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A "High Anglican Pagan" and His Pupil: Charles G. D. Roberts, Robert Norwood and the Development of a Nova Scotian Literary Tradition, 1885-1932

I

When Robert Norwood died in 1932 at the age of 58, he was firmly established as one of the leaders of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States. His sermons as Rector of St. Bartholomew's on Park Avenue in New York City were delivered to packed congregations of more than 1,000 people. During his seven years there (1925-1932), he became widely known for his outspoken pronouncements. "I will be perfectly frank and admit that I say the Apostles' Creed only because I am expected to say it," is but one example of his startling assertions from the pulpit. He had no hesitation in informing a group of female New York socialities, after rebuking some of them for whispering while he was giving an address, that Americans "were the most impolite people on the face of the planet." He also publicly attacked Prohibition.¹ In 1928 Norwood became the subject of an article in *Time* magazine when a number of clergymen in his native Nova Scotia wrote to their bishop, C. L. Worrell, protesting against his preaching on the ground that it was "disposed to shake the faith of the people" (*Halifax Chronicle*, 29 & 30 Aug. 1928: 1).² When, shortly before his death, he defended himself from the pulpit against rumors that he was lax in his parochial visiting, Norwood's comments were sufficiently newsworthy to result in articles in the *New York Times* and the *Literary Digest*.³

Rhetoric does not necessarily translate well to the printed page. Norwood, however, was a gifted writer whose published sermons give a sense of the vitality that electrified his audiences. Indeed, he regarded himself primarily as a poet and was a key figure in the circle of Nova Scotian poets including Kenneth Leslie, Charles Bruce and Andrew Merkel. Although his many volumes of poetry are mostly forgotten, his prose has an imaginative quality stemming from his love of language which makes it still readable today. Norwood believed that his activities as preacher and poet were inseparable, which is, no doubt, one of the reasons why his poetry is of such uneven quality. The didacticism of such poems as *Bill Boram*, which recounts how a rough Nova Scotian fisherman is redeemed through his love of beauty, reveals much about Norwood's thinking. He believed that beauty and poetry arose out of an intimation of the divine. Such a view of art cut him off from the work of his modernist literary contemporaries, but was shared by many in his Nova Scotian coterie. It stemmed from Norwood's teacher, Charles G. D. Roberts, who became the major influence upon his life from his arrival as a student at King's College, Windsor until his death 40 years later.

After moving to the United States in 1917, Norwood lived, in a sense, two lives. Each summer he returned to his cottage in Hubbards, the village where he had grown up, and resumed contact with his friends—particularly Andrew Merkel, manager of the Halifax bureau of the Canadian Press and a poetry enthusiast, who became one of Roberts's most loyal disciples (Davies, "Song Fishermen" 164-65).⁴ Norwood had maintained contact with his old professor during Roberts's long absence from North America (1907-1925), and met him in Britain in the 1920s when he took Roberts on a holiday to Wales. Norwood thus provided a link between Roberts, Merkel and other Nova Scotian poets (Adams, *Sir Charles* 129).

Norwood's emergence from the ecclesiastical backwater of Nova Scotia to become perhaps the most prominent voice of liberal Episcopalianism of his generation can only be understood in relation to his tutelage by Roberts; the same is true, though more obviously, of his activity as a poet and friend of poets. The singular vision of the inter-relationship of poetry and religion which came out of their lifelong bond, was forged in the unlikely crucible of King's, which, through Roberts's presence there between 1885 and 1895, became an unusual place, where

students such as Norwood were exposed to influences generally inaccessible at that time in Nova Scotia. Accordingly, King's in the Roberts era and Roberts's life there deserve some attention.

II

King's College in the last two decades of the nineteenth century was a tiny institution of a conservative and High Church character. Since its founding in 1789, its curriculum for much of its history had emphasized classics, mathematics and divinity. Theologically, the College reflected the leanings of the fourth bishop of Nova Scotia, Hibbert Binney, who, during his long episcopate (1851-1887) succeeded in giving it a Tractarian character; under his influence divinity education at King's emphasized the liturgical and sacramental aspects of Anglicanism. This orientation towards a more "Catholic" theological atmosphere probably contributed to the College's difficulty in attracting students in a province that was predominantly Protestant (Roper, "Evangelical-Tractarian Conflict" 39-40).⁵ Low enrolment, ongoing financial difficulties and a grading scandal in 1884 that directly implicated the President, the Reverend John Dart, led to a major restructuring of the Faculty and curriculum. President Dart was replaced and two youthful men were given Faculty appointments. The College made a significant break with the past in not filling the chair of classics, left vacant when its holder, the Reverend W. A. Wilson, was dismissed after bringing the grading scandal to light and publicly attacking Bishop Binney for inaction. Instead, the Board of Governors appointed a young American, W. A. Hammond, as lecturer in classics and German. Even more surprising was the creation of a new professorship, in English and French. This was given to the 25-year old Charles G. D. Roberts, whose only experience of higher education had been at the University of New Brunswick.⁶

It would appear that Roberts received the appointment, despite his youth and lack of a prestigious degree, for a number of reasons, both academic and non-academic. King's obviously wished to break with the traditional curriculum by making an appointment in a subject that barely existed as a discipline. Roberts had established a precocious reputation as the author of *Orion* (1880), hailed by contemporaries such as Archibald Lampman as a new beginning in Canadian poetry (Adams 23). By his mid-twenties Roberts had begun to assume the role that he would play for

the rest of his life, that of the father of Canadian letters. Even then, his friends called him "the old man."

