

**“First and foremost a writer of fiction”:** Revisiting two Toronto novels, Hopkins Moorhouse’s *Every Man For Himself* (1920) and Peter Donovan’s *Late Spring* (1930).

Hopkins Moorhouse’s *Every Man For Himself* (1920) and Peter Donovan’s *Late Spring* (1930), Toronto-set novels, were both popular texts upon publication. Moorhouse’s mystery novel was one of the year’s bestsellers in Canada. Both writers were also well-known public figures, had been popular journalists, and had succeeded in multiple public spheres under literary pseudonyms. Hopkins Moorhouse was the pen-name of Arthur Herbert Douglas Moorhouse. Peter Donovan was more familiarly known as the satirist-journalist P.O’D. or Tom Folio. Moorhouse had a long political career in Manitoba, whilst Donovan worked as a book reviewer. Donovan was also a founding member of the Toronto Arts and Letters Club and many of Donovan’s cultural circle make appearances in the semi-autobiographical novel *Late Spring*. The absence of critical attention to both writers’ Toronto novels is symptomatic of what Amy Lavender Harris and Germaine Warkentin have termed Toronto’s own persistent amnesia towards its cultural representation.<sup>1</sup> Such omission from critical discussions can also be explained by Colin Hill’s broader argument, addressing Canadian literature as a whole, that “urban and social realism of the period (1900-1960) has not yet been the subject of any comprehensive critical study, is scarcely mentioned in the critical surveys of the period, and many of its authors have been forgotten, if they were ever known at all” (142-143). Hill highlights an issue which is particularly pertinent here, given that both Donovan and Moorhouse were indeed well-known writers and cultural workers if not popular public figures. Mary Vipond illustrates the level of Moorhouse’s success, charting his first book-length work *Deep Furrows* as the ninth best-selling non-fiction work in Canada in 1919 and then tallying *Every Man For Himself* as the ninth best-selling fiction work in Canada in 1920 (“1919-1928”

99-100). Both Moorhouse and Donovan gave a significant number of public talks at various institutions across Canada, including meetings of the Canadian Authors Association, women's literary associations and public libraries, yet their influence as writers and cultural workers is now little understood. This article will seek to address how their two now little-known popular novels, published in and depicting early-twentieth-century Toronto, address the complexity of modernity and the literary innovations of modern realism. Rather than the generic labels that might be applied here – “detective story” and “social satire” respectively – both texts might be more productively seen, first and foremost, as self-aware modern urban Canadian fictions.

Canadian modern realism has only recently received concerted attention in the work of Hill. Drawing on research from a wider revival of interest in Canadian literary modernism, exemplified by the multi-institutional research project *Editing Modernism in Canada (EMIC)*, Hill positions Canadian modern realism as a literary movement echoing the international arrival of various modernisms. In fiction, Hill sees Canadian modern realism as a response to overly sentimental fiction, abandoning the world of symbolic idylls for a fresh focus on representing the real. Whilst the modern realists are often seen as a fragmented group, by virtue of the critical neglect they have faced, Hill argues that their texts share a coherent set of qualities and ambitions. Whilst modern realists do not embrace the highly experimental, avoiding the full employment of techniques which characterise works of high modernism, they nevertheless embrace similar concerns and make qualified approaches towards those same techniques. Hill identifies a number of modern realist concerns, including “direct, immediate, contemporary, idiomatically correct language,” “narrative objectivism and impersonality” and an “interest in psychological writing” (7). Where such concerns overlap with what we might know as modernism is in a shared reaction

to the changing social, political, religious, industrial and technological outlook in the early twentieth century (7). Hill's characterisation of Canadian modern realism as it applies to fiction enables fresh critical attention to those works omitted from Canadian literary history. The works of Moorhouse and Donovan examined in this article are emblematic of a raft of modern realist Toronto-set fictions written in the first half of the twentieth-century which can benefit from renewed critical attention.<sup>2</sup> Whilst being forgotten should not in and of itself constitute a virtue, there is a value in reintroducing to a critical literary conversation previously popular realist urban texts which canonical surveys have barely recognised. Including the work of Moorhouse and Donovan in our understanding of modern Canadian fiction also ensures that the perceived dominance of rural, small town settings or attention to the wilderness, has always been part of a conversation with defined visions of the urban. This article demonstrates how *Every Man* and *Late Spring* are distinctive modern realist texts, evoking a lived understanding of Toronto, using realism whilst anxious over its representational power, and providing insights into how modernisation and modern technologies change the outlook of the urban Canadian self.

### **Hopkins Moorhouse's *Every Man For Himself***

In 1920, Charles Musson's Musson Book Company printed a pamphlet promoting the publisher's latest literary releases. Entitled "Blazing a New Trail" the pamphlet transcends the mundane world of the publishing catalogue by itself being a narrative of a kind. The pamphlet relays a staged conversation acted out between "a Winnipegger and a Torontoniansat on the crowded bank of the Red River" seemingly watching a flotilla celebrating the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Hudson's Bay Company

(3). The characters' conversation is entirely to do with the latest books of the Musson Book Company, dwelling particularly on the Canadian titles being published. The Torontonian is a passionate sales representative for Musson Book Company but often steps outside the reality of the scene with his over-zealous advocacy. The Torontonian suggests that the press has "the right kind of policy" given that:

