

Research Paper

Father-Son conflict in the novels of Hugh MacLennan

Dr. H. B. Patil

Associate Professor
Arts, Commerce and Science
College Palus, Dist.- Sangli

ABSTRACT

Hugh MacLennan (1907-1990), a distinguished modern Canadian novelist, was born in the remote coal-mining town of Glace Bay in Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. He received his bachelor's degree and won a Rhodes Scholarship which took him to Oriol College, Oxford where he worked slavishly on the exceptionally difficult course of studies called Honour Moderations and Literae Humaniores. He acquired a research degree in Classics at Princeton University, America.

Within three years, for his Ph.D., he wrote a thesis on the decline of an early Roman Colony in Egypt, which was later published as *Oxyrhynchus: An Economic and Social Study*.

Hugh MacLennan is the first major Canada's contemporary writer, for he is an important novelist to become aware of Canadian problems and he has written ambitious novels about national identity. He has genuinely presented his vision of the Canadian problems to his fellow countrymen and to the world at large using explicitly Canadian settings, historical events and social issues not simply as background, but as subjects and themes in his seven novels: *Barometer Rising* (1941), *Two Solitudes* (1945), *The Precipice* (1948), *Each Man's Son* (1951), *The Watch That Ends the Night* (1959), *Return of the Sphinx* (1967), and *Voices in Time* (1980).

The present paper attempts to analyse the theme of father-son conflict in the novels of Hugh MacLennan. The conflict between father and son is a striking feature of Hugh MacLennan's novels, as he has presented this theme in his two novels: *Return of the Sphinx* and *Two Solitudes*. Like Athanase Tallard in *Two Solitudes*, Alan Ainslie in *Return of the Sphinx* believes in confederated Canada, and as a representative of the government, he struggles to retain unity in his country. Daniel, the son of Alan, is an active member of the Separatist Movement in Quebec, who demands separate Quebec for the French-Canadian so he comes in conflict with his father, Alan, who is a nationalist. Daniel thinks of his previous generations and irritates how old people like his father have accepted the subordinate place in their own country. Aime Latendresse, one of the leaders of the Separatist Movement, expresses his opinion regarding Alan to Daniel that men like

Alan Ainslie are more dangerous than the worst and the most open enemy. When he blames second time that Alan is sold to one of his senior party leaders, Bulstrode, Daniel resists and tells him, 'My father's never on sale to anyone.' Daniel tells him the fact that his father loves Quebec, but Bulstrode utilises his unselfish father for the sake of votes. When Bulstrode, who is Alan's senior colleague in the ministry, discloses Montreal Riot Report of government, which points out Daniel's active participation in the riot, Alan wishes to resign from his job of a minister. Though Bulstrode assures

him that this report will remain in file, Alan realises that one day he has to resign his ministership for the sake of his son, but he is not afraid of leaving the minister's job, as he is worried about his son Daniel's future life. Chantal, sister of Daniel, finds Daniel disturbed so she asks him to telephone their father but he refuses saying, 'He hasn't cared whether I was dead or alive.' (1967:230) She consoles him that Alan loves both of them and he must not speak like this. Then, he telephones his father in Ottawa and agrees to enjoy dinner with him next night. The next night in Ottawa, while having dinner, instead of discussing their domestic issues, they are involved in talking about Quebec, Daniel requests his father to resign from his job of a minister and support the Separatist Movement in Quebec. Alan, now, feels that he is not talking with his son but with some stranger doing official business and is sorry to realise that there is absence of any emotion or feelings between them. When he discloses the report of R.C.M.P (Secret Agency Dept. of govt.) that Daniel is pointed out by them as an active separatist and warns he must be cautious from now onwards, Daniel calls himself orphan. When he explains the difficulty which his son is going to face, Daniel fails to overcome the fear at last, at that particular time, and demands indirectly the help of his father who is interested in sending Daniel to France for higher education, which is essential for his bright future, but Daniel refuses the proposal of his father. As a father, Alan thinks of sending Daniel out of Canada with the intention of giving him higher education, which would be the only good solution in this critical situation, but he never tries for the second time to put the alternative proposal to Daniel, because he knows that Daniel is not in the mood of listening to anything apart from the Separatist Movement. Daniel becomes a programme conductor for TV network in French language. When Alan refuses to join the programme of debate with Aime Latendresse, he informs that his interview with Latendresse will be displayed on the French channel next Thursday night. The end of the dinner is unhappy as he calls Alan the henchman of Bulstrode, so Alan becomes angry and warns him to respect him as he also respects Daniel. Daniel, who is hungry for the parental emotional support, hopes that the meeting with his father in Ottawa will help him to overcome the emotional crisis he is facing, but he fails to understand his father and blindly, without any fundamental

principles, demands support for his Separatist Movement. On Thursday night, Alan telephones Daniel to object to the interview of Latendresse as it intends to destroy the unity of Canada and he expresses his fear to him, 'He's using you, Daniel and I tremble for you.' He becomes emotional and expresses his mental condition to Daniel:

Oh Daniel, what's gone wrong between us? Help me, won't you? I'm so worried about you I can hardly sleep.(1967:256)
His care and emotional appeal for his son fails to control Daniel, who becomes more rigid as he thinks that Latendresse is right when he says that men like his father are more dangerous than those who openly hate them. Chantal telephones father to inform that Daniel's next television show is cancelled by the government; Alan fears because Daniel would hate him more without understanding the truth behind it. When Alan attempts to convince Daniel that Bulstrode has cancelled his television programme, Daniel blames his father of having no spirit:

I know exactly the truth. This is a wonderful day for me, Dad . . . a wonderful day. I'm going to remember it as long as I live and I'll celebrate it instead of my birthday. (1967:275)

The Separatist Movement of Quebec has become the part of Daniel's life, so without thinking, he recklessly blames his father which hurts Alan.

Alan is increasingly worried about Daniel so he goes to Montréal to meet him, but there, he is shocked to see Daniel with a woman much older than his mother, in his bed. He loses his control, scolds him, and simultaneously feels sorry for his critical condition:

God knows why you set out to do this to me. But why did you set out to destroy yourself at the same time?(1967:287)

Alan's anger and his guilty feeling make him tremble, but eventually, Alan frees Daniel from all relations as he says to him, 'Go wherever you like. Do whatever you like.' After learning from Joe Lacombe that Daniel has been arrested with a bomb, and has admitted his intention of planting it in a public building, Alan Ainslie sends a telegram to the Prime Minister of Canada submitting his resignation.

Alan's political career comes to an end due to his son, but unlike Athanase Tallard, he is not destroyed. He, once, admits to Officer Joe Lacombe that Daniel, after the death of Constance was alone and all his efforts to divert Daniel failed. According to Robert Cockburn, 'MacLennan is dealing with a set of interrelated conflicts Father against Son, Generation against Generation, and Quebec against Canada.'(1969:129)

In *Two Solitudes*, Hugh MacLennan presents the same type of conflict between Athanase and Marius. When the novel opens, Athanase Tallard has married Protestant Kathleen with a small child Paul, and has a college going young son, Marius, from his first wife, Maire-Adele, who is dead. In Parliament, when the Conscription Act is passed, Marius misunderstands that Athanase has supported the act as he is also conscripted, which compels him to hide himself from the police. When Kathleen assures Marius that his father will fix everything regarding his conscription, Marius becomes angry and attacks his father:

He [Athanase] thinks the war's wonderful. Why not? He's safe. He's too old to be killed. Anyway, he sold out to the English long ago.(1945:39)

His feelings about his father are harsh but unlike Daniel, he blames his father for being sold out to the English Politicians. He complains to his step-mother that his father has managed to sell the land to the English- Canadian, and also resists Athanase's dream of setting up a factory in partnership with Huntly McQueen. He criticises the business policy of

McQueen:

He's harmless old fool. But his friends aren't. Look at that McQueen! The biggest profiteer in the country fixes things so his friend buys French land cheap.(1945:39)

Like Daniel, he thinks that his father is deceived by Huntly McQueen. When Marius is arrested, Father Beaubien, on behalf of Marius, blames Athanase, who has failed to love and has never thought about his son's emotions. When Huntly McQueen breaks the deal of partnership, all the dreams of Athanase are shattered and eventually he is converted to the original sect of Roman Catholicism which makes Marius happy and he reconciles himself with his father. Unlike Daniel, in adverse time of Athanase, he fulfills the responsibility of a son.

Athanase Tallard and Alan Ainslie know that the inferior treatment is given to the French-Canadians, and it is essential to give justice to them 198 but they have their own limitations which their sons fail to understand. There is reconciliation between Athanase and Marius not through action but through the tragedy of Athanase. Athanase marries Kathleen when his first wife dies and Alan, after his wife's death, gets involved in politics, so their children miss the love of their parent which is an important reason for the conflict between the father and the son in both the novels. Next, as their children are alone, they are brought up in environmental circumstances which compel them to get involved in the movement against the English-Canadians. T. D. MacLulich writes, 'the relationship between Marius and Athanase is a father-son conflict that is so intense it can only end destructively. The force of Marius's emotion is emphasized by the strategy of concealing both the nature of Athanase's deed and Marius' knowledge about his father until the moment when Beaubien confronts Athanase. By delaying the disclosure of Athanase's conduct, MacLennan arranges to juxtapose a primal scene with a father's downfall, just he also does so near the end of *Barometer Rising*.'(1983:146)

References:

- MacLennan, Hugh. *Two Solitudes*, Toronto : Macmillan Company of Canada Ltd., 1945.
- MacLennan, Hugh. *Return of the Sphinx*, Toronto : Macmillan Company of Canada Ltd., 1967.
- Cockburn, Robert. *The Novels of Hugh MacLennan*, Montreal: Harvest House Ltd, 1969.
- MacLulich, T. Hugh MacLennan, Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983.