On another level, he had excellent connections in the Anglican Church. His father, G. G. Roberts, was a prominent New Brunswick clergyman, Rector of St. Anne's Chapel-of-Ease in Fredericton, and a devoted disciple of Bishop Binney's Tractarian counterpart in New Brunswick, John Medley. Malcolm Ross has painted a fascinating portrait of Bishop Medley and the milieu he created, where both worship and education were shaped by the bishop's vision of high Anglican Christianity. Roberts and his cousin Bliss Carman were raised at the centre of Medley's world (Ross 27-42).⁷ With such a background, Roberts must have seemed to Bishop Binney and the Board of Governors of King's to be a most suitable person to contribute to the revitalization of a High Church college.

Roberts certainly proved a brilliant success, although partly in ways which his patrons could not have anticipated. He was a gifted teacher, worked hard at his job and was idolized by his students. He threw himself into college life, running the Haliburton, the literary society, and inspiring the student journal, the *Record*—to which he and Bliss Carman frequently contributed—to achieve a remarkable level of excellence. He even played intercollegiate football. Clearly, however, an institution with six professors and a student body fluctuating between 20 and 50 was too small for his talent and energy. He needed his stipend of \$1,000 per annum, plus the house on campus that he called "Kingscroft," to provide for his young family. But he was unable to manage on his salary; his writing was driven not only by ambition but by financial need. His habit of short-term borrowing to pay pressing expenses, which continued throughout his long life, became well established while at King's. Another pattern—extra-marital adventures and the compulsive need to talk about them—also appeared (Adams 40-63; Boone *passim*). He did not confine this tendency to discuss sexual matters to Carman, or his fellow English scholar, the morally upright Presbyterian Archibald MacMechan, but extended it to casual acquaintances.⁸

It is likely that Roberts survived at King's because of his connections with the Tractarian wing of the Church of England. In January 1888, both Roberts and W. A. Hammond were accused of improper conduct involving women. There survives no record of the specific charges against

Roberts. Hammond was accused of having a woman in his college rooms. Roberts denied wrong-doing, and managed to retain his position. He received, nevertheless, a severe reprimand as "owing to levity of behaviour Professor Roberts has given cause for rumours injurious to the College."⁹ The Board of Governors was informed that he "received the censure . . . in a becoming manner and admitted that his conduct might have borne the construction placed on it by the Board but that he had not been guilty of any improper conduct."¹⁰ Hammond, although admitting to indiscretion, also denied immoral conduct, but he was not so fortunate: he was informed that he would not be re-appointed the following year. Hammond was Roberts's best friend in Windsor and he felt the loss deeply, claiming that Hammond's dismissal was really due to his being an American and a Presbyterian.¹¹ It is perhaps significant that at this dangerous moment in Roberts's fortunes, the preacher at the King's *Encaenia* service in June 1888 was none other than his father, G. G. Roberts.¹²

From this time until his resignation in 1895 Roberts wanted to leave King's.¹³ Unable to travel because of lack of money, he tried to make literary contacts in the United States by correspondence and through his cousin, Bliss Carman, then living in Boston. On the latter's suggestion the young American poet Richard Hovey visited Windsor in August of 1892. This new friendship made the year 1893 a pivotal one for Roberts. He managed to get sick leave from King's to spend the month of April in Washington, DC at the home of Hovey's parents. Hovey provided him with a congenial place of escape (he visited again the following year), having much in common with Roberts and Carman. He too was a former high church Anglican and had even been a candidate for ordination. Like Roberts he was ambitious and preoccupied not only with writing poetry but also with studying poetic technique.¹⁴ Although they had lapsed from orthodox Christian belief, Hovey, Roberts and Carman had lost none of their idealism, which suffused their poetry and their hopes for fulfilment in romantic relationships.

Roberts reciprocated his visit to Washington by persuading Hovey to come again to Windsor, this time with his lover Henrietta Russell, a celebrity in her own right as a teacher of aesthetics, movement and gesture. Carman agreed to join the gathering. As the entire party could not be accommodated in "Kingscroft," the visitors lived (when weather

permitted) in two tents erected on the King's grounds (Macdonald 120-124).¹⁵ At the time of the so-called "Camp Avon" both Roberts and Hovey faced personal crises. Roberts's marriage was deeply unhappy. According to Henrietta Russell, his wife Mary (May) was "sad, silent, sullen."¹⁶ Her state of mind was probably due to having to share "Kingscroft" with "the Queen of Bohemia": Maude Clarke, the children's governess and Roberts's mistress. The estrangement between Roberts and his wife culminated in their separation in 1897.