Mr Musson is for specializing in Canadian stories by Canadian authors, set up by Canadian printers and produced entirely in Canada. All this firm's Canadian publications are easily identified with the MUSSON ALL CANADIAN PRODUCTION stamp that appears prominently on them. (10)

This not so subtle endorsement of all things Musson leads to a comparable survey of popular Canadian literature of the period, attempting to integrate the author biographies, fictional plots and regional topics of contemporary texts within the casual form of the conversation. The *Canadian Bookman* speculates that academic, and book reviewer, Dr. W. T. Allison, is the man behind the pamphlet, perhaps explaining the pose of familiarity struck when detailing the literary lives of the authors mentioned.<sup>3</sup>

The west-east background of the characters frames their discussion of national literary output. The Torontonian enquires of the Winnipegger about "another Winnipeg man, Hopkins Moorhouse ... Do you happen to know him?" (16). The Winnipegger answers strongly in the affirmative, and sets off on a potted biography which shows how Moorhouse's literary life is not strictly demarcated. Discussing the career of "Hopkins Moorhouse" rather than the politician Arthur Herbert Joseph Moorhouse, the westerner alerts the reader to Moorhouse's time as editor of the London Free Press until 1906, and then his spell in Winnipeg as an editor of "that ill-

fated publication” *The Trail* magazine (16). A promotion of Moorhouse then has to cover his prior bestseller – the book that literary history remembers him for:

‘Perhaps you have seen his book, ‘Deep Furrows?’

‘You mean that much-talked-of history of the Grain Growers movement in the West? Yes, I read that book and hardly knew whether to call it a romance or a history.’

‘Well, it was both’ (18)

Moorhouse is already a straddler of literary form and becomes a hard figure for both the conversation and biography to encompass. This is all the more fascinating for the selective portrayal of Moorhouse as author. The pamphlet’s omission of the political career in Manitoba that eventually led Moorhouse to work for United Grain Growers also negates the influence of Moorhouse’s employment in the writing of *Deep Furrows*. Rather than focus on the study of agriculture, the Musson catalogue builds on the sales figures, and popular attraction, of Moorhouse’s previous work attesting to the title’s sales of “20,000 copies in Canada” (18). This prior popularity, and the sense of Moorhouse as a journalist, is deliberately repositioned to present the author as “first and foremost a writer of fiction” (18). In doing so, Moorhouse’s background of short story writing in popular magazines is also omitted, perhaps for fear of being relegated to what Moorhouse later calls a “pulpeteer”.<sup>4</sup> Instead, the fictional conversation deliberately digresses by discussing an author not published by Musson, emphasising the “star-system” to which Moorhouse belongs. When the Musson representative notes that “Ralph Connor is a lonely survivor yet outside the Musson fold,” he is consciously associating Moorhouse with the huge popularity of Connor, a figure believed to have written “more Canadian best sellers than any other native author” (18, Vipond “1899–1918” 103). Conversation between the pamphlet’s

protagonists then turns to Moorhouse's latest work, *Every Man For Himself*, which conveniently they have both read.

The new novel is feted as much for setting as its literary form, if not more so. It is initially described as containing "machine gun-action" and "brimming with color and life and the zest of adventure and romance" (20), all to connote the popular appeal of the work. Highlighting the novel's dramatic qualities, the grounded scene of action is then asserted by noting the novel's various settings, moving from Toronto's waterfront to the "wilderness of Algoma" (20). The westerner takes the power centre of the novel as reason for creating a popular readership in Toronto:

Toronto readers ought to be interested in that story anyway... It isn't often that you find a Winnipeg author laying the scene of a romance in Toronto, and now that I think of it, I do not know why it is that you don't grow any novelists in your city. (20)

The problems with this statement are numerous, not least Moorhouse's status as "a Winnipeg author". However, Moorhouse's dramatic, named use of Toronto's cityscape is both distinctive and counter to the current reputation of Canadian popular fiction from the period.

These judgements and the pamphlet's whole meta-fictional conceit are well chosen when discussing *Every Man For Himself*. Moorhouse's novel is highly aware of its fictional status, as an adventure, a romance and as a work deeply embedded in Canadian locales. Ostensibly a mystery novel tackling corruption in Toronto's political elites, *Every Man* is a highly self-aware novel which draws attention to both its setting and form. This self-awareness of setting is itself immersive, continually drawing attention to the unconventional meshing of a modern realist outlook with the mode and tropes of mystery fiction. Moorhouse's foreword to the novel attempts to

