

The strength of the book may well lie in its pre-1957 material, in its detailing of the tensions which existed between the provincial and federal wings of the Conservative Party, which from 1933 to 1949 was nearly moribund at both levels of Nova Scotia politics. If the rooms of the old Roy Building could talk, what tales they might tell. Rod Black, Ralph MacDougall, Harry MacKeen, Richard Donahoe, C.D. Smith, and others — were men who sustained themselves and the party through some of its darkest hours. But the opposites did attract and Nowlan's work at the federal level during the 1960 DOSCO crisis may have saved the Stanfield government from defeat in the provincial election of that year. Even more significant may have been the tariff concession he saw through cabinet in 1963 which helped entice Volvo to establish a car assembly plant in Nova Scotia.

Politics, for George Nowlan, was a hard taskmaster. Miriam Nowlan's role in her husband's career was supportive, and indispensable. George Nowlan was already a provincial candidate when she married him in 1923. Life was hectic and by 1936, with five young children, a family debt of some \$4,000.00, and a husband out of office and struggling to rejuvenate his law practice, her health collapsed. She recovered, and never complained, at least publicly, about her husband's continued political involvement. By 1954 her family had grown and her husband was an opposition member in Ottawa. Unfortunately, the family finances now stood more than \$17,000.00 in arrears. And what of Ruby Meabry, Nowlan's Ottawa secretary/executive assistant? Some of Conrad's best writing centers on the role which these two women played in Nowlan's life and career.

Archivists, an erudite readership indeed, might have hoped for a little more information on the Nowlan Papers themselves. Were they packed by Ruby Meabry and shipped to Wolfville immediately after Nowlan's death? How extensive is the material? Has there been any weeding and what are the present access restrictions, if any, on use of the collection?

There are some typographical errors which distract from an otherwise very fine publication. A.S. MacMillan appears as Macmillan; Donahoe and McInnes are misspelled, at least consistently, as Donohoe and McInnis; Parrsboro is incorrectly placed in Colchester County; Hedley House appears incorrectly as Headly House; and 1953 appears as 1913. The foregoing are the minor blemishes which seem to creep into many good works. They annoy but they do not detract from the overall merit and significance of it. Minor distractions aside, this work merits national recognition. It represents the most complete scholarly study of a major regional spokesman presently available for examination. As Nowlan recognized, this country is but the sum of its parts. When the biographies of other regional spokesmen appear, this book will be the benchmark against which they will be measured.

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Lily: A Rhapsody In Red. Volume 2. The King Years. HEATHER ROBERTSON.
Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1986. 327 p. ISBN 0-88862-954-00 \$24.95.

If to have a sense of history is to view the past as remote and different from the present, unreachable except by flimsy paper bridges, then the heroine of Heather Robertson's *Lily* is often ahistorical. For her the past can be right here, crowding in, affecting the present and future:

The past doesn't go away. It gets closer. It turns into dreams, and memories, and pictures, so it's impossible to tell what happened, or didn't, or hasn't happened yet. (p. 71)

Lily's sense of the immediacy of the past is, if anything, even livelier than that of her husband, the notoriously past-ridden Willie King. With her vivid apprehension of the past she has no need to resort to spiritualism. One day at Kirkland Lake, "walking across a field of severed stumps" she falls "into an overgrown trench" and experiences a brief epiphany:

She lay at the bottom a moment, frightened, and then she heard a dull *boom* and the ground shook beneath her. She covered her face with her arm. A shower of pebbles rained down on her back. As she scrambled over the side, she saw Skull, the mine foreman with the steel plate in his head, running across the scarred, rain-swept landscape towards the shaft, his old khaki greatcoat flying in the wind. Between them was nothing but blackened earth and boulders and barbed wire.

