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John Walker

"Scotland is a Kingdom of the Mind":
The Novels of Frederick Niven



The name of Frederick Niven is not one that appears frequently in contemporary discussion of Scottish literature, although in his day he was one of the most prolific and popular of novelists. In a recent article in *Books in Scotland* dealing with the so-called "Glasgow novel," Niven's name appears as one in a long catalogue of writers who have depicted the Glasgow scene.¹ It is one of the many ironies of Scottish literature that there is an important literary award named after Frederick Niven, whose work is scarcely remembered today in his own country.

It is also ironic, I should add, that I came to Niven indirectly, even accidentally, many years ago during my research on R. B. Cunninghame Graham. As I was ploughing through the voluminous correspondence of Graham, trying to decipher his barbarous handwriting, I chanced upon letters to and from Niven. Since then I have pursued the Graham-Niven connection not only in the letters but elsewhere. For example, Niven dedicated his novel *Triumph* to Graham,² who also appears as a friend and correspondent of the hero of Niven's last Canadian novel, *The Transplanted* (1944). In the 1930s Niven was already writing literary articles

¹Edwin Morgan, "Glasgow Writing," *Books in Scotland*, No. 15 (Summer 1984), 4-6.

²London, 1935.

about Graham's works.³ Apart from the Scottish link, Niven has a Latin-American bond with Graham, since he was born in Chile and spent his childhood there. William New talks even of the four landscapes of Frederick Niven, incorporating England.⁴ However, it seems to me that Niven's contribution to literature is best judged by his rendering of the two worlds (geographical and fictional) which matter most to him and which he knew and described best—Scotland and Canada.

I do not intend to describe in detail the life of Frederick Niven, since I think that a writer should be judged by his artistic output, not by his biographical attractions. One of the reasons that Cunninghame Graham has not yet been fully appreciated as a writer is that critics have tended to concentrate on the "character" to the neglect of the artist. Besides, much of Niven's life, like Graham's, is to be found in his writings. It might be useful, however, to provide the barest of details, to give something of the background of the man against which we might better judge the writer.

Frederick John Niven was born in Valparaiso, Chile, in 1878 of Scottish parents. At an early age he was taken home to Scotland to be educated at Hutcheson's Grammar and later at the Glasgow School of Art. After working at several different jobs, including library assistant in both Glasgow and Edinburgh, he went to Canada in 1899, wandered around the West, and worked in railway and lumber camps in British Columbia. This provided him with material for a series of articles for the *Glasgow Weekly Herald* and other publications. These same travels were also to provide the background, ideas and plots for his Canadian novels written some forty years later.

Now married, he returned to Canada in 1912, commissioned to write further articles on the Canadian West. Apart from a stint in England during World War I with the Ministry of Food and the Ministry of Information (where his superior was John Buchan), Niven dedicated his entire life to writing, contributing to the *Glasgow Herald*, the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the *Morning Leader*, and other such publications. He went to Canada again in 1920 with his English wife for a visit, and decided to settle there, making his home near Nelson, British Columbia. In a letter of 1954 to John Dunlop (at the Baillies Library in Glasgow), his wife reveals that it

³Frederick Niven, "Cunninghame Graham," *Library Review*, III (Winter 1932), 376-81; reprinted in his volume of memoirs, *Coloured Spectacles* (London, 1938), pp. 133-41.

⁴William New, "A Life and Four Landscapes: Frederick John Niven," in *The Canadian Novel in the Twentieth Century*, ed. George Woodcock (Toronto, 1975), pp. 15-27. This is one of the few general studies of Niven's work. See also more recently Jeanie MacNair Wagner's article "The Two Worlds of Frederick Niven," *Scottish Tradition*, XIII (1984-85), 4-13.

was ill health that forced him first to try Canada on his doctor's orders, and that it was the same ill health that sent him back in 1920:

We only meant to stay six months, to get away from the fogs and rains of Britain, but during that time several magazines for which he had commissions closed down. At the same time the CPR arranged for him to do a series of impressions of post-war Canada and an American magazine gave him a contract for two serial stories a year. So we saw the first year through comfortably without one sign of bronchitis or rheumatism both of which had been chronic at home. For a time that lasted but eventually the old heart-trouble that had prevented him swimming when he was at Hutcheson's asserted itself and what with doctors' bills and so-forth there was never enough to take us back.⁵

Whatever the motivation, then, he stayed on in British Columbia earning his living by the pen till his death there in 1944. His wife was to survive him till the late 1960s.