answer those regional concerns of authority and authorship, asserting that “the story events are pure invention and as fittingly might have been staged in any other of the nine provinces” (n.p.). Framing the novel in this manner places the core concern on Canadianness rather than any explicit concerns with local culture and idiom. The broader use of setting as a foil to the creeping Americanisms of mystery fiction is a way of adapting the popular and asserting the difference of national outlook, as much as geography. This is seen in the many mentioned uses of the canoe and the handling of American vernacular. Certain characters are wholehearted embodiments of American language use such as Robert Clayton, alias “Tuxedo Bob” who gains Jimmy Stiles’ confidence by commenting that Anne, at Jimmy’s church, is a “mighty swell girl” (69). However when the Canadian characters attempt to use borrowed words, the dissonance is clear. When Kendrick, the novel’s chief protagonist, is called a “fresh Aleck” by Cristy, he appears to dwell on the wording itself as much as the sentiment (189). A review in *The Spectator* in 1921 picks up on this, highlighting the novel as one where ““Guys’ ‘crack’ guns and effect ‘get-aways’” (147). This brief review misses how, in using such language, Moorhouse is mimicking American dialogue and so deliberately transposing generic tropes of the day (147). Moorhouse’s concern, as the foreword to *Every Man* explains, is in merging the generic type with realism and so “spinning the incidents necessary for a novel of this type while seeking verisimilitude in settings with which he is familiar” (n.p.). Verisimilitude is then enhanced by a consistent metafictional calling into question of realism. The protagonist’s early canoe trip across the bay towards Toronto’s islands establishes a knowing tone: “The fog gave him little concern. This land-locked Toronto Bay he knew like a well-marked passage in a favourite book” (3). From this narrative

distance, we are aware that Kendrick is a proxy for the author, well versed in mystery fiction.

As Kendrick himself is heard to say: “This isn’t the opening spasm of some blood-and-thunder novel, you know. We’re right here on Toronto Bay where one can get into trouble for not showing a light after dark” (21). Local laws and customs are declared to trump those of the plot device, and yet this nod to verisimilitude is the more immersive given that the novel employs and satirises mystery tropes, such as crossed purposes, amateur sleuthing and decoding the everyday. Kendrick’s canoe is the site of the first crossed-purpose, which leads him to articulate very clearly the problem at hand, eliciting what is one of the finest sentences in Canadian literature: “Excuse me, madam, but there appears to be some mistake...it is evident that you have got into the wrong canoe in the dark” (19). This is the reader’s introduction to Cristy Lawson, who has indeed got into the wrong canoe in the dark, having been spying on Kendrick’s Uncle Milton at his house on the islands. Presenting Kendrick’s canoe as Cristy’s wrong canoe comedically undercuts the circumstance of their meeting, jarring romantic notions of fate by underscoring the disorderly situation.

The convention by which mystery fiction identifies exceptions to everyday conduct also allows Cristy Lawson to exist as an exceptionally strong female character. Lawson shuns roles she is assumed to be employed in through the agency of that mystery staple, undercover work. Kendrick’s inability to spot Cristy’s deceptions does not prevent the omniscient narrator, and Kendrick himself, from observing actions that set her apart. Encountering “Margaret Williams” in the light space of an office, masquerading as a stenographer, Kendrick cannot place Cristy’s face, and has no name to attach to the woman in the canoe (56). Catching Cristy at first “with her ear to the keyhole” of a barrister’s office door, the subsequent scene

shows Cristy's appearance as in keeping with her supposed role as secretary but for "only one jarring note—the fact she was chewing gum" (51, 53). Not only might Cristy's gum chewing be thought a relatively vulgar performance for the time, but it also carries with it the early cinematic stereotypes of impropriety and ideas of Americanness (Dellis Hill 213). Wrigley's chewing gum helped to establish the perception of gum chewing in the early twentieth century as "the great American habit," and so Cristy's chewing may well appear doubly symbolic in reinscribing appropriate Canadian behaviour ("Death of" 8). Cristy's real employment is as a journalist, one of a large number of female journalists working in early-twentieth-century Toronto.<sup>5</sup> It later transpires that Cristy has had to win over, and subvert, the approbation of her father, Nat Lawson, who objects to his daughter's new career. Allegedly he has been assuaged by her "position on the *Recorder's* day staff as 'Society Editor'" (93). However, her wish to progress, particularly through investigative reporting, is suppressed by her father's objections to the alleged danger of such mobility: "No daughter of Nathaniel Lawson was going to be allowed to roam the city at all hours. 'No night work,' her father insisted" (93). The boundaries of permissible roles for working women are clear here, but the novel is at its boldest in allowing Cristy to continually transgress such boundaries, as her continual night-time assignments and amateur detective work attest. Cristy pursues such activities to help her father's business interests. Whilst this is the novel's moral justification for her liberal behaviour, it is clear that the role of investigative journalist also aligns Cristy with a wider freeing of restrictions under Western modernity. Kendrick's developing understanding of Cristy's activities also ties such exceptions to the novel's ongoing concern with metafiction: "If she were one of these female detectives you read about,

who had hired her?" (144-145). Cristy's exceptional reality is made more convincing by Kendrick's use of literary examples to unpack her actions.

The aftermath of the initial meeting with Cristy in the canoe scene is long, and presents Kendrick with a number of anxieties, not least the strikingly poor visibility permitted by their meeting in the dark and the fog. Trying to imagine the form of the woman in the canoe, Kendrick attempts to recall the sound of her voice. Considering the divorcing of image and sound, Kendrick comments on the anxieties modernity presents for doing just that as the novel dwells, not for the first time, on the effect of the telephone. Kendrick's attempts to understand what he has learnt from his canoe-encounter with the mystery woman prompts him to consider the extent of trust that can be developed through conversation alone. This in turn, unaided, reveals a past encounter of Kendrick's: "Voices were not to be relied upon. Take that 'hello-girl,' for instance; she had had the softest lilting voice over the wire, then when he got a look at her she hadn't been a day under forty-five and her face---!" (46-47). Having previously developed a fascination for the voice of a female telephonist, Kendrick has already experienced the ambiguity of such separations of sound and image.

