling with the roar of the cataract at Lundy’s Lane” (Jasen, Wild Things, p. 38).

Inevitably, commodification of these places required the discovery of “untouched” wildernesses, such as the Muskoka region north of Toronto which rapidly became a highly developed place where urban dwellers could recuperate from their business in the city and employ Native guides to take them duck-shooting. As is typical for travel-writing with the advent of nineteenth-century organized tourism, narratives describing the sights appear side by side with others lamenting the environmental destruction necessary to make these sights accessible. With the wisdom of hindsight, scientific reports like Henry Youle Hind’s Narrative of the Canadian Red River Exploring Expedition of 1857 and of the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan Exploring Expedition of 1858 (1860) and The Papers of the Palliser Expedition (1857; publ. 1968)
may also be read as elegies for a vanishing world. Norman Henderson’s memoir *Rediscovering the Great Plains: Journeys by Dog, Canoe, and Horse* (2001) is infused with a good dose of nostalgia, but it also comes with some belligerently practical observations. The author is a senior policy advisor on resource and environmental management issues to the government of Saskatchewan, who has studied grasslands worldwide. As an experiment to research the conditions of historical travel through the prairies, Henderson makes three trips through the Qu’Appelle Valley by dog-and-travois, canoe, and horse-and-travois. Although the journey has its adventures and tense moments, its purpose is not extreme sports. The narrative takes the time “to travel through [the landscape] slowly, and as exposed to the elements as reasonably possible.”

It cites the observations of HBC men and other travelers through the prairies, looks at the impact of agriculture and the constitution of the grassland, studies animals and their habitats, and formulates some practical recommendations. The book comes with a scholarly apparatus, but it is also a spiritual autobiography leavened by self-irony.

Henderson warily reviews the “nation-building agenda that underlies the promotion of a canoe ideology” (*Rediscovering the Great Plains*, p. 67). He cites Prime Minister Trudeau’s essay “Exhaustion and Fulfillment: The Ascetic in a Canoe” (1944), and one might add Governor-General Adrienne Clarkson’s “mystical love of the land” which impelled her to ask in her inaugural speech, “what were Cavalier de la Salle, La Verendrye, Hearne and Mackenzie doing if not imagining this astonishing space?” and which made her promise “to travel this whole country by plane, train, car, canoe and kayak.” But there is an undercurrent of patriotism in *Rediscovering the Great Plains* as well, updated as global responsibility. Nation-building was certainly part of the agenda when a crew traveled the historical 3,283-mile *voyageur* route from North Saskatchewan to Montreal during the Centennial year. A similar feat was performed in 2002 when History Television – inspired by the success of the CBC’s *Canada: A People’s History* and *Pioneer Quest*, a reality television show simulating life among the pioneers – produced “Quest for the Bay,” a York boat trip from Lake Winnipeg to York Factory under nineteenth-century conditions.