I know that modern critics would insist that it is the text that counts, and I agree that one should not confuse fiction and biography. However, there is no doubt Niven put a lot of his life into his writings. In fact, I am sure that the literary detective type of critic would have a field day interpreting Niven's novels as *romans clef*, for there is much meat here for the "erotic motive in literature" scholars, and others of that ilk. One might apply to Niven's novels what his friend Cunninghame Graham affirmed in the Apologia to *His People*: "Still I believe, that be it bad or good, all that a writer does is to dress up what he has seen, or felt, and nothing real is evolved from his own brain, except the words he uses, and the way in which he uses them. Therefore it follows that in writing he sets down (perhaps unwittingly) the story of his life."⁶ Although there is some truth in this remark, it would tend to play down the artistic qualities in Niven's novels, just as it has led to an underestimation of the aesthetic qualities in Graham's own work. It is only when photographic reality is filtered through the lens of Art that it transcends the mere geographic, biographic and photographic plane, and is raised to the rank of literature. No less important for the artistic process, in both Graham and Niven, is the phenomenon of aesthetic distancing—and Niven was often far removed, both temporally and spatially, from the events, people and places that he was describing.

The two worlds that he lived in most were the two worlds that he described best. Of course, he wrote about the contemporary Canadian scene

⁵This letter, undated but written late in 1954, is in the Mitchell Library, Glasgow.

⁶*His People* (London, 1906), p. x.

which he observed and experienced, but he also wrote about a Canada of the past. Even more successfully he described Scotland, "a kingdom of the mind," especially during the last quarter century of his life when he was far removed from home. Even when he was writing about Canada of the past in his historical novels, it was from the point of view of the Scottish immigrants who could not forget the mother country, and who had to return at least once to the old country from which they had fled or been evicted.

If 1920 seems to be the key year from the Canadian point of view, Niven continued to write novels with a Scottish setting right up till his death—almost a novel a year for forty years. Although his Scottish fiction and his later Canadian novels were generally of a reasonably high quality, Niven was often an uneven writer. Forced to churn out pot-boilers to keep the wolf from the door—literally in the wilds of British Columbia—he wrote to meet publishers' deadlines and to please an indiscriminating public. In so doing he produced a series of good yarns, adventure stories and romances about the old West, featuring the pioneers, the miners, the lumber camps and the railways, with not very profound plots, and containing one-dimensional characters usually called Slim or Hank, and other such varmints. These stories were based on his early travels and his boyhood reading of the adventures of *Deadwood Dick* and the like. Works of his including *The Lost Cabin Mine* (1908), *Hands Up* (1913), *The Wolfer* (1923) and *Treasure Trail* (1923) originally appeared in serial form in American newspapers.

His Scottish stories, written before and after his final departure to Canada, are generally much more solid and better crafted, with less tendency to facile plot, coincidence and flat characterization. Before he left for Canada he had already written *Ellen Adair* (1913); *Justice of the Peace* (1914), which many, including his wife, consider his best novel; *Two Generations* (1916); and *A Tale that is Told* (1920). In the 1920s, when he was trying to settle down in the New World and make his mark in American literary circles, there was little Scottish literature written by Niven. It is no wonder that he complained about his isolation and the disadvantages of living far from the heart of the literary world and being forgotten by the reviewers. One must remember that he had been a friend of Graham, I. A. Richards to whom he later dedicated *The Flying Years*, and others. He had been favorably reviewed in the *Times Literary Supplement*, the *Sunday Times* and elsewhere by Hugh Walpole and Christopher Morley (who both wrote prefaces for *Justice of the Peace*), Rebecca West, Katherine Mansfield, Compton Mackenzie, H. E. Bates, and many others.