Kendrick's instinct here, that Cristy is not bound up in true wrongdoing, prioritises the bodily experience and casts aspersions on the disembodied artificiality of the telephone and the role of the hello-girl in enabling a telephone call. This episode signals the sense in which the technology of modernity, in the form of telephony and railway, haunts the novel's thematic engagement with a modern realism.

The machinery of the railway provides a quick transition between urban Toronto, and events in the backwoods of Algoma and Northern Ontario. Whilst stretches of the narrative are concerned with older-style action adventures, the encounters on "old logging trails" with bootleggers and railway-workers make clear

the shifting industrial function of Ontario's natural landscape (239). The mechanised railway itself is depicted within the novel as both a domestication of landscape and a raw animalistic being. From the train, one of the novel's central conspirators, ex-newspaperman Hughey Podmore, views the backwoods landscape as predictable and repetitive as he: "idly watched the endless flow of the Algoma wilderness pass the windows monotonously" (104). The framing of the train's moving window transforms the outlook. However, Kendrick's own speedy transportation to Muskoka illustrates how an urban sensibility crowds the thoughts of the protagonists, even when machinery is not mediating. Kendrick senses "the deep quiet ... oppressive after the city's multitude of noises" (147). The novel's omniscient narrator attaches to the subjective focus of Kendrick in such moments, but detaches to describe multiple points of view. As the action quickens towards the novel's end, the speed of the railway becomes an important reflection of what Moorhouse describes in the foreword, a sense of the period's "quickenings times" (n.p.). The railway is a spectacle not only of speed but also of light:

Her powerful electric headlight threw a beam, long and bright, that burrowed into the black void far in front. But for this and the few red-glowing chinks in her firebox and the thunder of the wheels, the freight might have been some phantom reptile rushing through the land with two red eyes in its tail. (313)

The engine of the railway is figured as female but also as a mixture of light and noise or a prehistoric creature. In this way, the description of the railway draws on discourses of nature and otherworldliness challenging the earlier assumptions of domesticated landscape experienced by Podmore. This distanced view of the railways also corrects the public view of machinery, something that the novel returns to in its overall hinge of the sleuthing journalist. Podmore is a willing believer in machinery

servicing his needs, but to an extent that the raw materiality of technology passes him by. So too do the material lived experiences of journalists, outside of the 'proper' rhythms of the city's working day. Cristy's experiences, as her editor McAllister infers, are as unseen as the labour in "the brightly-lighted *Recorder* building, where hummed activity during the hours that others slept, in order that the public might have a morning newspaper to prop against the sugar-bowl while it breakfasted" (92). The mystery form of *Every Man* unpacks the ordinary working life of everyday, public Toronto, by exposing the contrary lives of those within it. In turn the novel questions realism's power to evoke life and the machine in the machine age.

### **Peter Donovan's *Late Spring***

Robertson Davies recalls his own early literary life in Toronto by way of those writers he read, highlighting the work of Peter Donovan. Acknowledging in *Merry Heart* that Peter Donovan is "a man, who is not much remembered nowadays," Davies underscores the public view of Donovan the humourist: "The thing about Peter Donovan was that he was funny" (146-147). Donovan's work as literary editor of *Saturday Night* from 1909-1920 set a precedent for Canadian literary journalism, although he has received less attention than the work of his successor in the role, William Arthur Deacon. Some of Donovan's obscurity, at least to Canadian criticism, may also be down to his move to the UK in 1920. This did not remove him entirely from the Canadian literary scene, and he maintained a presence in the pages of *Saturday Night* magazine, continuing to write sketches into the 1950s. As was common in the period, Donovan's *Late Spring* was published both in Canada and the UK, by Macmillan of Canada and Hodder and Stoughton respectively. There are

however, few extant reviews to judge its critical reception in relation to other modern realist, or modernist texts. Where Canadian criticism has continued to consider Donovan is therefore only in the earlier magazine pieces, collected as *Imperfectly Proper* (1920) and *Over Ere and Back Home* (1922).

Jesse Edgar Middleton, who would later write two Toronto-set novels, posits in a review of *Late Spring* that fiction has two possible audiences – “the leisurely and the hasty” (9). Calling these audience “classes,” carrying connotations of the class system, Middleton speculates on who will read *Late Spring* and why. Splitting the groups by a preference for either Charles Dickens or Edgar Wallace, Middleton determines “the leisurely will like ‘Late Spring’ [...but t]he hasty will probably say that the book is diffuse” (9). Taking the perspective of the hasty reader seriously, Middleton dwells on the importance of authorly control and exactitude in a novel’s form, implying that whilst these characteristics are underdeployed in *Late Spring* that an average leisure reader would not require them. Brandon Conron establishes a similar idea of “the ‘average reader’” (121) with reference to Donovan’s journalistic work. Donovan is seen as a prime example of Canadian satirist journalists who “managed to please because each cultivated an ‘average man’ [*sic*] attitude and an idiomatic style” (121-22). These appeals to a popular audience may go some way to explaining how Donovan’s one known novel, *Late Spring*, complies with the established conventions of 1920s Canadian fiction. Corresponding with Hill’s suggestion that “the novel of the period ... abounds with portraits of unempowered housewives and mistresses,” *Late Spring* contains two far from liberated female characters, Joan and Katherine (156). In turn, whilst unsettling themes of post-war disaffection, commercialised art and infidelity all arise, the novel safely reconciles all plot-threads. Mary Vipond similarly notes that the popular 1920s novel “treated

adultery and free love in a comforting, non-controversial manner, resolved in marriage and happiness” (“1919-1928” 92). Yet Donovan’s *Late Spring* provides resolution and curtailing of female liberty whilst portraying unconventional characters in a meshing of satirical and realist fiction.