Hovey, on the other hand, faced the prospect of a problematic marriage. Fourteen years his senior, Henrietta Russell had borne him a child in 1892. At the time of "Camp Avon" she was in the final stages of divorce proceedings from her second husband and desperately wanted to marry Hovey as soon as possible (Macdonald 105-21). She was a celebrated, if not notorious, figure, much better known than her lover, and wished to regularize her situation. As the leading female exponent of the Delsarte system of movement she had risen to fame on the wave of the craze for Delsartism which swept America. Although forgotten today, the maxims of François Delsarte (1811-1871) on the training of the body to express the soul resonated widely in a society steeped in writers like Emerson and Whitman.¹⁷ No less a personage than Isadora Duncan asserted in 1898 that Delsarte "should receive universal thanks for the bonds which he has removed from our constrained members" (qtd. in Duncan et al 29). Henrietta Russell's lectures and classes had attracted much publicity in both America and England, where she had been praised by Gladstone, among others, for her ideas on physical training for women. Following Delsarte, she understood movement and the proper development of the body as part of a larger aesthetic vision, acting as a propagandist for Whistler, Burne-Jones, Wilde and the aesthetic movement generally.¹⁸

It is reasonable to suppose that this sophisticated and cultured woman helped to liberate Roberts from the milieu of Fredericton and Windsor in which he had spent much of his life. She presented an extreme contrast to his wife May, whom he had married at the age of 20. Although loyal and worthy, May was not particularly intelligent and remained attached to a world which Roberts found stifling and dull.¹⁹ Henrietta Russell behaved unconventionally. Her goal of liberating women from contemporary restraints upon their freedom of movement found expression in her

corsetless gowns, which draped the body in a manner reminiscent of the costumes of classical Greece. Under her influence, Carman began the serious study of Delsarte's writings that led him into his life-long relationship with her pupil Mary Perry King (Boone, "Carman's pageants" *passim*). As Roberts rejected Delsartism, Russell's influence upon him is more difficult to assess, but her influence at "Camp Avon" is underscored by the existence of photographs of both May Roberts and "the Queen of Bohemia," Maude Clarke, dressed in "Delsarte costume."²⁰

It was Henrietta Russell's presence at "Camp Avon" that attracted press interest to the artistic group visiting the King's campus. She had come to Nova Scotia at least partly because she hoped that her celebrity would enable her to earn some money by teaching in Halifax and Windsor. Roberts did his best to help her make contacts and the considerable newspaper publicity that the "camp" received was no doubt inspired by him.²¹ It is easy to imagine the reaction of Roberts's more conventional colleagues to articles about a well-known American woman living in a tent on the grounds of King's. "Camp Avon" no doubt helped to fuel critical gossip about Roberts's friendships and mode of living.²²

Whatever the views of his academic colleagues, and even though the camp broke up before the beginning of term, it seems likely that the presence of two well-known poets and an emancipated woman as his guests could only have enhanced Roberts's already towering prestige among the tiny student body at King's. A sense of the awe in which he was held can be gleaned from a "reminiscence" of the Haliburton Society published five years after he had resigned his professorship:

Professor Roberts occupied the chair of President—and what a President he was! To the outside world a famous Canadian poet—laureate of the snowy continent, to us who knew him as a loving friend, genial, affable, indulgent. . . . Ah, how he would lie back in the cosy arm-chair we always had provided for him, bohemian-like emitting the thin blue wreaths of smoke from the fragrant cigarette. . . . (Foster, "Reminiscences" 63)

The "Kingscroft" camp brought Bohemia to King's, but it is crucial to understanding Roberts's influence on the students at King's in general and Robert Norwood in particular that it was an idealistic, high-minded Bohemia. All three poets were moving away from their Anglicanism to

positions in which they could reconcile their belief in nature and sexual fulfilment with their continuing belief in the eternal.²³ It was Carman who dubbed Hovey, Roberts and himself "high Anglican pagans." Although the three poets produced one poem, to which each contributed a verse, and which supposedly expressed their common faith, Roberts did not ultimately contribute to the volume Carman and Hovey published as *Songs from Vagabondia* the following year.²⁴ Although he was not drawn to the Delsartism which captivated his friends, his poetry and thought were suffused, nevertheless, with the belief that the divine was made manifest in nature. He did not discard his contribution to the joint "high Anglican pagan" poem, but later published it in his selected works under the suggestive title "Immanence":

Not only in the cataract and the thunder,
Or in the deeps of man's uncharted soul,
But in the dew-star dwells alike the wonder,
And in the whirling dust-mote the control. (*Selected Poems*)²⁵

This verse expressed what Roberts was to believe for the remainder of his life. He saw the true poet as one who revealed the eternal in the temporal. Even when he found himself out of step with his times, this belief never wavered. As he put it in his Preface to Robert Norwood's *Issa*, published in 1931:

In speaking of Robert Norwood as a great religious poet, certain critics have implied a condescension as if the poet's engagement with religious themes constituted a kind of "special pleading," the critics' ideas being that the poet must be "free" to every wind that blows; whereas the history of singing should prove, even to the songless, that great poetry has always been "special pleading" and has always been religious. (Roberts, "Poetry of Norwood" xiv)

III

Robert Norwood first enrolled at King's in 1892, the year before "Camp Avon." His father was Rector of Hubbards, then an isolated fishing village. Joseph William Norwood had immigrated to Nova Scotia from the United States after an adventurous early life as a sailor before the mast and a soldier in the American Civil War. The Norwoods were proud

to be related to Emerson, and valued learning; money, however, was in short supply. Although his father had been able to send him to Bishop's College School for a year, Robert Norwood's studies at home and in local schools left him ill-prepared for the King's curriculum, with its emphasis upon classics and mathematics. Furthermore, he had to interrupt his studies twice, each time for a year, to work as a lay reader in order to complete his BA.²⁶ Financial and academic difficulties did not affect his self-confidence, as illustrated by this contemporary appraisal:

What is this from Hubbard's Cove? Is it a man? Is it a boy? Is it an infant? What's the matter with it anyhow? What reading, what speaking, what self-conceit, what learning, what wisdom is contained in its brain. But greater than all, eclipsing all, far above all, is its cheek, which is the greatest and most expansive that the Commoner [the anonymous columnist] has had anything to do with.²⁷

Hard work, exuberance, a precocious rhetorical gift and a love of poetry soon brought Norwood to Roberts's attention. Many years later, Norwood wrote that "Perhaps more than any man he taught, he found me pliable and industrious," and he became a frequent visitor to "Kingscroft."²⁸ Norwood's poverty made it difficult to afford the social life of King's; instead he spent his evenings in Roberts's library, to which his teacher, with characteristic generosity, gave him access (Watson 20). Norwood had already decided to become a clergyman. His future course was shaped by a mystical occurrence which followed his first reception of the sacrament. Brought up by his Tractarian father to believe in the "real presence" of Jesus in the Eucharist, he was devastated to find that he experienced not exaltation, but fear and alienation:

After the service, still fearful and trembling, I went along a woodland path and came to where a few Mayflowers were growing. There was the song of birds. There was a bit of blue sky. My heart was filled with ecstasy. I was meeting Jesus—meeting him in the song of the birds, in the smell and color and delicacy of the Mayflowers. . . . I was not afraid. I was at ease. I talked with him. I saw him. (Norwood, *Steep Ascent* 30-31)

Although this passage was written many years after the event, Norwood's sensibilities corresponded to those of Roberts, who, two months after the youth from Hubbards arrived at King's, published "In

the *Wide Awe and Wisdom of the Night*" in the *Record*. The final lines are an affirmation of a non-Christian divine immanence:

And in my still soul apprehended space,
Till, weighing laws which these but blindly heed,
At last I came before Him face to face,—
And knew the universe of no such span
As the august infinitude of man.²⁹

Roberts not only instructed Norwood in English literature, but encouraged him to write poetry. Most importantly, he opened to him a vision of the relation between God and nature which reflected his own experience.

Teacher and pupil shared, and continued to share throughout their lives, a conviction of God as immanently present in human beings, and in nature. Where Norwood departed from Roberts was in fusing this conception with his attachment to the person of Jesus. In doing so, he followed in the path of liberal theologians such as Phillips Brooks and his own predecessor at St. Bartholomew's, Leighton Parks,³⁰ who called themselves "modernists," to express their willingness to re-interpret Christian dogma in the light of the progress of thought. They understood Jesus's divinity to lie in his awareness of the eternality of his soul's essence, which he exemplified in his life. As Norwood put it, he "dared to be God," because he had the courage to be the supreme lover (*The Man Who Dared* 164-67). Roberts, however, had already left behind even this humanistic view of the divine by the early 1890s. W. J. Keith has argued convincingly that Roberts thought of God as "a process rather than a person . . . rarely to be identified directly with the God of Christianity" ("A Choice of Worlds" 95). Carman, accordingly, had missed the mark in calling his friend a "high Anglican pagan"; even then he was less Christian than pagan, but his paganism emphasized a universe ruled by mind, which pervaded all nature.

Norwood's understanding of divine immanence focussed concretely upon specific individuals who exemplified the struggle of the human race to rise from ignorance to knowledge, i.e. to partake of God. He argued in his poems and sermons that great minds of all traditions express this urge; what distinguishes Jesus is that he grasped most completely the nature of the soul as love and the corollary that love must be the basis of

human existence. All humans are, like Jesus, sons of God; their task is to realize, in Norwood's language, their "Christhood."³¹

Norwood believed that an emphasis upon the transcendental and eschatological aspects of Christianity such as miracles and the Last Judgement only distracted from the essential Christian message of renewal in the here and now through love. His verse play, *The Man of Kerioth*, published in 1919, turns on this theme. Jesus resists all attempts to establish his authority through signs; he refuses to change water into wine at Cana, giving the guests instead "wine caught from the sky," i.e. water, symbol of renewal (90). In another scene, the lame man "walks" by coming to terms with his infirmity and attaining spiritual joy through service to others. The "Man of Kerioth" is Judas Iscariot, who wishes the Messiah to be a man of power, manifested through signs. He betrays Jesus, not for money, but in an attempt to force him into a supernatural act to save himself which would compel his recognition as King of the Jews. When Jesus confounds Judas by assenting to death, Judas, in sorrow and despair, commits suicide. *The Man of Kerioth* ends with the Crucifixion, as does Norwood's biography of Jesus, *The Man Who Dared to be God*. Norwood understood the empty tomb as expressing the overcoming of death through love, a miracle which was actually or potentially present to everyone in the here and now.