However, from his exile in British Columbia in the 1930s he wrote some of his best Scottish novels—proof of my aforementioned point about aesthetic distancing. These include *The Three Marys* (1930), *The Paisley*

Shawl (1931), *The Staff at Simsons* (1937). If one were to read Niven merely as a painter of customs and times, the result would be fruitful indeed. His description of the Glasgow scene—the drapery warehouses in Ingram Street, the message boys "jooking" up vennels, closes and pends, sneaking into the Mitchell Library, the Art Gallery, and the Glasgow School of Art in the time of Francis Newberry—is all beyond compare. Niven had a great facility for remembering and recording details which were the stuff of a past way of life—Miss Cranston's tearooms, the papierie in St. Enoch Square, Porteus' Bookshop in Exchange Square, the period figures dressed for their time at the beginning of the century, the social life and the bustle of the Glasgow docks. Niven captured it all perfectly. In the aforementioned 1954 letter Mrs. Niven speaks thus: "When he was writing *The Staff at Simsons* (1937) his hands frequently would be wet as if they had been in water. One one occasion, looking very dazed, he said, 'I have seen the pigeons in Ingram Street...' and he really had. He dictated a lot and at such times one could see him practically reporting what he saw before his eyes—very like an artist at a drawing."

Most of the material for his Scottish novels is autobiographical. Niven was the apprentice of *Justice of the Peace*, working in the drapery business but much more interested in art; he was also the bookseller of *A Tale that is Told*, and so on. It is mildly interesting to read the novels in the light of his autobiographical reminiscences in *Coloured Spectacles* (1938), and to see just how much of his life he had put into his fiction. We know that, like his fictional creation Martin Moir of *Justice of the Peace*, he always wanted to be an artist, and that during his reluctant apprenticeship in the drapery business he attended evening classes to be a pattern-designer. His foreman used to say, he recalls: "Freddy, the plain fact is ye dinna gie a spittle for your work." The fact that he went into something useful and practical like pattern-designing instead of art was a concession to the strong will of his mother and her Calvinistic outlook. In *A Tale that is Told* the mother tries to persuade her son to devote himself to applied art. These themes of maternal influence and Calvinism, which keep recurring like a leitmotif throughout his novels, are the problems of Niven's own life. As a boy he had escaped the Calvinistic confines and maternal inhibitions through his reading of adventure literature, dreams and imaginations, and, given to solitude, through long walks on the outskirts of Glasgow, and Edinburgh where his family later moved. If all this were just autobiographical, it would be only mildly interesting as but one more personal manifestation of the son-versus-mother struggle and religious imposition. However, Niven has raised these dilemmas to a level that is above the purely autobiographical in that his problems, which he transliterates to his characters in novels like those mentioned above and in *Dead Men's Bells*

(1912), *Two Generations* (1916), *Ellen Adair* (1913), but especially *Justice of the Peace* (1914), are the problems of his time and generation. It is very significant that almost all the examples of Calvinism and its pernicious influence appear in the novels written after his first trip to Canada and before his final return in 1920. The escapist, wanderlust element in reaction to the restrictions of his Calvinistic upbringing, developed in literary terms and became the therapeutic exorcism of the novels of the second decade. This was matched in physical and personal terms by the great leap, or the great escape, to British Columbia in 1920, and a new way of life in the New World, far from the limitations of the narrow Scottish upbringing and the provincial/parochial attitude that prevailed in those times.

Having taken the giant step of leaving Scotland forever, at least physically, Niven found in British Columbia that sense of openness and liberty that kept recalling him to the West:

What is the lure? It is a sense of freedom. It is the pines mounting up the steep hill, and the smell of the pines and the quiet under them.... It is the rank tea, tasting like nectar after working in the woods.... It is the lonely call of loons in the hush before twilight, when the grasshoppers all suddenly cease to chirp... It is the clear air that lets the eyes roam over great spaces. It is the moon rising to silhouette a ridge of firs and light their tips all down the slope and the wonder of it all getting into one's blood.⁷

For a decade he was to get to know intimately this new territory, this promised land, and if not his best period qualitatively from the fictional point of view, the 1920s gave him the opportunity to write many of the non-fiction pieces which were later put to good use in the Canadian historical novels of the 1930s and 1940s. He travelled extensively in British Columbia and the other western provinces, met the Indians, learned their sign language, went to the Yukon and even to Hawaii. All of this is recorded in *Coloured Spectacles*. Non-fiction books to emerge out of this period were *The Story of Alexander Selkirk* (1929), one of the sources for his novel *Mine Inheritance; Canada West* (1929); and later, in collaboration with the artist W. H. Phillips, *Colour in the Canadian Rockies* (1937); as well as articles for the *Canadian Magazine*, *Dalhousie Review*, *Saturday Night* and elsewhere. He also wrote two volumes of verse, *Maple Leaf Songs* (1917) and *A Lover of the Land and Other Poems* (1925). There is no doubt that Niven had studied his subject well, as his knowledge and love of the West shines through. All of this was good for his fiction in general and especially for the later Canadian historical novels of the 1930s and 1940s.

