

this sprawling waste of timber and rock and water where the only living sounds were the footfalls of animals or the fantastic laughter of a loon, this empty tract of primordial silences and winds and erosions and shifting colours, this bead-like string of crude towns and cities tied by nothing but railway tracks, this nation undiscovered by the rest of the world and unknown to itself, these people neither American nor English, nor even sure what they wanted to be, this unborn mightiness, this question-mark, this future for himself, and for God knew how many millions of mankind!<sup>111</sup>

This striking passage in the middle of his first published novel may remind the reader of the vision in Archibald MacLeish's panoramic poem of 1930 'You, Andrew Marvell' with its grand cosmic sweep.<sup>112</sup> But instead of the shadow of the night encroaching upon the world and evoking a sense of the precariousness of the moment in the poem, there is a jubilant awareness here of the potential of this sublime expanse of the landmass for a young nation.

The terrible explosion in the Narrows flattened part of Halifax, and, together with innumerable other victims, eliminated some of the opponents of the protagonist such as Neil's unscrupulous uncle Geoffrey Wain, as well as uniting him with Penelope. After this tragedy Neil Macrae is offered another opportunity to reflect optimistically and emotionally on the national task. MacLennan shows how this returnee, a veteran from the Great War, in contrast to his uncle Colonel Wain, embraces Canadian patriotism and nationalism. Abandoning a colonial perspective he looks forward to a significant mission of his country in the world, which is separate from that of the mother country Britain and also distinct from that of the neighboring nation.

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<sup>111</sup> *Barometer Rising*, Toronto 1941, chapter 'Tuesday'. Quoted from New Canadian Library pb. ed. 1982, p. 79.

<sup>112</sup> MacLeish's poem, which is often anthologized, opens with the line, 'And here face down beneath the sun'.