Fred Cogswell has argued that Roberts's poetry was animated by "the notion that individual existence was part of an idealistic process designed by its mysterious mover to bring into being a greater degree of cosmic consciousness" ("Introduction" 20).³² It was therefore appropriate that Norwood dedicated his collection of dramatic monologues, *The Modernists*, to Roberts. As presented by Norwood, these modernists were individuals who furthered humankind's march towards knowledge. His eclectic selection ranges from "The Cave Man," to Akenaton, Moses, Socrates, Dante and Darwin. Darwin is given the following words, which, however wildly unsuited they might be to their purported speaker, are true to the spirit of Norwood and Roberts:

Chaos bears / To that eternal Energy called God, / A child whose name
is Form . . . Struggle of Form with Form—experiment of Nature working
blindly but in faith / To one end: *Mind!* Love dominates the chords; /
There is a song upon the star-lit hills: GLORY TO GOD! ON EARTH,
PEACE AND GOOD WILL! (*Modernists* 140)

He then proceeds to discourse about God, who is not found "in the Book," but in nature:

There only may we find Him. Did she fail / To make him known to man,
then would man be / Apart from her and alien to the earth / God has not
ceased to walk down garden paths. / He has not grown a-weary of the
rose. (142)

Norwood, like Roberts, appropriated the idea of natural selection, but for the purpose of showing the working of providence. Struggle, as he saw it, is itself a manifestation of love and in no way detracts from the natural beauty that is the principal way to the divine. Norwood's Darwin is as much artist as scientist, proclaiming that "God is the lover of all open wings, / Of all who glorify the world with song" (142). The great scientist, like Norwood's other modernists, has an apprehension of God because of the purity of his desire for truth, an impulse Norwood believed to be for the most part obstructed by institutional Christianity.

Norwood's appeal to his contemporaries, in a career that took him from rural and small town parishes in Nova Scotia to Montreal, London (Ontario), Philadelphia, and finally to New York City, was his impatience both with traditional Christian doctrine and with the Church as an institution. "Why is Christianity so sundered now? Why is the Church so impotent? Because it is putting the emphasis on the lesser things. It is not climbing the hill of the Master's vision" (Norwood, *Steep Ascent* 47). He believed that creeds, formularies, and institutions generally obscured what was simply and readily understandable:

I do not understand the Trinity, do you? It is a name for God. I do not understand it, and I have given up trying to understand it, but I do understand Jesus. So I call God Jesus. I do not understand the Absolute, do you? I do not understand the supernatural, do you? . . . But I do understand Jesus, and believe that the universe is becoming completely formed and articulated in Jesus.³³

At the centre of Norwood's Christianity lay the idea of renewal, of resurrection; poetry that was not written in the light of this fundamental truth of human experience must miss the mark. Poetry need not be Christian but it must embrace the notion of humanity as containing the divine essence.

Roberts and Norwood had no sympathy for writers who lacked their vision of the purpose of poetry. In the words of Fred Cogswell:

Roberts' quarrel with the direction of modern literature lay principally in its denial of any meaning and value beyond the material and its basic concern with the representatives and actions of the mass of mankind rather than those of the *élite*. ("Introduction" 22)

This is a fair judgment, if *élite* is interpreted as meaning exceptional. Roberts, Norwood, Merkel, Kenneth Leslie and Charles Bruce shared a belief in the nobility of ordinary people engaged in elemental struggle, as contrasted with those engaged in the deadening routine of commercial and industrial life. Living by the seasons, fishermen and farmers understood the importance of tradition and had time for reflection because they were free from the discipline of the clock. As Merkel put it:

Let us not get too ambitious. Keep your eyes free from the glare of big cities and big reputations. Keep your mind free from the contemporary illusion which names every new thing a good thing, and which turns its back on old things which have been proved in many thousand years of human blood and sacrifice. (Qtd. in Davies, "Song Fishermen" 168)

Gwendolyn Davies has provided a perceptive account of the group of Nova Scotian poets, the Song Fishermen, led by Norwood and Merkel. Their breezy camaraderie is illustrated by a letter from Norwood printed in one of Merkel's "Song Fishermen's Song Sheets":

Ken [Leslie] blew in yesterday with his hair a little longer than usual, but quite effective. He grinned at me and said, "In all things I imitate you."

I answered: "Please, only my best."

He answered: "If you rule out the worst, what is there left to imitate?"³⁴

The "Song Sheets" originated in the fall of 1928, when Carman, Roberts and Norwood were all in Nova Scotia together and Roberts and Norwood gave a successful joint poetry recital. Out of the gathering of old friends and their admirers came the proposal for a series of broadsheets; Carman suggested that they be published under the imprint of the "Abenaki Press," in honor of "the original 100 per cent Nova Scotians" (qtd. in Wainwright, *Charles Bruce* 53). The underlying theme of the ensuing

broadsheets, "Nova Scotia Catches," and the mimeographed "Song Fishermen's Song Sheets," was that by drawing on Nova Scotian roots poetry could express a vitality lost by modernist writers. This was not simply romantic nostalgia on the part of individuals comfortably removed from the privations of working-class life, nor can it be dismissed as "the quest of the folk" (cf. McKay 228-30). The leaders of the Song Fishermen were well aware of the reality of poverty. Norwood served for many years in tough Nova Scotia parishes ranging from Neil's Harbour to the coal town of Springhill. Merkel, as manager of the Canadian Press in Halifax, reported at first hand on labor strife in Industrial Cape Breton. Much of Roberts's restless and adventurous life had been lived on the edge of penury. The original Song Fishermen romanticized Nova Scotia and its people because they viewed the poetry produced in "the glare of big cities" to be antithetical to their humanism.