⁷"The Call of the West," *The Canadian Magazine*, LV (July 1920), 224.

The fact that his Canadian novels are written in the historical genre indicates a subtle difference in his literary attitude as expressed in these novels. Much more at home and familiar with the Scottish psyche, in *Justice of the Peace*, *Mrs. Barry*, *Ellen Adair* and the like, Niven writes what one might label psychological fiction—or perhaps even the metaphysical novel, which manifests the author's view of life and his existential outlook, which treats of the human condition, of life and death and other essentials, set against the Scottish background, of course, with an underlying philosophical commentary, but transcending the purely regional. In the Canadian novel Niven is less sure of what constitutes a Canadian or the Canadian essence, and thus needs the historical point of departure or the peg on which to hang certain events, characters, narrative, etc. Another feature, perforce, of the Canadian novel is the introduction of the Scottish figure, albeit in the foreign setting, with whom he is much more at ease. In a sense, then, in his last novels as in his first, Frederick Niven is still wrestling with the problem of the Scottish character and spirit, but transported to an alien environment. Although *The Flying Years*, *Mine Inheritance* and *The Transplanted* are quite interesting and effective documents, and although they still contain much of the power and the beauty of Niven's descriptive, poetic language, it seems to me that they do not quite hang together nor do they hit the mark in the way that the best of his Scottish works do.

The Flying Years (1935—the only Niven novel to be included in the New Canadian Library series)⁸ is the earliest and perhaps the best of what I shall call his Canadian trilogy about the opening up the Canadian West, from the first settlements of the nineteenth century right up to the early years of the twentieth century. In the vast canvas of the novel, with all its historical detail, the human story is basically a simple one. Having been evicted from its highland home in Brendan, the Munro family goes to Canada and settles in the Red River district (c. 1856) where Mr. and Mrs. Munro soon die, exiles from the hills of home. Their son Angus, going farther west, joins the Hudson's Bay Company, marries an Indian girl, Minota, who dies of smallpox leaving their son motherless. Angus returns to Scotland with adventurer/entrepreneur Sam Douglas to raise funds for setting up a western transport company. Unsuccessful, he takes a job in a bookstore in Edinburgh (cf. Niven) where he meets several Indians from a New World exhibition—incentive enough for Angus to return to the Canadian West where he works as an Indian agent and marries Fiona

⁸Published originally by Collins (London) in 1935, *The Flying Years* was republished in the New Canadian Library series, with an Introduction by Jan de Bruyn (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974). All quotations are from the NCL edition.

Fraser, whom he had known in the early years of the Red River settlement. With the passage of the "flying years" he sees his former unscrupulous partner, now Sir Samuel Douglas, making his fortune, whilst Angus's son dies in the 1914-18 War. At the end of the novel the hero is left only with the memories of his adopted land, and of Scotland, a kingdom of the mind which he can never forget.

The Flying Years is not a great novel, but it is interesting in that Niven had done what few Canadian writers had done before him, tell the vast story of the West in fictional form. Of course, the novel has its defects, as the few critics who have treated it in Canada clearly saw. Edward McCourt recognizes its episodic nature and its lack of judicious selection of incidents and impressions.⁹ The characterization is not of the best, nor is the plot really memorable. Jan de Bruyn, who provides the eight-page introduction to the New Canadian Library edition, is so critical of the novel that one wonders why he chose to do it in the first place.

Although not a great work of fiction, then, *The Flying Years* is useful and interesting as an historical novel which records the passing of events that go to make up an early part of Canadian history. In this sense, it is a valuable document. In fictional terms it is less satisfactory. Although the characters seem to be dwarfed by the historical events and geographical background, Niven's novel contains the seeds of some interesting personages, not least the protagonist Angus Munro who is worthy of our attention not because he is a Canadian figure but because of his abivalence, torn between the old country and his adopted land. Here Niven transcends the purely personal or even national in his depiction of the conflict of the immigrant seeking to escape the corruption and abuses of the Old World. Munro, although distant from it, is never quite able to expel from his mind the memories, the nostalgia for the past. In Chapter 1, as the evicted family looks at the shell of their destroyed highland home for the last time, Angus Munro keeps repeating: "Scotland, Scotland. Just a few sad songs and old ballads! That's all. I see it getting worse every year. God knows what the end will be. And yet—and yet—we'll take Scotland with us: a kingdom of the mind" (p. 14). Later, despite the success and the happiness of his family in the New World, his mind turns again to home:

They have the sun, they have all this, and they love it. Yes, they love it, said Angus, and thought how he had come to love it also—and yet growing older, longed again to see Brendan and the loch with inverted mountains and the silver passage of reflected gulls in its veneered darkness, and the sunlight slipping off Ben

⁹*The Canadian West in Fiction* (Toronto, 1970), pp. 42-55.