**Travel to Europe**

When historian François-Xavier Garneau traveled to Europe in 1831, he spent twenty-one days on board the *Strathisla* in a crossing still to be considered brisk compared to Susanna Moodie’s nine-week crossing in the other direction the year after. On their journey to attend Queen Victoria’s coronation in 1838, however, Joseph Howe and Thomas Chandler Haliburton
were thrilled with a sighting of the *Sirius*, an English steamer moving along “in gallant style with the speed of a hunter,” which was expected to complete the crossing in twelve to fifteen days. A year later, Samuel Cunard of Halifax founded the British and North American Royal Mail Steam Packet Company, and in 1840 the first Cunard liner, the *Britannia*, made its way across the Atlantic. After 1850, excavations in the St. Lawrence and an extensive improvement of pilotage service and sounding systems eased the way for oceangoing vessels to Quebec and Montreal, both of which quickly overtook Halifax in their importance as ports. Hugh Allan of Montreal became one of the most prominent shipping magnates of the Empire and, like Cunard, he was knighted for his endeavors. By 1891, the fastest crossing was clocked at five days, sixteen hours, and thirty-one minutes. Although travel remained a privilege of the well-to-do for some time to come, the journey to Canada was no longer the inexorable one-way trip that it had been for many emigrants at the time of Marie de l’Incarnation and for many years after. Journeys to Europe were now undertaken to visit family, to conduct a pilgrimage associated with one’s cultural origins, and to ensure that the younger generation was exposed to the traditions that their elders held high. Thomas Stinson Jarvis, offspring of a prominent Loyalist family and later a well-known lawyer, produced a series of lively and precocious sketches describing his grand tour. His *Letters from East Longitudes: Sketches of Travel in Egypt, the Holy Land, Greece, and Cities of the Levant* (1875) give evidence of the classical and contemporary reading he had done as a graduate of Upper Canada College, of the prejudices of his class, and of his adolescent preoccupations with “half-clad women.” Jarvis traveled alone, as did William Henry Parker who in 1855 enjoyed upsetting his family back in Canada with reports of “bandits” in Italy whom he intended to fight with “colts [and] revolvers” should they become “bould” but other parents wisely kept an eye on their children’s progress at all times. Egerton Ryerson, chief superintendent for education, Canada West, supervised his son’s progress personally, requiring him to pursue a formidable program of language lessons, opera, and art appreciation. Ryerson himself intently studied the educational systems of France and Germany, and brought home stacks of paintings and plaster casts for use as educational material. Margaret Addison’s *Diary of a European Tour 1900* (1999) provides a rare feminine complement to Ryerson’s preoccupations. Addison, the first dean of Annesley Hall at Toronto’s Victoria College, studied women’s education in Switzerland and Great Britain, writing enthusiastically about Newnham and Girton Colleges and using the opportunity to form friendships that were to prove helpful in her profession. In addition to acquiring information and building a network, Addison was also traveling to improve her health and
recovered from a nervous disposition. In 1891, Sandford Fleming’s daughter-in-law Gertrude was overcome by neurasthenia while traveling through Europe on her honeymoon and consulted an avuncular Walter Cheadle (by then an advocate of women’s right to practice medicine) in London who prescribed burgundy and rest and took his patient for a drive. Canadians who could afford it consulted with European doctors and removed themselves to the hot climates of France, Italy, and North Africa in the hope of curing their tuberculosis when the salubrious environment of the Muskoka Lakes or the sanatoriums in the St. Lawrence Valley failed them.

Although Ryerson made some very unorthodox friendships during his travels, including one with an eccentric Librarian to the Pope, and was well known for his occasional extravagant spending on vintage wines and other luxuries, he was guided by his Methodism to account for his time and actions, as was Addison who throughout her life was given to keeping meticulous lists of her activities. She traveled to Europe on a tour led by William Withrow, a Methodist minister believed to have completed much of his copious reading while on horseback as a circuit rider, and a recipient of many of the Dominion’s highest honors for his contributions to education, publishing, and the arts, including his work with William Hay, a disciple of Augustus Welby Pugin. His letters to the Canadian Methodist Magazine were later gathered in A Canadian in Europe: Being Sketches of Travel in France, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Holland and Belgium, Great Britain and Ireland (1881), and he also wrote about early Christianity and the catacombs in his novel Valeria: The Martyr of the Catacombs; a Tale of Early Christian Life in Rome (1882), which fictionalized material from his travel sketches. Pedestrian as some of these writings may be, they are an important source of influential views on art in nineteenth-century Canada, especially if compared with similarly conservative views forwarded by French Canadian travelers, many of them priests, in the same time period. However, while some of the artists who traveled to Europe to work in its studios had imbibed the lessons of the likes of Withrow and his counterparts among French Canadian arbiters, others certainly did not. Sara Jeannette Duncan and Alice Jones both wrote slightly risqué novels about the artists’ milieu in Paris, and Jones, daughter of Lieutenant-Governor Alfred Gilpin Jones of Nova Scotia and sister of the painter Frances Bannerman, published some exceptionally elegant and nuanced sketches in the Week based on her extensive travels in France and Italy in the 1880s and 90s.