Norwood, Roberts and Merkel placed particular hopes on two poets to carry on their poetic vision into the next generation, Charles Bruce and Kenneth Leslie. Roberts praised one of Leslie's lyrics in a letter to his younger colleague by saying that "the effect is fresh & original, with an originality which the modernists of today strain for in vain with all their grotesque & violent antics."³⁵ As Norwood put it to Bruce, then an 18-year old undergraduate at Mount Allison, contemporary poets, having lost a sense of the divine, "threw their gift down into the mud. Since then they have been trying to blow the smouldering spark of the extinguished flame into its former beauty; but it will never be done, for mud and flame are the eternal antitheses of art." Norwood rather pompously instructed Bruce to "keep your body wholesome and clean and your mind as it is—normal."³⁶

Norwood could obviously be sententious, but there is no evidence that he was a hypocrite. It is not likely that a person who took unabashed pleasure in flirting with attractive women and who so enjoyed the company of his Rabelaisian old professor intended to give Bruce a lecture on sexual hygiene.³⁷ To the end of his life Norwood treasured his association with Roberts. In 1931, while ill from a hemorrhage that brought him near death, he wrote to Kenneth Leslie that "no one can beat that glorious Pagan. He gives me more strength by his example than all the clergy put together. There is such a moral consistency in Roberts' point of view—bless him!"³⁸ Any view of Norwood as a prude is

impossible to reconcile with another letter to Leslie, in which he made fun of their circle of friends, conjuring up a vision of them, disguised as Protestant Irish, disrupting the St. Patrick's Day parade on Fifth Avenue, with Leslie riding a white horse as King Billy, "while Andy came along with the harem of King Solomon, with Roberts in the rear, kissing the golden Eve by sliding scale of smothering (sic) kisses from the tip of her finger to the curve of her ivory shoulder. . . ."39 Norwood's Polonius-like advice to Bruce would seem to have been intended as a warning against the moral and intellectual perversity which both he and Roberts hated as the enemy of their vision of the connection between life and art.

The two younger poets that expected to beat back the literary modernists were very different in personality. Nonetheless it is arguable that they both remained on the path set by Roberts and Norwood. In temperament and intellect Kenneth Leslie was closer to his mentors. He had been deeply interested in philosophy and religion since his student years; his MA thesis was entitled "A Modern View of Mysticism."⁴⁰ He was charming, handsome and a superlative orator, exercising this gift as a Baptist lay preacher. After living a life of ease during the 1920s and early 1930s through his marriage to an heiress, the daughter of the confectionery manufacturer James Moir, his fortunes plummeted when she divorced him for adultery. Within three years he had married another wealthy woman who helped finance the magazine, the *Protestant Digest*, that launched him as a public figure in the United States. By the early 1950s, having left his second wife for his secretary, branded by *Life* magazine as one of the 50 most prominent Communist "fellow travellers" in the United States, he was reduced for a time to driving a taxi in Halifax (Devanney, "Kenneth Leslie" 95-97).⁴¹

Bruce had a far more stable character than the charismatic Leslie. Through Merkel's influence he joined the staff of the Canadian Press, and remained there for his working life, becoming one of Canada's most distinguished journalists. Although he could only write poetry and fiction in his spare time, he continued to produce important work. The religious element in the thinking of Roberts and Norwood had little if any influence on Bruce. Nevertheless, he retained the ethical core of their belief in the relationship between the character of the poet and the quality of his/her poetry. He said of Pound that "Being the man he is, he was bound to produce corrupt verbal manure. . . . When art and the artist are

as inseparable as they are in poetry, it is redundant to go beyond the corruption of the art" (qtd. in Wainwright, *Charles Bruce* 117-18). He also remained faithful to the friends of his youth in his artistic commitment to Nova Scotia, specifically to the exploration of the lives of rural Nova Scotians. His sense of the depth and richness of their way of life is expressed on every page of his novel *The Channel Shore*, published in 1954.⁴²

Leslie's best work, on the other hand, had been done by 1938.⁴³ His later writing was dominated by an idiosyncratic fusion of humanistic Christianity and socialism. Norwood's didacticism here bore fruit in a way that he would certainly have found unappealing. Bruce, however, remained immune to socialism. In an article on Norwood published in 1933, Bruce recalled an evening he spent with him and their circle of friends a week before Norwood's death. The setting was a "farmhouse in the Annapolis Valley," probably the home of Kenneth Leslie's brother Robert, who was also a song fisherman. It was suggested, when the conversation turned to socialism, that the problem of destitution could only be dealt with by "forced sharing." This was September 1932, at the depth of the great depression, but Norwood rejected this solution on the ground that sharing must be voluntary, and not coercive:

The good in the future doesn't lie in a change of systems. It lies in a change of thought. Our greatest sin is contempt of our neighbour. Let us recognize the soul in him, stop thinking meanly about him. When we are able to do that, man's treatment of his fellow will change. There will be no need for systems. (Bruce, "Norwood" 20)⁴⁴

It would be appropriately symmetrical if Leslie were Norwood's opponent on the question of forced sharing on this last meeting of friends, before their ways parted forever, with Leslie and Norwood debating the issue, and Bruce the watchful recorder; unfortunately, however, Bruce has left us with a tantalizing glimpse, not a detailed account.

