

facing Quebec culture. The increase in divorce and women's unwillingness to marry and have children for fear of being left alone are presented as reasons to worry about the perpetuation of French culture in America, indeed about the survival of society. Yet his book has revealed some of the horrors of family life in the past. In the period he studied couples chose to live together without church sanction; men drank up family resources and abused their wives physically and emotionally. He presents evidence of parents forcing their children to marry and of racism in communities and within the church hierarchy about marriages between First Nations men and women and French Canadians. He explains in detail the problems caused by the lack of divorce and the complicity of church officials in encouraging women to stay in violent marriages. He also demonstrates the exhaustion and depression of women like Julie Papineau who were constantly pregnant and unhappy about their marriage, despite its start as a marriage of love.

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Mary Lu MacDonald — *Literature and Society in the Canadas, 1817–1850*.
Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992. Pp. viii, 360.

In this ambitious study, Mary Lu MacDonald examines literature and society in Upper and Lower Canada from 1817 to 1850. Arguing that too many critical theories about Canada's early literature are based on late twentieth-century attitudes, and thus analyze and explain a "perceived failure", her study is an attempt to place this literature in its proper historical context, correct some of the misunderstandings which have emerged, and spark further study and re-evaluation. Such impressive goals are matched by a methodological commitment to "assemble all the extant literary works [both French and English] whether published in book, periodical, or newspaper format", provide biographical information about the writers wherever possible, decipher what was expected of this literature, and then analyze and evaluate the resulting information "by use of political, economic, demographic, religious, gender, linguistic and other explanatory models" (p. 4).

In actuality, because of the small number of writers in the far from densely populated Canadas, the cast of characters examined is not large. MacDonald is analyzing the literary output of 108 writers, comprised of 78 English-language and 30 French-language authors. Each of these groups can be further subdivided into 18 Canadian-born versus 60 British- and American-born writers in English, and 27 Canadian-born versus three European-born writers in French. Women are badly under-represented with only one female French author and 17 female English authors.

MacDonald moves quickly and at times all too briefly through discussions of matters such as the distribution of the literature; its social expectations and basic themes; the consciousness of nationality, politics, history, and landscape; and perceptions of social relationships. On occasion one wishes the sweep of topics

were narrowed and the pace slowed. A praiseworthy attempt to escape from the two usual literary solitudes imposed by two separate languages might have been further enhanced by a more selective and detailed dissection of certain themes. What does the French writers' commitment to the Reform cause, compared to an almost even split of Tory, Reform, and unknown among English writers, tell us about the prevailing political cultures? Was the strong European influence among both linguistic groups being softened at all by an American influence, particularly in Upper Canada, as Allan Smith has suggested? Do we need more careful analysis of how the Native peoples were portrayed, and was racism at work in both languages? In terms of the period covered, is the 1850 cutoff valid in view of the intellectual coming of age in the immediate pre-Confederation period?

MacDonald's conclusions, like the entire work, are carefully balanced and far from startling. Her writers reflect clearly their urban middle-class worlds and espouse, for the most part, the attitudes and morals of a stable conservative society. While one hopes for a more penetrating analysis, perhaps even an application or at least a consideration of Ian McKay's neo-Gramscian approach to cultural history, such is not forthcoming. Nonetheless, it is clearly established that at times literary attitudes did diverge "along the lines of language and nationality" (p. 258). As well, immigrant English writers and native-born writers in English sometimes parted company, while there were on certain issues "similarities in attitudes of the Canadian-born of both language groups" (p. 263). In general, MacDonald's broad view and approach do occasionally lead to some convincing qualifications of the work of literary specialists while "accepted historical interpretations of this period", as she admits, are confirmed (p. 263). Despite the notoriety of her publisher, the Edwin Mellen Press, which has been much chastised in periodicals such as *Lingua franca*, it is worthwhile to see this study in book form. It is a commendable attempt to deepen our understanding of the historical context of French- and English-Canadian literature in this early period and does indeed, as the author hoped, develop themes which deserve further study and analysis.

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Mary Hallett and Marilyn Davis — *Firing the Heather: The Life and Times of Nellie McClung*. Saskatoon: Fifth House Publishers, 1993. Pp. xv, 336.

This long-awaited book cannot have been easy to write. Anyone working in the field of Canadian women's history is familiar with the life of McClung, perhaps the most famous Canadian woman of her time. Thus there are many readers who already believe they know Nellie and will be examining this study to see whether it supports their own preconceived notions. Much of our familiarity comes from her two autobiographies *Clearing in the West* and *The Stream Runs Fast*. McClung's own writing in these two books, especially in the former, is so vibrant that it creates a challenge for any biographer to measure up. In addition, the personal journals