A welcome opportunity to compare Canada’s accomplishments with those of Europe and with those of the other members of the British Empire was provided by the international exhibitions that, from the Great Exhibition in 1851 onwards, served as powerful tourist attractions. In 1900 Addison
dutifully visited as many pavilions as she could, but she was disappointed by the disorganized Canadian display, consisting of “gold, minerals, fruits, cold storage, furs, birds and animals peculiar to the country, graniteware, stoves, agricultural implements, pianos, bicycles, leather, paper, pictures of the mountains, exhibits of the C.P.R. even to a sleeping car made up.” She did not go so far as the lawyer Thomas Langton who began to think of his country as a “hobbledehoy-nation” when he had been mistaken once too often as American or British, or the schoolteacher Andrew Spedon whose description of Canada’s display at the 1867 Paris exhibition turns into full-blown satire. Spedon tells of his painful search for the display and for his failure to locate anyone to give him directions, until by sheer accident he comes upon an “alcove” headed by the word “Canada in insignificant letters, surrounded by maple-leaves, and surmounted by the figure of a ‘Beaver’ chewing at a maple-branch.” While it found itself in close proximity to more glamorous members of the Empire, especially India, Canada was a regular disappointment to visitors from home, but there was rich compensation when Expo ’67 in Montreal proved a spectacular success, showing off the country’s accomplishments on its own home ground.

Other welcome opportunities to compare Canada’s public image to that of other nations were Queen Victoria’s Jubilees. Writing in *To London for the Jubilee* (1897), Kathleen ("Kit") Coleman, acerbic journalist of the *Globe* (later *Globe and Empire*), reported on the pageantry of the Diamond Jubilee in London, dutifully including the fashion notes that were expected of her although she was herself notorious for her unkempt appearance.

**Travel and war**

The time when tourists began to haunt Queenston Heights, digging “up the bones of the dead” to take away as relics (Jasen, *Wild Things*, p. 40) coincided roughly with the time when the Battle of Waterloo generated an entire battlefield industry. Throughout the nineteenth century, travelers on their way to the Holy Land detoured to the sights of the Crimean War, and others were barely dissuaded from pocketing unexploded shells from the ruins of Paris after the Franco-Prussian War. For Canadians, World War I was a nation-defining event in numerous ways, and battles like Vimy Ridge generated entire iconographies to go with them. A Michelin guide to the Front was available as early as 1919, and travel agencies specialized in affordable tours. For the unveiling of the Walter Allward memorial (which has since become the subject of Jane Urquhart’s novel *The Stone Carvers* [2001]) at Vimy Ridge 6,000 Canadians made the pilgrimage, and many brought back “[b]its of rubble, shards of glass, and bags of dirt” as souvenirs.
While some of these activities developed with hostile action scarcely over, some tourists found their movements suddenly and alarmingly curtailed when war broke out while they were on their travels. Passenger ships were immediately requisitioned for the troops, and Hugh Allan’s shipping company gained praise for the commendable speed with which he made his fleet available during the Crimean and Boer Wars. In 1914 Joseph Whitman Bailey, a lawyer from New Brunswick, spent a tense week or so on board a ship painted “the steel gray coloring of a ship of war” with all the lights dimmed. He was fortunate to have obtained passage at all. In order to replace the travel-writing that had become a staple of weekly leisure reading and in order to educate Canadians in their patriotic duty, the Canadian Magazine and Maclean’s turned to local tourism, alerting readers to the beauties of the West Coast and the prairies, and substituting some of its more “exotic” immigrants for the ones who could not be visited in their own countries. However, travel books are also major sources for the ethnic phobias that erupt during times of war. Two such works are Bruce Hutchison’s The Unknown Country: Canada and Her People (1942), winner of a Governor-General’s Award, and Dorothy Duncan’s Here’s to Canada! (1941), both cross-country journeys. A highly respected journalist, Hutchison produced an idiosyncratic narrative, alternating regionalist sketches with political journalism and high-toned lyrical reflections. His description of Vancouver at night, for instance, resembles Earle Birney’s poem “Vancouver Lights” (1941) in its pathos, and both Hutchison and Birney won Governor-General’s Awards in 1942 for work that evoked the effects of war on Canada. Hutchison’s book was very popular, going through thirteen printings between 1942 and 1965, with excerpts included in such patriotic anthologies as John D. Robins’s A Pocketful of Canada (1946) and McClelland and Stewart featuring the first paperback version in its “Canadian Best-Seller Library” in 1965. The book was revised in 1948 and some of the comments on the Chinese and Japanese have been muted, but what remains in the 1965 edition is still highly prejudiced. It is when he talks about the “Orientals” on the West Coast that the wartime propaganda that runs through the narrative as a not-so-subtle undercurrent is openly revealed. Expressing alarm at their “control” of gardening, fishing, and other businesses, Hutchison is convinced that “[t]here is no hope either of their absorption or their decline.”39 Duncan, American-born wife of the novelist Hugh MacLennan, also mixes genres in her book which presents Canada as an emergency tourist land for wartime Americans, combining regional sketches with information on how to get to places and what sorts of souvenir to buy. Writing about Halifax, she does offer interesting information on life in a wartime port, but when her itinerary reaches British Columbia, the guidebook disguise of the book is suddenly swept aside in
favour of unalloyed prejudice against the Japanese in particular who, although “these hard-working little men were needed as cheap labour in the building of the railroads,” are now a menace because “there are urgent war activities going on which cannot run the risk of being sabotaged or spied upon.”