After Norwood's death, Leslie wrote to Andrew Merkel:

Of course whatever they do to the preacher we will still have the rantin (sic) roving Robin and that is the man we want to save for Nova Scotia. Let them tie him up in the pink ribbons of divinity. Wherever we go up and down Nova Scotia we will take the gospel of his humanity.⁴⁵

One unusual way Norwood was "tied up in the pink ribbons of divinity" was through the preparation by American friends of an order of service compiled from his various works of poetry and prose. This was first performed in St. Mark's Church-in-the-Bouwrie, New York on 13 November 1932. According to the printed pamphlet of the Order of Service, one of the participants was "The Rev. Charles G. D. Roberts, Dean of Canadian Letters, Toronto."⁴⁶ To be mistaken for a priest must surely have amused Roberts and would have brought roars of laughter from Norwood. The notion that the old pagan had finally been returned to the Anglican fold was the sort of joke that he and his pupil would have relished.⁴⁷

NOTES

1. St. Bartholomew's Church Parish Archives [SBPA], Robert Norwood box, "The Creed of Christ," sermon preached on 30 Jan. 1927; *New York Times* 12 May 1926; 17; *ibid.*, 14 Feb. 1932: 14.
2. The names and number of clergy involved were not made public. Norwood informed Worrell that he would not preach again in an Anglican church in Nova Scotia. The following week he fulfilled a long-standing commitment to preach in First Baptist Church in Halifax; standing room was at a premium and many were turned away at the door (*Chronicle* 3 Sept. 1928: 1). Unfortunately, neither the complaint nor the exchange of letters between Worrell and Norwood are to be found in the Archives of the Anglican Diocese of Nova Scotia. The article in *Time* appeared in the issue of 10 Sept. 1928: 32. I wish to thank Professor Ken MacKinnon for drawing this and other articles to my attention and for placing his research file on Norwood at my disposal.
3. *New York Times* 11 April 1932: 1; *Literary Digest* 14 May 1932: 20.
4. For a brief biography of Andrew Merkel (1884-1954), see Rhodenizer, 919. Merkel's relationship with Roberts is documented in King's College Archives [KCA] Can 3, Sir Charles G. D. Roberts file, Andrew Merkel Papers.
5. For a good brief account of Tractarianism, see Carrington 88-90.
6. Roberts earned an MA from UNB See Roper, "Aspects of the History of a Loyalist College."
7. I wish to thank Ms. Patricia Chalmers for directing me to this article.
8. Dalhousie University Archives [DUA], MS 2-82-A-2, Archibald MacMechan Private Journal (MSS), 22 March 1895; Adams 42-48.
9. KCA, A.1.1.6, Minutes of the Board of Governors, King's College (MSS), 202-203, 9 Feb. 1888.

10. *Ibid.* 203.
11. *Collected Letters*, 70-71, Roberts to E. C. Stedman, 19 Feb. 1888. Roberts did not specify the reason for Hammond's dismissal, asserting only that "a flimsy pretext has been found." He made no mention of personally facing charges.
12. *King's College Record* (May and June 1888): 109.
13. Fred Cogswell states in his monograph *Charles G. D. Roberts and His Works* that "the exact precipitating event" leading to Roberts's departure from King's remains to be explained. The circumstances were as follows. In the spring of 1895 Roberts applied for a year's leave of absence. The Board of Governors of the College took no action on his application as they had resolved to inform all members of Faculty that their appointments would be terminated because of a financial crisis facing the institution. Roberts then resigned, stating in his letter of resignation that "I was anxious to resign in the way that, as it seemed to me, would do least injury to the College. Under the circumstances I can only regret that I did not lay before you an unconditional resignation. As it is, I beg to say that I shall not be open to reappointment. I regret that my offer, from which the College had much to gain and I myself nothing, was not received in the spirit in which I made it." See KCA, A.1.1.7, Minutes of the Board of Governors, King's College (MSS), 240, 14 March 1895; A.1.2.103, Board of Governors Administrative Records (MSS), Charles G. D. Roberts to the Board of King's College, 12 March 1895; A.1.2.104, Charles G. D. Roberts to the Board of Governors, 15 March 1895.
14. Macdonald provides an excellent account of Hovey's life and ideas.
15. See also Boone, "Bliss Carman's Pageants, Masques and Essays and the Genesis of Modern Dance," 167.
16. Dartmouth College Library [DCL] ML 48-2:5, Richard Hovey Papers (MSS), Henrietta Russell to Mrs. Charles E. Hovey, "Tuesday." See also Miller, *Bliss Carman* 107-109 and Adams 44-49.
17. See Macdonald 62-77 for a good account of the Delsartism's great, if short-lived popularity in the United States.
18. See DCL, ML 48-2:3, Richard Hovey Papers, scrapbooks of Henrietta Hovey (Russell), which provide much information about her teachings on physical culture and aesthetics. They also attest to her fame in the early 1890s.
19. Lloyd Roberts, to whom his father was close, gives an unflattering picture of his maternal grandparents in *The Book of Roberts* 117-22.
20. See *Collected Letters*, 137 and Adams, photograph pages (unpaginated), for photographs of Maude Clarke and May Roberts in "Delsarte costume," both probably taken in 1893.
21. DCL, ML 48-2:5, Richard Hovey Papers, Henrietta Russell to Mrs. Charles E. Russell, "Tuesday."
22. KCA, A.1.2.114, Board of Governors' Administrative Records (MSS), George T. Kennedy [Professor of Chemistry and sometime Vice-President] to the Rt. Rev. Frederick Courtney [Bishop of Nova Scotia] and the Board of Governors, 1 Aug. 1896 (copy): "It has unquestionably been the opinion of some whited sepulchres that there are very few clever men—native or foreign—without pernicious habits & that

