

cusses achieved her goal, or at least not in the way she envisioned. All were seeking to reconfigure the private as well as the public world. They shared a “desire to appropriate the world of ideas—hitherto, in their communal tradition the world of men alone—and to build a new and egalitarian relationship with men.” Their most enduring legacy, Shepherd argues, can be appreciated only when they are seen in the context of Jewish society and history. “Their efforts to create a new identity for themselves as women, in defiance of the norms of their own society, made them pioneers of women’s liberation.” *A Price Below Rubies* tells a fascinating story and is an important contribution to women’s history, Jewish history, and the history of radical movements in modern times.

THE TRAITOR AND THE JEW: ANTI-SEMITISM AND THE DELIRIUM OF EXTREMIST RIGHT-WING NATIONALISM IN FRENCH CANADA FROM 1929-1939

Esther Delisle. Montreal: Robert Davies Publishing, 1993.

by Donald A. Wright

Highly specialized, often burdened with impenetrable vocabulary, and aimed at small, academic audiences, Ph.D. dissertations, even published dissertations, rarely attract national media attention. Yet a 1992 political science dissertation from Laval University, “Antisémitisme et nationalisme d’extrême droite dans la province du Québec, 1929-1939,” found itself at the centre of a contentious, emotional, and at times puerile de-

bate: was French Canadian nationalism then, and is Quebec nationalism now, exclusive, xenophobic, and anti-Semitic?¹ Its author, Esther Delisle—who at one point was publicly condemned as an intellectual Vychinsky, in reference to Stalin’s show trials prosecutor—rightly likened the controversy to caricature. Indeed, looking beyond the controversy, one finds in Delisle’s thesis not a vituperative attack against Quebec nationalism, but rather an intelligent, well researched analysis of right-wing nationalist thought in Quebec during the 1930s.

Translated into English, and published by Robert Davies Publishing of Montreal with a preface by the historian Ramsay Cook, *The Traitor and the Jew: Anti-Semitism and the Delirium of Extremist Right-Wing Nationalism in French Canada from 1929-1939*, thoroughly documents the vicious anti-Semitism inherent to the nationalism of Abbé Lionel Groulx, *Le Devoir*, *l’Action nationale* and the youth organization, *Jeune Canada*. Although Delisle states very clearly that “nowhere in my thesis is there any mention of *French Canadian* anti-Semitism” (emphasis not mine) she also states very clearly that her subjects were neither marginal nor insignificant. For example, Claude Ryan once honoured Lionel Groulx as “the spiritual father of modern Quebec.”

Moreover, the anti-Semitism of Groulx, *Le Devoir*, *l’Action nationale* and *Jeune Canada* was not isolated, nor was it merely mischievous as André Laurendeau would later describe it; it was essential to their nationalism. The Jew, as a symbolic construct, represented liberalism, democracy, capitalism, and modernity, all threats to the French-Canadian nation. Indeed, the Jew remained the ultimate negative Other, defined by Michel Foucault as “that which, for a given culture, is at once interior and foreign, therefore to be excluded (so as to exorcise the interior danger).”

However, and this is central to Delisle’s thesis, the French Canadian and the Jew were not binary oppo-

sites, the one absolute good, the other absolute evil: Groulx also maintained a profound contempt for French Canadians who he regarded as Traitors committed to modernity and its concomitants, pluralism, individualism, liberalism, democracy and capitalism. In Groulx’s world, watching a hockey game, or listening to jazz (that “Negro-Semitic cocktail”), were fundamentally acts of treason. In 1935 he concluded, “The great misfortune of French Canadians, I must dare to say, is that there are no French Canadians.” The Traitor and the Jew, writes Delisle, fell “into the same vortex of hatred.”

Despite his abiding nihilism Groulx did not drift into despair. Taking his cue from the European dictatorships of the 1930s, Groulx sought salvation for French Canada in millenarian Fascism. “Weak minds which believe in democracy at the expense of the Church and Christ react with horror to Fascism in all its shapes and forms,” Groulx argued in 1937. “This despite the fact that certain nations are currently very content, experiencing the most glorious kind of rebirth under this political system.” Towards realizing a Fascist utopia, wherein French Canada “would reconcile itself with the soil and its ancestors,” solutions were required for the Traitor problem and the Jew problem.

Inspired by Hitler’s early answer to the “Jewish question,” writers at *l’Action nationale*—including André Laurendeau who would eventually become co-chair of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism—argued that because pogroms do not work, “government measures” were required. A euphemism, “government measures” meant the building of ghettos, the imposition of quotas at educational institutions, the repeal of voting rights, deportations to Palestine, mandatory identification cards and the institution of economic boycotts.