Chattan. His heart was sick sometimes with such memories, but memory of the eviction (unforgettable) and recollection of the Ettricks' minds and ways allayed homesickness. His Scotland was no place on which he could set foot and feel beneath his tread, but a country of the mind at once definite and unsubstantial—as a song, an old ballad, sung and dying in the air. (p. 203)

Angus makes a final pilgrimage to his homeland and visits the old territory—but returns to Canada, convinced that this is where he should live with his Canadian family and friends. And yet, the ghost is never completely laid. In the last pages of the novel, at the age of eighty, propelled by memory and music, "He thought of a sea loch of Scotland, with a sense of instability, a sickness under his heart. He had no place—no place. There was no ground under his feet. A faintness came to him.... It would be *nice*, he considered, to live in one's own country. Still he had grown to love this one..." (p. 252). The agonizing of Angus Munro about roots and transplanting, displacement and resettling, leaving and returning, is a normal feeling amongst immigrants. What makes it convincing and compelling is Niven's artistic rendering of the common experience.

The Flying Years is a Canadian novel, but it is also very much a novel about the Scots, their wishes and desires, their fears and longings, their hopes and prayers. In fact, Mrs. Niven in her correspondence confirms that "he was never more of a Scotsman than when he wrote that book." She goes on to say: "He was often homesick for Scotland and he did truly have Scotland with him. There is a lot of Frederick Niven in *The Flying Years*'Scotland is a country of the mind' Angus Munro thought, and it became as it were a running theme through the book" (letter to Dunlop).

It is also a leitmotif of Niven's second novel, *Mine Inheritance* (1940), dedicated to John Murray Gibbon, which intensifies much of what he said and did in *The Flying Years*. Many of my foregoing points, both negative and positive, can be applied equally to this novel. Also set in the days of the Red River settlement of Lord Selkirk, although a little earlier (1811), the action takes place over a twenty-year period. The hero David Baxter goes from Paisley to the Red River colony to serve as secretary to Miles MacDonnel, the governor. He marries a beautiful halfbreed Indian, the daughter of a Scottish fur trader known as Court Nez (who turns out to be David's uncle who long before had abandoned wife and family responsibilities in Scotland). When David's Indian wife conveniently dies (as in *The Flying Years*), he marries the young Chisholm girl Mairi, who had always loved him in the early days of the settlement, and she looks after his baby. In the meanwhile, he participates actively and heroically in the struggle of the colonists against the North West Company and their halfbreed allies. From the historical point of view, the novel ends on a peaceful note with the amalgamation of the North West Company and the Hud-

son's Bay Company, an alliance which brings to an end a period of unrest and persecution for the settlers.

Since there are not so many years to fly past, and since they do not fly past quite so quickly as in the first novel, *Mine Inheritance* is written on a more manageable scale. As an historical novel it is superior to *The Flying Years* in that Niven has manifestly done his research, and includes, to prove it, a massive bibliography of almost one hundred items examined for the purpose of writing the novel. If more accurate historically, *Mine Inheritance* is inferior from the human and artistic points of view, in that the characters are poorly portrayed. As always, the more interesting characters are Scottish—like the fur trader Court Nez, and MacDonald of Garth of the Northwesters. The protagonist, David Baxter, however, does not seem capable of escaping the welter of historical facts and data to emerge as a life-like figure of flesh and blood. Unable to transcend the historical mass of details, he never touches us in a way that even Angus Munro does, for all the defects of *The Flying Years*, despite the autobiographical tone of the first-person narrative which in theory ought to render it more personal and more convincing. (It should be noted that Niven, the conscious artist here, rewrote the whole novel from the third to the first person for the express purpose of making it more subjective, more analytical, more psychological.)¹⁰