- these latter habits must of necessity be tolerated even in an institution where divinity students are being instructed." See also DUA, MS 2-82-A-2, MacMechan Private Journal, 17 Feb. 1895. For newspaper articles about the camp, see DCL, ML 48-2:3, Richard Hovey Papers, scrapbooks of Henrietta Hovey, in which the newspaper cuttings about her visit to Nova Scotia are preserved.
23. See John Robert Sorfleet, "Transcendentalist, Mystic, Evolutionary Idealist: Bliss Carman, 1886-1894," ed. Woodcock, *Colony and Confederation* 189-210; Boone, "Carman's Pageants" 165-80.
 24. Miller 110, where all three verses of the collaborative poem are reprinted. It was first published in the King's College *Record* XVII (Dec. 1894): 37.
 25. See the perceptive discussion of "Immanence" by W. J. Keith in *Charles G. D. Roberts* 35-36.
 26. Rhodenizer, "Robert Winkworth Norwood (1874-1932)"; Downes, "Robert Winkworth Norwood"; MacKinnon, "Robert Norwood"; Watson, *Robert Norwood* 9-20; KCA, *King's College Register* (1875-1903): 21.
 27. "The Commons," King's College *Record* XV (Dec. 1892): 21.
 28. Public Archives of Nova Scotia [PANS], MG 1 2196 Folder 11 #36 (typescript), Kenneth Leslie Papers, Robert Norwood to Kenneth Leslie, 25 Aug. 1931.
 29. Kings College *Record* XV (Nov. 1892): 1. This sonnet is reprinted in *Selected Poems*, 111.
 30. For the theological context of Norwood's thought, see Manross 310-50; Chorley 235-322; Smith 13-15.
 31. This position is developed in Norwood's last book, *Increasing Christhood*.
 32. See also Cogswell's monograph *Charles G. D. Roberts and His Works* and his article "Charles G. D. Roberts: The Critical Years," for perceptive insights into Roberts's religious ideas. For stimulating comments on Roberts's use of Christian themes in the *New York Nocturnes*, see D. M. R. Bentley, "Half Passion and Half Prayer: the New York Nocturnes."
 33. SBPA, Norwood box, "Farewell sermon preached . . . in the Memorial Church of St. Paul's Overbrook" (1925): 12. Norwood served as rector of this church, which is located outside Philadelphia, from 1917 to 1925.
 34. KCA, Can 6, "Song Fishermen's Song Sheet" file, Andrew Merkel Papers, "Song Sheet No. 10" (13 April 1929). For the dates of specific issues of the "Song Sheets," as well as useful information about the "song fishermen," see Alexander Kizuk, "Molly Beresford and the Song Fishermen of Halifax: Cultural Production, Canon and Desire in 1920s Canadian Poetry."
 35. PANS, MG 1 2196 Folder 11 #33, Leslie Papers (MSS), Roberts to Leslie, 1 June 1931. For Roberts and literary modernism, see Don Conway, "Roberts and Modernism: The Achievement of 'The Squatter.'"
 36. DUA, MS2 297 C 136, Charles Bruce Correspondence (typescript), Norwood to Bruce, 10 Sept. 1924. Cf. Wainwright 32.
 37. For Norwood's susceptibility to, and attraction for, women, see Burris Devanney, "Kenneth Leslie: A Biographical Introduction." Devanney provides a good account

- of Leslie's turbulent life. See PANS, MG 1 2200, Personal and Biographical material, Leslie Papers, for a photocopy of this article.
38. PANS, MG 1 2196 Folder 11 #32, Leslie Papers (MSS), Norwood to Leslie, 27 May 1931. See also Norwood's letters to Roberts, written between 1928-1932, in the Norwood papers recently acquired by Dalhousie University. I wish to thank Ms. Karen Smith, Special Collections librarian, for enabling me to examine these letters, and Professor Gwendolyn Davies for drawing this collection to my attention.
 39. *Ibid.*, Folder 10 #4, Norwood to Leslie (typescript), 18 March 1930.
 40. A copy of Leslie's thesis, which was submitted in 1914 to the University of Nebraska, can be found in PANS, MG 1 2205 #2, Leslie Papers. Leslie paid tribute to Norwood in "The Shanachie Man" in *Windward Rock* 1-6.
 41. Leslie's third wife left him and married his nephew. In 1960 he married the wealthy widow of an old friend, and lived comfortably in Halifax until his death in 1974, at the age of 82.
 42. See Andrew Wainwright's introduction to the Formac Press edition i-iv. In this context see also *The Mulgrave Road*, for which Bruce received the Governor-General's medal.
 43. Leslie received the Governor-General's medal for *By Stubborn Stars* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1938).
 44. A copy of this article can be found in DUA, MS2 297 c 137, Charles Bruce correspondence.
 45. KCA, Can 3, Kenneth Leslie file, Andrew Merkel Papers, Leslie to Merkel (transcript), undated.
 46. SBPA Norwood box, *Office compiled out of his prose and verse in love and honor of Robert Norwood, 1874-1932* (n.p.: n.p.) 29.
 47. I wish to thank the Research Grants Committee of the University of King's College for their support, and Ms. Pat Dixon for her help in preparing this article for publication.

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