Set in a thinly veiled version of Toronto, the protagonist Daragon leads a life which borrows at a slant Donovan’s prior experiences, enabling a quasi-fictionalisation of the city’s cultural institutions and figures. Donovan writes *Late Spring* having lived in England for ten years, and remaining outside Canada whilst continuing to write as a correspondent for Toronto’s *Saturday Night* magazine. This ex-patriated distance from the lived setting in space and time seemingly enables a qualified power of critique in the narrative stance, although the tendency to revert to formulaic expectations and to entertain the average reader may have prevented Donovan’s novel from being more widely known. Extant commentary on *Late Spring* runs to two brief mentions in selective literary histories. Norah Story, surveying Canadian literature in English in 1967, gives a brief précis of the work as: “A well-meaning but sweetly domineering wife is at the root of the marital difficulties that supply the tension in *Late Spring* (1930) by ‘P. O’D.’ (Peter Donovan)” (260). Whilst there are definite marital difficulties within the novel, the reduction of plot to Daragon’s wife Joan’s alleged “domineering” behaviour rather skews an understanding of *Late Spring*. More recently Greg Gatenby’s descriptions of *Late Spring*, and Donovan’s career, in *Toronto: A Literary Guide*, are mixed, describing the novel as both a “substantial contribution to our literary culture” and as “little known” (102, 288).<sup>6</sup> That Gatenby judges *Late Spring* as substantial in comparison with the collected magazine sketches could be simply length; however, Donovan’s novel is a fully realised and complex reflection on a period in Toronto’s cultural life,

as well as an attempt to realise complex characters within dynamic social relationships. Whilst the novel's attempts at sustaining a modern realist technique are not entirely experimental, the thematic coverage of urban modernity is in itself worth the attention of contemporary scholars.

As with many novels of the 1920s, *Late Spring* reflects on a decade impacted upon by World War One. Jack Daragon's early life foreshadows the international conflicts of the war, and its implications for art, through reminiscences of his German art teacher. In a compressed first chapter, Daragon's early life in rural Tecumsehville details his artistic awakening. Herr Deigel amends the nose on an unflattering portrait young Daragon has sketched of the tutor, and instils an artistic realism, symbolised in a need to look unflinchingly at the human figure. No sooner has this happened, triggering a desire in Daragon to become an artist, than war erupts and Daragon departs for Europe. By chapter's end, Daragon has returned to Tecumsehville and, lacking work, decided to move to Yorkton, a none-too-coded Toronto. The events of this chapter could in themselves serve to fill a novel of the period. As a result of the narrative compression of these events – the war, Daragon's artistic training and his early commercial career – are all jarringly proximate. The disappearance of Herr Deigel as a war-time victim of xenophobia, "forced to seek refuge in Buffalo," leaves Daragon without his artistic mentor. Removed from the voice of art for art's sake, Daragon instead follows prompts towards a career in commercial art. At the same time, echoing Daragon's artistic concerns, the narrative style of the first chapter evokes both a popular fiction and experiments with other modes of representation.

The narrator betrays a sense of *Late Spring* as a constructed narrative, indicating conscious reshaping of the narrative, by reflecting on other possible ways of seeing Daragon's war-time experiences. Positing two poles of opposing thought,

sentimental symbolism and gritty realism, the narrator suggests that Daragon's own life suits neither outlook. In one eventuality: "The war...should, according to the idealists, have made a stronger, nobler man of him, as befitted one who had looked steadily on death, and to whom heroism had presumably become a daily habit" (16). In contrast, Daragon's life is also ill-fitted to an opposing view where "he might...from the standpoint of the realists, have been coarsened and brutalized, with all the finer aspirations of his nature burned away in the hell-fires of war" (16). These are set up as extremes, and also as the only available options for artistic representation, which Daragon is presented as renouncing. The narrative voice's self-awareness steps outside of Daragon's war experience as a rebuttal to these stances, but such conscious rejection does not in itself provide a comfortable alternative. It is instead a way of attempting to describe a complexity and perhaps a horror beyond description. Embodying a critique of the war novel in a self-aware, metafictional stance is a high-risk strategy and gestures towards the very heart of high modernism's concerns. Attempting to articulate reality as lived, *Late Spring* provides a cursory amount of information on Daragon's war experience. Mentioning a visceral memory of his wounding in France, "when the piece of shell imbedded itself in the muscles of his left shoulder" before convalescence and an end to the war, the horror is adumbrated. We, like Daragon, are left surprised at the assertion: "it was astonishing how quickly it all passed" (17). In similar high modernist experiments of compressed wartime horror, as seen in Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse* (1927), this does not reduce the presence of the war, but acts as a distilled memory hanging over the subsequent artistic life Daragon pursues. The self-awareness of *Late Spring* as a corrective to war narratives appears to sweep away the material experiences, but exposes the varying real and symbolic effects of the war on Daragon's life.