"Passchendaele," she said aloud. So this was what the war had been like, exactly this. Not her war (a paper war of photographs and parcels), but a real world of earth and rain and sky, and perhaps Talbot had been as happy there, from time to time, as she was happy here. Now she knew. (p. 8)

It is significant that both these quotations are part of passages dealing with one of the novel's most important themes — frustrated or impotent action. In the first, Lily is contemplating the assassination of Willie King, finally deciding that she cannot do it. In the second, Lily goes on to say "The war isn't over yet ... and I am at the front! What do I do now?" Although Lily is too busy herself valiantly throughout the novel in her attempts to fight the good fight, the blows she strikes seem few and ineffectual. Eventually committing herself (the pun is intentional) to the Communist Party, as it seems loony enough to have the answers in her madhouse of a country, she comes to see that it, like The Empire she has rejected, is ignorant of and indifferent to Canada. She cries out to one of her party friends: "The Comintern will be handing out leaflets at Armageddon. Annie, we are at the Finland Station. *Where is the train?*" (p. 300). The revolution spoken of as a painful necessity in the novel's epigraph remains a mirage. Grippled in stasis, with a Prime Minister said "to have an effect on people a lot like infantile paralysis," (p. 28) Canada emerges from one war only to begin the helpless slide into another:

In every photograph I see of the *Führer*, he has his mouth open, a black hole in the centre of his face. The Cyclops. Will any of us come out alive? (p. 327)

When Lily is affected by the immediacy and inescapability of the past, it is her personal past she is concerned with — her father, her lover killed in the war, her husband. (Whenever she hears Willie's name, "she feels her past pursuing her, *tick, tick, tick*, like the alligator in *Peter Pan*." (p. 6)) Yet historical novels, it should be remembered, are not about individuals, but about countries. *Lily* is a novel about Canada, just as Scott's *Waverley* is about Scotland, not about its eponymous hero, Edward Waverley. Robertson, however, uses a fictional technique quite different from Scott's to move her novel from the plane of the individual to that of the national. Lily, the Lily of the Ottawa Valley, the Canada Lily, is not only the heroine of a realistic novel, but an allegorical figure. She may be no stony-breasted female on a war memorial, nor yet the demure fur-clad

young miss of Victorian political cartoons, but Canada she is, the embodiment of all that is good in our nation. (This is why she's subversive, like Anne of Green Gables.) Like Spencer's Una in Book I of *The Faerie Queene*, she is trapped in the toils of a "great, guileful enchanter," who weaves his false enchantments over the land — her husband, Willie King. Her husband, and our Prime Minister, our Fisher King, the sick man "elected but never loved" by a sick country.* Lily is perhaps not so satisfactorily fixed for a Red Cross Knight as Una, but then the novel ends in mid-story, with Lily drawn inexorably into the future like Pearl White into the sawmill, and it may be that Esselwein, both a Red and a red-coated Mountie, will yet come to the rescue.

Lily is full of doubles, characters who echo and reflect one another as in a dream, and there may be cause for hope in the fact that Lily's double, Vivian MacMillan, survives her relationship with John Brownlee and marries a healer, a druggist named Harry. On the other hand, there may be less cause for rejoicing in the fact that Vivian's sufferings help bring in, not a glad new day, but a Social Credit government. I suppose we shall just have to wait and see how it all turns out.

Of course, maybe it will not turn out. Funny, generous, and energetic a novel as *Lily* is, to read it is to share disquietingly in Lily's sense of being trapped in the past. While *Waverley* shows the transformation of Scotland in the years from 1745 to 1805, *Lily* brings forcefully to mind the unhappy thought that the Canada we live in today is still the Canada under King's spell. Perhaps *Lily* is not a historical novel at all, but a novel about the present set in a past existing in dream time and historical time.

Ours is a political nation, as Cartier called it, created by an act of political will and kept in being by a continuous re-affirmation and re-examination of that original act. A novel like *Lily* helps us in our national task of making Canada up as we go along.

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* W.L. Morton, *The Kingdom of Canada* (Toronto, 1963), p. 491. "He was a sick man and it was a sick country" was Morton's private, less charitable explanation for King's long years of electoral success.