Meanwhile the Traitor, that “French Canadian *incapable* of solidarity” (emphasis not mine), required a thorough political and national re-education: the Jew would always be a

Jew but the Traitor could be re-educated, ultimately transformed into something great, a superman, even a God, living in a utopian paradise. Inspired by the Fascist aesthetic, Laurendeau dreamt of a day when "Doctors, dentists and gymnasts will help build a strong, chaste race of handsome young men and beautiful young girls."

Delisle ultimately concludes that the writers, intellectuals and nationalists associated with Lionel Groulx, *Le Devoir*, *l'Action nationale* and *Jeune Canada*, all expressed "the same wish, at heart: via dictatorship, by the re-education of the Traitor and the expulsion of the Jew, the chaos and decay which surround us will end."

If *The Traitor and the Jew* remains an important contribution to Canadian intellectual history it is also a timely investigation into white hegemony. In her introduction Delisle discusses the notion of government-defined cultural communities, that is, government efforts "to assimilate new immigrants into the francophone majority without destroying their presence as defined minorities whose very existence testifies to and confirms the presence of the majority." Delisle is led to ask, "But when does one cease to belong to a 'cultural community' and actually become 'Québécois'? Just how many generations have to be counted, and what characteristics must be acquired, before the club takes in some new members?"

English Canada would do very well to ask itself the same question.

¹For a good overview of *l'affaire Delisle* see Charles Foran, "That Book of Esther's," *Saturday Night*, 108, 8 (October 1993).

FIRING THE HEATHER: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF NELLIE MCCLUNG

Mary Hallett and Marilyn Davis.
Saskatoon: Fifth House Publishers,
1993.

by Clara Thomas

No one at all interested in the history of women's rights in Canada could fail to know the name of Nellie McClung, but few of us have an appreciation of the range and importance of her manifold activities. We have heard a good deal about her, but in sporadic bits and pieces; this book is the first gathering together and presentation of the whole complicated and colourful tapestry of Nellie's "life and times." There is something today in the very sound of "Nellie," a name that has gone completely out of fashion, that has too often encouraged a hint of amused and condescending over-familiarity in her treatment, perhaps because one of her most engaging qualities was a readiness to laugh at herself. This book should go a long way toward persuading readers of her paramount importance in Canada's feminist history.

For many years many of us have been devoted readers and teachers of *Clearing in the West* and *The Stream Runs Fast*, the two volumes of McClung's autobiography; for us it is particularly interesting to have this fleshed-out account of the development of McClung, the passionately-engaged activist, from the eager, clever, energetic and often frustrated child of Irish-Scottish Manitoba emigrants from Ontario. First, as soon as she had achieved independence as a teacher, she jumped the hurdle of her mother's disapproval of a show-off daughter to begin giving readings and poetry recitations at all kinds of neighbourhood social events. She was a natural mimic, a "stand-up comic" of her day (always ladylike, mind you) and at a time when public speaking was an intensely popular enter-

tainment and entertainment was home-made, not technologically provided, she quickly became widely in demand far beyond her own district. Gradually she began to give speeches on topics that engaged her loyalties, temperance first and always, with women's suffrage and women's rights in general a close second. The time was right for her: married to Wes McClung, a pharmacist, and living in the little town of Manitou, she speedily became known as a riotously successful speaker throughout Manitoba, then across Canada and finally, from the mid-teen war years on, when the suffrage movement was at its hottest, in the States and Europe.

In these same years she had five children, wrote and sold innumerable short stories, and in 1908 became a continental bestseller with the novel, *Sowing Seeds in Danny*. Wes McClung gave up a prosperous pharmacy business because of a serious and lengthy bout of ill health the nature of which remains mysterious; and in 1911 they moved to Winnipeg where he became an insurance salesman, then after some years to Edmonton, where Nellie became deeply engaged in Alberta politics, a member for the Liberals from 1922 to 1926. At the same time, along with Emily Murphy, her friend and equal in energy, zest, humour and activism, and Irene Parlby, Louise McKinley and Henrietta Muir Edwards, the other three of the "Famous Five," she was relentlessly pushing along a movement that would climax in the 1929 decision of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Court in London, England that women were indeed persons under the B. N. A. Act and could therefore be appointed to the Senate. Just as relentless was her campaign for the ordination of women in the United Church and her continuing battles for legislation against alcohol. "Relentless" and "ruthless" were always the operative words when Nellie McClung and her army of supporters were on the move, and by the mid-twenties, women had been emboldened by the franchise and in most, if not all of their causes, had been joined