Withal, *Mine Inheritance*, flawed as it is, is the most solid contribution that Niven has made to the Canadian historical novel, replete as it is with accurate and faithful recording of events. However, I think that it is this very desire for historical veracity which vitiates the human element of the novel, whose cardboard figures never quite rise beyond the morass of disputes, treaties, protests, skirmishes, battles and political skull-duggery that seemed to characterize early nineteenth-century Canadian history. Although it has the occasional skilful passage and several felicitous moments, especially Niven's handling of the natural descriptions of the Western landscape, it lacks the sparkle, the liveliness, the humanity, even the typical Niven ambivalence. If *Mine Inheritance* fails, it does so because, dare one say it, it is *too* Canadian, with not enough of the Scottish character, however dispiriting that may be.

The Transplanted, published posthumously in 1944, treats once again of the Scots in exile, this time a voluntary exile—in this case in British Columbia at the start of this century. Although obviously less historical than its two Red River predecessors, *The Transplanted* makes an interesting contribution to the history of the Far West—the advent of progress

¹⁰W. H. New, p. 25. The manuscripts are preserved in the University of British Columbia Library.

and civilization as they affect the small lumber and mining communities, an integral part of the growth of modern Canada.

The hero of the novel is Robert Wallace, a Glasgow man, a civil engineer who reached via Montreal the small British Columbia town of Camp Elkhorn, before it became Elkhorn City, and finally sophisticated enough to be just plain Elkhorn, where Wallace works for the Laurentian Mining Company. Marrying the boss's daughter, Wallace buys profitably for the company and by dint of good Scots common sense, business acumen and hard work, sees his own successful career paralleled in the growth of the town, with its motor cars, railway, and other manifestations of progress. Inextricably tied up with the life of the Wallaces is the career of his horse-loving foreman, Jock Galbraith, another Glasgow man from the other side of the tracks, in this case from the Gorbals. His ill-starred marriage to the abandoned, wretched Vancouver waitress, Marion Masters, and her infidelity with the no-good, woman-beating varmint Max Harker represent the other side of the coin. Marion's death, Jock's murder of Harker, and Wallace's perjurious defense of his foreman are not the best examples of Niven's writing, but the surviving Wallaces and Jock live on happily ever after in their new situation.

Niven died before revising *The Transplanted*, and there is no doubt that there are defects of structure, style and characterization. For example, the "two men of Glasgow" theme of Books I and IV does not quite come off, since the secondary intrigue of Jock's relations with Marion is undoubtedly a subplot in both senses of the word. Although the novel is mildly interesting as an account of observed reality—one remembers that Niven had travelled this region as a young man during the very decade portrayed in the novel—and for the descriptions of mining and pioneer life, Indians, Chinese laundries and cafes, *The Transplanted* smacks of the potboilers of Niven's early career, but which he tries to raise to an artistic level by an historical dimension that is grafted on rather than infused.

The two attributes that make *The Transplanted* worthy of our attention are Niven's sense of, and contribution to, history, however defectively it may be depicted, and the role of the Scottish exile, his ambivalence and his motivation. That it is an historical novel and thus represents a stage in Niven's fictional development is obvious from the words placed in Wallace's mouth: "I wish I'd lived in the days of the early explorers.... Just to have been able to do something for this country, something big, something permanent. They thought of our future. We think of their past. The expression recurred in his mind that history was of the past, that he had come too late to have any connection with the story of the land."¹¹ Gal-

¹¹*The Transplanted* (London, 1944), p. 38. All quotations are from this edition.

braith, realizing that one does not have to write tomes full of history in order to make history or even to write a historical novel, replies: "You—just as much as your David Thompson and your Simon Fraser, your Sir Alexander Mackenzie and Sir George Simpson—you are part of the history of the West." Wallace, seeing the lights of his city shining, hearing the locomotive whistles sounding and the night freights hauling ore cars from neighboring West Fork to the smelter, finally seems to convince himself of what was obvious to his friend: "By God, you're right. I never thought of it that way. I have been part of it. I am part of it. And so are you. We've worked together and we'll work together again" (p. 307).

Tied up with Wallace's sense of history, and his sense of duty and responsibility to his new land, is his sense of Scottishness. Robert Wallace is a Scot, conscious and proud of it:

In public and private life he was a Scot still. On Burns Night, the Scotsmen of the valley always had him in the chair—and among his bedside books were the poems of Dunbar. When the people talked to him of Sir Walter Scott he responded in kind, cudgelling his memory for scenes and incidents they mentioned—and among his bedside books was John Galt's *Annals of the Parish*. He had early training in keeping his own counsel when books were talked of (p. 177).