The war re-emerges in Daragon's artistic life through the various sketches done in Europe that are in his portfolio. Presenting these at his initial interview for a job at the Acme Engraving Company – a commercial illustration group drawing largely on the real-life Grip Ltd. – Daragon's artistic work serves as a counterweight to the seductive and implicitly American world of commercial art. His acquiring a job as a salesman hinges on recalling the phrase "selling ideas" from an American instruction book (29). This faculty at advertising concepts through brief sketches is disrupted by the presentation of his war art. Indeed, the presentation of what the narrator describes as "charcoal sketches of guns and gun emplacements" draw the attention of Arthur Grant, the manager of Acme's artists (24). To mediate their presentation, Daragon comments, "I did those at the Front" (24). The matter-of-fact captioning of the images as products of the war seems to leave Grant's initial response beyond words, producing an approving nod before saying "the stuff's all right – lots of action in it" (24). This exchange omits the detail of action, and the reader is left to infer a subtext. Action becomes the metonymy for both war and modernist stylistic traits, as in the euphemism that the images attest to a man who saw action and the concomitant expressionistic style left suggesting movement and action. Both capture the poignancy of describing or representing events which seem beyond comprehension.

The same war sketches arise again in conversation at Daragon's boarding house. Henderson, the boarding house owner's son, sees the images and suggests they would look good on the wall. Daragon responds as if the sketches had been done on a painting holiday: "they're just a few things I did myself – mostly in France" (53). The omniscient narrator describes a sketch, which Henderson is pointing to, as "the most colourful of the sketches, a thing of splotchy reds and orange" (53). Henderson

identifies this as a sunset and then connects the image to the Group of Seven, suggesting it may have been done at Georgian Bay. Daragon counteracts this misreading by informing Henderson the painting is of a shell explosion “near Vimy” (53). Firmly lampooning the pretensions of comfortable society, Donovan’s omniscient narrator, again seemingly shadowing Daragon’s thoughts, notes “Henderson should have been confused, but he was a man above such little weaknesses” (53). Quite contrarily, Henderson’s followup is darkly ironic, continuing to pursue conversational links to modern painting and the Group of Seven by way of the colours used in Daragon’s sketch. Mimicking the language of the popular manifesto present in many Canadian magazines of the period, Henderson crassly devalues the situation represented in Daragon’s war art: “what we need in art here in Canada is more guts. You know what I mean – lots of colour, splash it on, hang the expense, attaboy!” (53). Locating this crass ignorance of the suffering of war in a crossover between popular manifesto and the standpoint of experimental modernist art, Donovan again implies the dangers in wholeheartedly rejecting the clearer symbolism of figurative realism. Such a response also throws into sharp contrast the earlier reception of Daragon’s war art by Grant at Acme.

The kinds of arguments prompted by Daragon’s war art filter through Daragon’s own personal life and career. Particularly, the strong women in Daragon’s life are fascinated by art and often share their views of it alongside their conceptions of the shape of Daragon’s possible artistic career. Whilst an objective narrator would allow the reader access to the complexity of these standpoints, they are instead presented in Daragon’s own understanding of the poles of modern art. Joan Morland, an independent-minded and wealthy daughter of Soap Factory owner William Morland, offers her judgements of Daragon’s artistic career in an idealistic manner.

Joan feels, and shares with Daragon, that “to be an artist is one the greatest things in the world – to be busy with beauty all the time, and not just making money” (103). In doing so, Joan articulates a sense of art as entirely bound up with beauty that leaves Daragon, considering his complex life-experiences, distinctly uncomfortable. Coupled with the inference of wealth, Daragon takes Joan’s views to be divorced from reality and naïve, and yet he is still enticed by their vision. It is perhaps no accident that Daragon immediately compares Joan’s views with those of a fellow boarder, and Joan’s friend, Katherine Ryder. Joan’s sentimental attitude is seen as the opposite of “the ironic and astringent realism of Katherine’s conversation” (104).

Daragon’s work as a sales representative for Acme takes him to see his future father-in-law, William Morland, and the “Morland Company” soap factory (94). The omniscient narrative voice, coloured by Daragon’s thoughts, is conflicted by the factory’s appearance: “The red brick façade stretched hideously but impressively for almost two city blocks” (94). The same conflict of interest and repulsion continues to play on Daragon’s mind during the visit, illustrating the proximity of the distanced narrator to Daragon. Machinery and manufacturing are described in some detail, continually prompting reflection on the function of art in a commercial environment. Alongside these ruminations on art and artistic perception are some observations of the work being carried out. Daragon’s impressions of the factory seem to highlight the anonymity of the individual on the production line, whilst gazing past this to the role and meaning of machinery. On Daragon’s way to Morland’s office, “he caught glimpses of huge tanks surrounded by the steam of boiling soap, and packing-rooms where long lines of girls were swiftly wrapping up the tablets in gaudy papers, and immense cooling-rooms, and row after row of offices” (95). The focus here is on the scale of manufacturing processes, overwhelming the subjects against a backdrop of

the numerous offices and vast factory spaces. The “long lines of girls” echo the production line of soap tablets, reducing the workers to inseparable, consumable objects. It is also an aesthetic gaze, offended by the “gaudy” papers on the bars of soap and recording the purely visual signs of large-scale mechanised labour. Any smells of animal fat or scenting of the soaps are outside of the sensory impressions the narrator and Daragon provide.<sup>7</sup> Thoughts on the machinery of the factory are then almost entirely removed from the human as the repetitive movements of cranes and transporters take on aspects of humanity:

The window at which he stood looked down into a wide yard, in which freight-cars and huge lorries were moving about with the slowness and dignity of such ponderous things. Gangs of men with trucks trundled about piles of cases, while the long, ungainly arms of electric cranes swung enormous burdens to and fro with a grotesque precision. (96)

The omniscient narrator mimics Daragon’s sensory awe at the efficient space of production, balancing the realist of new technology with language that reifies and aestheticizes disembodied labour. These machines are valued and respected for their labour contribution, fundamental to the “dignity” they are said to have. In possessing dignity and in having “ungainly arms,” aspects of humanity are projected onto the factory’s mechanised production line. Bound up in the visual awareness of the scene is the wider notion of “grotesque precision,” appreciating the unsettling forms and behaviours of machinery as much as the human labour it may mask.

From the office, the novel’s description of the city continues to mask human lives, and echoes the look of the Group of Seven painter Lawren Harris’s paintings of downtown Toronto, with the factory complex seen as “the red mass of the clustered buildings” (97). Subsequent context for the factory’s setting projects this outlook onto

the city's urban geography, where factories as a group are termed as having "pushed the residential sections...back towards the rising ground to the north" (98). Such sweeping narratives of Yorkton's urban history engage with the bird's-eye-view of the omniscient narrator, whilst imposing a sense of the city residents being thrust into suburban living by industry. The micro-narrative of such suburban living provided in *Late Spring* is a counter to this displacement, being a discussion of the factory owner's own comfortable family home in Rosedale – evoked by the naming of Morland's "Dale House" in "Rosemount" (99). From Dale House the city's downtown is only distantly evoked through electric lighting, described in a mixture of the natural and technological: "Through the blue dimness of the night the garden seemed to stretch away endlessly. In the distance the electric lights along the ravine made a trickling rivulet of illumination which lost itself finally in the wide glow which was the city" (129). Echoing the geological form of the ravine feeding towards the lake, this perspective shows the city as fed by new currents of energy that are then rendered visually at night. Morland's home affords both a sense of being outside this, the aspect to see this, and the telephone connection to remain caught up in the expanding modern forms of interdependence. Joan and Daragon's unattended observation of this scene, whilst not engaged, is only made possible by Morland's receiving an important telephone call. The simple distinctions inscribed by light and mass, the sectioning of the city, is simultaneously undone by the less visible shift in behaviour prompted by modern technology.

Donovan's novel also offers a social critique of the work of the Arts and Letters Club of Toronto, or as it is figured "the Crafts club" (32).<sup>8</sup> In the novel, Daragon's initial employment at Acme leads him to the club, and to frequent conversations about the power and place of art in modern society. Other traditional

society gatherings become occasions where Crafts club members are desired to attend but inevitably jar with society's social conventions. One such meeting takes place at the home of a local culture enthusiast and matchmaker, Mrs. Bowden. Mrs. Bowden invites Daragon on the strength of his involvement in a Crafts club play, and a meal is delayed for the introduction of a Tom Thomson-esque painter, Robbie Robertson, who Mrs. Bowden begins to describe as "the painter who does all those wonderful wilderness..." (110). Daragon's immediate identification of Robertson echoes the powerful mystique of Thomson. Attaching artistic views to Robertson, *Late Spring* thus uses this Thomson-figure to present a complex satire on the modern painter. Speaking from Robertson's perspective enables a reverse of the conventional satire present in Donovan's past sketches for *Saturday Night*. In such sketches, Donovan would lampoon the scale and ambition of modern art, unable to be seen in a studio as "you can't get far enough away from it to see it in its true proportion and color -- about a hundred yards is a good safe distance for the average modern painting" ("Arting" 293). Conversely Robertson's view in *Late Spring* is a retort to critics and society alike, championing the raw experience of painting in situ, and their attempts to explain the calculation of the artwork:

And when I painted it, fellows like Phillips talked about Impressionism and Japanese pattern and hell knows what. The only kind of snow the little society doodah knows about is the sort they put on frosted cakes. (120-121)

Robertson sees critical opinion as part of an attempt to domesticate the artworks produced by the Group of Seven's methods of work. The raw experience, and the spiritual conduct of art shifts the discussion of style to a level of participation and relating to the site of interpretation. Whilst such a method still relies on the prompts of realism and mimesis, the terms of such verisimilitude go unarticulated. Perhaps it is

for this reason Daragon finds no replacement art tutor for Deigel in Robertson, unable to employ these insights fully. Later in the book, when Daragon has moved to the town of Winona, New Jersey to join other Canadian artists, he follows some of these instructions by attempting sketching excursions on an old motorcycle, attempting to convey landscapes and then working horses, “the beauty and the pathos of their toil, so immense, so patient, so soon to be superseded by hideous mechanical contrivance” (267). This method of abandonment assigns him critically to what he eventually regards as a confinement: “I don’t want to become just a painter of horses” (281).