The connection between war and travel was brought home powerfully during the attack on the World Trade Center in New York. Thousands of passengers stranded in Canada and their encounters with the locals in Gander, Newfoundland, and elsewhere were celebrated in newspaper articles by the likes of Stephen Jay Gould, in television specials, and in a number of commemorative books, including *The Day the World Came to Town: 9/11 in Gander, Newfoundland* and *A Diary between Friends*, both published in 2002. The travel section of the *Sunday New York Times*, generally the bulk of a doorstop, shriveled to minimal size for several weeks because the logistics of travel suddenly seemed insurmountable. One of the few travel essays that made it into publication on 22 September offered a railway journey through Canada as a safe and comforting alternative while 7 October brought a special on “America, Grandly Familiar.”

The 2003 war in Iraq provoked similar publications in Canada and the United States.

**Literary travel**

Many Canadian writers have published books about their travels around the world. The inward-gazing scholarship of the 1960s and 70s paid little attention to these narratives, but recent research has taken another look at Margaret Laurence’s writing about Ghana and Somalia, especially *The Prophet’s Camel Bell* (1963), at Daryl Hine’s charming if superficial notes on Cold-War Poland in *Polish Subtitles: Impressions from a Journey* (1962), and at P. K. Page’s reflections about her time as an ambassador’s wife in Rio de Janeiro in *Brazilian Journal* (1987). Diplomat Charles Ritchie, in *The Siren Years* (1974), writes of wartime duty in London’s Canada House, telling of assignations with a ballerina and lunches with “Sachie” Sitwell, Margot Asquith, and the Princess Callimachi. All of this still left enough leisure to admire “the white lilacs leaning over the garden wall at Apsley House.” Pierre Elliott Trudeau and Jacques Hébert’s *Deux innocents en Chine Rouge* (1961; translated as *Two Innocents in Red China*) has been mined for its biographical and political information, but deserves analysis as a piece of travel-writing. In her Governor-General’s Award-winning *Touch the Dragon: A Thai Journal* (1992), Karen Connelly writes about a year teaching English in Thailand, and language teaching is also one of the subjects in Gabrielle Bauer’s *Tokyo, My Everest: A Canadian Woman in Tokyo*.
Exploration and travel

The travel books of George Woodcock are legion, including *To the City of the Dead: An Account of Travels in Mexico* (1957) and *Faces of India: A Travel Narrative* (1964). Ronald Wright has also been prolific, with *Cut Stones and Crossroads: A Journey in the Two Worlds of Peru* (1984) and *Time among the Maya: Travels in Belize, Guatemala and Mexico* (1989) among his publications. Of particular note are the travel sketches in *Writing Away: The PEN Canada Travel Anthology* (1994), edited by Constance Rooke, with contributions by Daniel David Moses, Thomas King, George Elliott Clarke, and Rohinton Mistry which steadfastly return the gaze that tourists have directed at their forebears.