Although the Scottish element is still very strong in Wallace, one senses in *The Transplanted* Niven's swan song, almost a feeling of acceptance, of reconciliation, of contentment, of having come to terms with the dual personality of the Scottish exile. There is little of the agonizing of Angus Munro from *The Flying Years*. If Scotland is a kingdom of the mind for Robert Wallace, it is not one that tortures him constantly. Unlike Munro, he left Scotland of his own free will. In this novel Niven also tackles the problem of why the Scots leave home, for Canada in this case, in a discussion between Robert and his dour stay-at-home brother Alex, during Robert's only visit home. Without rancor or bitterness Wallace explains why Scots leave: "One reason is because Scotland can't support them. That is to consider the question from the practical point of view alone, without touching on any other" (p. 242).

However, the practical consideration was not the only one, as Wallace (and Niven I am sure) was to admit in his various self-examinations. As Wallace, faced with his mother's admonition not to get too big for his boots, recalls that his youthful rambles on the moors had been made "in a quest for freedom, and from relief from shackles, and that his departure from Scotland had been at the same urge," (p. 244) he realizes, like Niven, that he had never admitted it so frankly, even to himself. Thus, in his last novel Niven comes full cycle to the early problems of the Scottish

novels—the confines of Calvinism, an inhibiting mother, and a love-hate relationship with the land and the people that had formed him. Constantly questioning himself as to whether he was a sentimentalist, in the belittling or disparaging sense of the word, displaying an "emotion of affection he had for a land in which he had no wish to live," (p. 145) Wallace seems to have reconciled himself at the end of the novel with his dual citizenship. Rather than being bitterly chauvinistic, which is not the same thing as patriotic, he sums up his own feelings in this dictum: "A citizen of the world was not a man without a country" (p. 245).

Wallace's problem, like Niven's, however, is rooted in the Scottish/Canadian issue. Like "the thousand dollar cure," as it used to be called, Wallace's trip back home helps him to sort out things in his own mind: "On his second departure from the homeland he had the feeling of leaving home for home. A duality of a different sort from the duality already noted in him at times took hold of him then. He was the unwilling exile looking back on a receding shore. He was the willing exile looking beyond the sea to a country that had adopted him, that he had adopted" (p. 245). It is significant that the title of the novel stresses the idea of transplantation and not exile and transplants generally flourish in their new earth.

Although defective structurally and stylistically, and obviously unfinished and unrevised, *The Transplanted* has many good moments when Niven clearly demonstrates his poetic skills by painting a fine landscape, for example, that ends thus:

There were electrical discharges in the air, threats of storm that ended only in a crash like the rending of steel or one terrific blow of legendary Vulcan's hammer. There were frightened silverings of birches and cotton poplars in sultry winds, presaging storms that kept detonations and echoes rumbling hour-long and ended in deluges that filled the nostrils with the smell of wet, warm earth. Then came days of rain. Mists crept along the hillsides and wavered on currents of air into high ravines. A period followed when it could not be said the sky was cloudy. Wontedly their ceiling was high, blue space, but there was no sky for a while. The days were gray, neither shadow nor sunlight in the woods. There were just the trees—brooding, sombre. (p. 235)

Here he succeeds in capturing a season:

Indian summer came and lingered. Geese came from the sloughs and departed from the south. There was an invigorating snap in the air at night. The Wallaces went up to the Bird's Eye for one more look at the grandeur there before winter came and found that the lake was showing traces of ice. Films of it were along the edges like thin glass. Stoves in the bunk houses at mine and concentrator were lit. The marmots had gone underground for the year.

They had just returned to the valley when the peaks were silvered with the first fall of snow but still at mid-day, in the sunshine, dragon flies showed again, shuttling to and fro among the rushes and an occasional bumblebee bumbled by. (p. 236)

This is good descriptive writing, but Niven's inability to revise the novel before publication is revealed in the formal flaws of punctuation and a style less polished than one finds in Niven's best work. However, for Wallace, as for Niven, the Canadian landscape, not to mention the Canadian land, had begun to captivate him: "Sagebrush, not yet in bloom, flourished there and as they rode along, with the trampling of the horses its aromatic odour rose frequently—another magical scent for Wallace. He rode there in a controlled, quiet ecstasy. This land was taking hold of him" (p. 39).