Modern thematics and style are overtly discussed and embodied throughout *Late Spring* but Donovan’s novel wraps up the issues concerned with an all-too-quick rapprochement between Daragon and Joan. Daragon realises that his life must dwell on the “hard labour” of the commercially disinterested artist (352), whilst Joan agrees to sacrifice herself and her money in a trust for their child’s future. In this respect the issues at hand find no natural resolution in the world of popular fiction, but the conventions of the form appear to graft a conclusion onto the work. In a sense this harms the psychological complexity of the novel’s characters, as their worlds become reduced to fit the happy ending. However, Daragon’s decision to persist at an artistic career is also optimistic given the novel’s continual distrust of art. In the finale, Daragon’s early life in Tecumsehville and in Europe during the war goes unmentioned, unless the resonance of those times is found in Daragon’s newfound love of labour.

Both Donovan and Moorhouse deserve to be a part of renewed attention to early-twentieth-century urban realist fiction. Within the conventions of popular fiction, both writers experiment with the capacity for modes of satire and mystery to convey a heightened appreciation of shifts in artistic society under modernity. Both

authors also confirm an experimental interest in how best to enact a “mimetic representation of a contemporary world” (Hill 7). Moorhouse’s enmeshing of transnational mystery conventions, and *Every Man’s* conscious attention to such borrowings enables a different sense of Toronto to be conveyed in realist fiction. The framing of a strong female lead, reflections on the shift in sensibility around machinery and a lively meta-fiction all ensure Moorhouse’s work contributes to an understanding of Canadian modern realism. Donovan’s own reflections are partially of interest to the social historian, as *Late Spring* airs much of what seems to be a roman à clef. Without all the keys to the text, there are indications that society figures have been blurred. The name of Morland is one more hint of this blurring, combining the connotations of Morse’s soap and the Freeland Soap Factory. More studied unpacking of the text might yield more important reflections on the critical intellectual period in Canadian literature. However, even without this unpacking, the text provides a fascinating reflection on some key themes of modernity: the impact of war and the ongoing negotiations of mechanisation, commercialism and fine art. Whilst Donovan’s text proves to be more conservative in its narrative focalisation and its depiction of women, there are striking stylistic choices in the attempt to convey a sense of life in the fictional Yorkton. Both texts demonstrate the ongoing connection between modernity and the urban, whilst illustrating that such connections are far from simple and far from particular in their spatial boundaries.

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<sup>1</sup> Germaine Warkentin suggested in a 2005 article in the *Literary Review of Canada* that Toronto has, for most of its literary history "been in a state of near-amnesia" (14). Amy Lavender Harris builds on this in her study of Toronto's literary geography, suggesting that Toronto is affected by a "cultural amnesia" whereby cultural representations of the city are gradually omitted and forgotten amidst the city's constant expansion and regeneration (20).

<sup>2</sup> Prominent amongst these are Fred Jacob's *Peevee* (1928), Jesse Edgar Middleton's *Green Plush* (1932) and *The Clever Ones* (1936), and Isabelle Hughes' Toronto-set novels beginning with *Serpent's Tooth* (1947). Evocative uses of the city-space can also be seen in Harvey O'Higgins' *Don-A-Dreams* (1906), Emily Weaver's *The Trouble Man* (1911), William Banks' *William Adolphus Turnpike* (1913) and in the "Merlton" of Beaumont Cornell's *Lantern Marsh* (1923).

<sup>3</sup> The pamphlet could also have been drafted, or co-written by a novelist also mentioned in the text, Robert Stead. Stead's archival papers indicate a number of articles written for Allison, and presumably *The Winnipeg Tribune*, one of which is entitled "Mr East,-- Meet Mr West" Public Archives Canada MG30-D74.

<sup>4</sup> In a *Canadian Bookman* report on a talk given by Moorhouse entitled "Fiction marketing," he discusses the "average selling fictioneer" and implies their proximity to a "pulpeteer" writing for pulp fiction magazines (51). Even so, Moorhouse himself is less judgmental about the separation between these roles: "I shall even dare the heresy of declaring that literature of good quality is being written by some of the writers appearing in the pulpwood magazines" (51).

<sup>5</sup> For more on Canadian women in journalism in the period, see Marjory Lang, *Women Who Made the News: Female Journalists in Canada, 1880-1945* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's U P, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Whilst Gatenby's compendium traces where Donovan lived in Toronto it is unable to trace his late career, "how Donovan ended his days is a mystery. Even his death date remains elusive" (288). An obituary in Toronto's *Saturday Night* in 1962 fills in the gaps, noting that Donovan's well-documented job at London's *Daily Express* alongside Arthur Beverley Baxter was short lived. Donovan left to work in public relations for a pre-cursor of the modern day British Petroleum, the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. All the while, Donovan maintained his contributions to *Saturday Night* writing a "London letter" until the 1950s. Donovan died at his then home in Rye, Sussex ("Peter Donovan").

<sup>7</sup> Donovan's depiction of the soap factory foreshadows Hugh Garner's differing view on the same Toronto working environment in *Cabbagetown* (1950/1968), developed

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from Garner's own experience working in a Toronto soap factory soon after *Late Spring* was published.

<sup>8</sup> Donovan's position as a founder member of Toronto's Arts and Letters Club is clear evidence of his association with fellow members the Group of Seven, as well as several prominent journalist-novelists e.g. Fred Jacob and Augustus Bridle. For a history of the association see Bridle's *The Story of the Club* (Toronto: Arts and Letters Club, 1945).