A complex and growing subcategory is the literature of travel by Canadian writers to their families’ homeland. Journalist Jan Wong’s bestselling *Red-China Blues* (1996) offers a *bildungsroman* of the author’s disillusionment with Maoism, while filmmaker Yi Sun-Kyung’s *Inside the Hermit Kingdom: A Memoir* (1997) is a bitter account of the author’s exposure to the regime of North Korea. A particularly accomplished work, Dionne Brand’s *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* (2001), moves between Canada, Trinidad, Europe, and Africa, combining travel-writing with memoir, history, linguistic study, and a dozen other genres. Drawing on her background in philosophy, history, education, and English, Brand provides brief essays in which she interrogates and thus revives terms like “migration” and “diaspora” that have become something of a cliché in postcolonial studies, losing much of their experiential poignancy in the process. Her approach is one of question and answer, with repeated runs at a topic or formulation and with provisional conclusions. Clarke Blaise and Bharati Mukherjee’s *Days and Nights in Calcutta* (1977), a relatively early example of such return journeys, describes the complications of cross-cultural marriage. The book has reappeared, with updated introductory comments by both authors, in the wake of the current interest in collaborative and ethnic autobiographical writing. Michael Ondaatje’s *Running in the Family* (1982) also belongs to this genre, although its inventiveness and crossovers into fiction put it in a category of its own.

Because their authors come from privileged backgrounds, however, neither Blaise/Mukherjee nor Ondaatje conveys the sense of exile that complicates the travels in the flood of recent books written by immigrants from Eastern European countries or by their descendants, such as Myrna Kostash’s *Bloodlines: A Journey into Europe* (1993), Eva Hoffman’s *Exit into History: A Journey through the New Eastern Europe* (1993), Irena Karafilly’s *Ashes and Miracles: A Polish Journey* (1998), Janice Kulyk Keefer’s *Honey and Ashes: A Story of Family* (1998), and Lisa Appignanesi’s *Losing the Dead* (1999). With the exception of Kostash who completed her travels before
the fall of the Wall, these books recount journeys long delayed by restrictions imposed by Eastern European communist regimes. Their purpose is wide-ranging: to be reunited with family the narrator barely knows, to visit a village or city conjured up in stories and photographs, and to deal with the traumas – often the Holocaust – that have forced their families to emigrate and that, as Karafilly poignantly relates in The Stranger in the Plumed Hat: A Memoir (2000), have been repressed until the onset of a personal crisis, such as Alzheimer’s, releases them. Historian Modris Eksteins’s Walking since Daybreak: A Story of Eastern Europe, World War II, and the Heart of Our Century (1999) has attracted attention for its experimental narrative which juxtaposes his prodigiously successful contemporary self (Upper Canada College student, Rhodes scholar, university professor) with the humiliations his family endured in fleeing from Latvia and settling in Canada. Bristling with scholarly footnotes that document in painful detail how impromptu changes in political expediency determined the lives of thousands, including that of his family, Eksteins’s book dwells with bitterness on terms like “Displaced Persons” that convey their full impact only to those who have lived through the experience.

These visits are hazardous because they can expose collusion and guilt that the traveler is not prepared for, and they open difficult questions about ethnicity in Canada. Janice Kulyk Keefer’s response, in “The Sacredness of Bridges: Writing Immigrant Experience,” to Himani Bannerji’s blanket criticism of East Europeans illustrates the resulting conflicts particularly well. For her part, Myrna Kostash is a traveler who resolutely confronts the difficult personal consequences when ethnic identities shift between those of victim and victor. She is equally resolute about de-romanticizing globalism. Instead, she calls “for a rearticulated idea of the common cause” which is all the more necessary because “the new capitalism [is] the one ‘meta-narrative’ that has not been deconstructed.” From its beginnings, Canadian travel-writing has provided ways of drafting and continually revising the meaning of Canada, and the recent wealth of publications and the discussions about them indicate that the process is far from completed.

NOTES

Exploration and travel


10. Samuel Hearne, *Journey from Prince of Wales’s Fort in Hudson’s Bay to the Northern Ocean in the Years 1769, 1770, 1771, and 1772* (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1911) p. 179.


31. See William Henry Parker Papers, National Archives of Canada.
32. Gertrude Fleming Papers, National Archives of Canada.
34. Thomas Langton Papers, National Archives of Canada.
42. See *Canadian Literature* 174 (Autumn 2002), a special issue on travel, for recent scholarship.