Although clearly not "the great Canadian novel," *The Transplanted* is important not just for its valuable contribution to the texture of Canadian history, not just for its beautiful descriptions of the Western landscape, but also for its treatment of the profound question of a man's existence, his soul-searching, the probing and the meaning of his past life, and the vital decision as to his future and where he should spend it. Wallace at least had the pleasure, denied to many (including Niven?), of making his own choice and enjoying the thrill of reconciliation as he faced his new life in this new chosen land:

The first flurry of snow, or sleet, had gone overnight and the sun shone in a cloudless sky—Indian summer in the valley. High up in the cleft of the west fork one peak showed, a white cone, and all along the upper ranges was whiteness. Winter had come up there but only there. Lower down was still the ruddy green of pine and fir, here and there among them plumes of gold where small stands of tamaracks were touched by frost.

This was the beginning of a new day. (pp. 309-10)

Thus Niven concludes *The Transplanted* with a euphoric ending which is a new beginning for Robert Wallace. One can only hope that Wallace's joy in his new land reflects something of Niven's own search for a fusion, or at least a reconciliation, of the two worlds that formed not only his life but also his literary career.

Frederick Niven never reached the top rank of either Scottish or Canadian literature, and I am not suggesting that he should have. He is, however, one of the very few writers who have managed to produce not just Canadian and Scottish fiction, but Scottish-Canadian novels, novels about the Scots in Canada. These are not just works with Scottish or Canadian geographical settings, but novels which treat of the problems of two worlds, two sets of values, novels which are more than just examples

of geographical and chronological entities. Niven has done much to capture something of a past way of life in two countries. He has wrestled with the existentialist problems not only of individual men, both Canadian and Scots, but of Everyman, transcending the limits of time and space—no mean achievement for a little-known novelist. The link is still between Canada and Scotland, and the problem is still how to reconcile them and to permit them to co-exist, if not in physical or intellectual terms, at least in the heart, where it counts, as Niven would have surely added.

It is only proper that Frederick Niven should have the last word—appropriately from the final page of the last chapter of his autobiographical reminiscences, a chapter aptly titled "Maple Leaf and Thistle":

[In my mind's eye] I saw the Clyde. I saw the umbrellas darkly gleaming. I saw the streets, the doorways, the grey light on wet slate-roofs, the steeples in the rain—aye, even the sooty city pigeons cowering, hunched in their niches—sitting on a sunny morning in a house by the shores of Kootenay Lake in British Columbia. In another decade, no doubt, there will be more than a voice out of a magic box for us. We shall both hear and see—truly see, not figuratively—across these miles.

The love for the Old Land must be considerable, after all, I think in one who, hearing of rain on umbrellas in Govan—rain on umbrellas in Govan!—felt that he would like fine to see auld Glasgow again. Scotland is a place in the sun and rain, but it is more than that. I have said it before and I will say it again: it is a kingdom of the mind. Wherever a Scot goes Scotland goes with him, inside his cranium, inside his heart—which need not at all imply any chauvinism. The old love for it endures, whatever his reason or necessity for living elsewhere.¹²

Thus one is left with this last picture, this final example of Niven's memory of the old country, the kingdom of the mind, recalled from a Canada so far away, and yet so near, recreated by the art and craft of a writer who has done so much to capture a past way of life on two continents—a fine achievement for which we should be long grateful.¹³

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¹²*Coloured Spectacles*, pp. 251-52.

¹³In my research on Niven over the years, I have been helped by Mary Manchester at the old Baillies Library (now closed) in Glasgow, and Roy Gillespie and his staff at the Mitchell Library, Glasgow. Both institutions provided me with useful bibliographical details, for which I express my gratitude.

The Scottish Poetry Library is located in Tweeddale Court off the Royal Mile in Edinburgh. As well as being a lending and reference library it is a living centre of activity where everyone with an interest in poetry can browse, study, listen to poetry on tape. An emphasis has been placed on the work of modern poets and encouragement of living poets. The collection includes twentieth century poetry in English, Gaelic and Scots, earlier Scottish poetry, and a selection of twentieth century poetry from all parts of the world. Special exhibitions are mounted regularly, based on the work of a single poet, a geographical area or theme.

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