

The Chesapeake and the Shannon Approach the Canon

by Mary Lu MacDonald

Carl Klinck loved finding "new" writers. Having found them, he researched their lives and works and published the results of his investigations so that others could share his delight and use his work as a starting point for their own. As a result, many of the early writers in our modern canon entered it via a Klinck article or book. For me personally, even before we had met he was amazingly supportive, taking great interest in my research and sending me encouraging notes as I slogged through the writing of my doctoral thesis. In his memory I offer another candidate for the canon.

Barker's Canadian Monthly Magazine, published in Kingston, Canada West, for twelve issues, May 1846-April 1847, was one of a number of short-lived periodicals in the pre-Confederation period. Some of them contained a high percentage of material written in Canada, but *Barker's* is the only one published before mid-century that appears to have been entirely written here. The sixth number contains the first instalment of a novel, "Altham", by John S. Cummins Esq. Each of the remaining issues contained a further instalment, leaving the reader hanging when *Barker's* ceased publication, because "Altham" was far from complete.¹ A note in Dr. Barker's newspaper, the *British Whig*, later in 1847², announced that the novel was about to be published in London. This good news for readers of *Barker's* was equally pleasing to a researcher, hooked on the story of Jemmy Annesley. The British Library Catalogue showed that the book had indeed been published, in two volumes, by Saunders and Otley in London in 1849. Further research revealed several Canadian locations. Jemmy's story was pursued to its happy conclusion and a search for Cummins began.

The book itself is listed in the "First Supplement" to the Toronto Public Library's *A Bibliography of Canadiana*. Cummins, however, is elusive. The author gives little personal information in his Preface, other than that he was one of those restless lads, who can [not] be induced to remain quietly at home. . . .", and that he had begun writing the novel twenty years earlier, during a two-month sea voyage, when he had exhausted the ship's supply of reading materials, which consisted principally of Scott's Waverly novels. Henry J. Morgan, in *Bibliotheca Canadensis* (Ottawa, 1867) gives the following listing for Cummins:

A Canadian journalist and novelist. Ed. the *Chronicle and News*, (Kingston) for some years. D. some years. Had been an officer in the Br. Merchant service. Served in the Canadian Militia during the Rebellion of 1837. Contributed to *Barker's Magazine* (Kingston).

Morgan appears to have confused Cummins with John S. Cumming, a prominent Kingstonian who assisted in the editing of the *Chronicle and News* about 1820, and who had indeed been dead for some years.

John Swete Cummins, the author of *Altham*, was born in Cork in 1810, the second son and third child of Nicholas Marshall Cummins and Martha Swete. The Cummins family was prominent in the life of Cork and Cummins' ancestors, siblings and cousins are easily traced. Unfortunately, in his case, information in the family genealogies seems to stop in about 1860. No death place or date is given.³

Whether or not he ever served in the British Merchant service as Morgan states, we do not know. *Altham* certainly shows knowledge of the sea, but we know that Cummins crossed the Atlantic a number of times on business and he could have learned a great deal from talking to ships' crews. Altham also shows a considerable knowledge of the law. Cummins could equally well have had at least some training in that profession, although he certainly never practised it in Canada. He arrived in Canada in November 1836 as the agent of Lord Mount Cashel, who owned land at Delaware in the Western District, and on Amherst Island, just offshore from the present Ontario villages of Bath and Millhaven.⁴ He stopped briefly at Amherst Island and then went on to Delaware where he seems to have remained until the outbreak of the Rebellions of 1837.⁵ Family records show that Col. Fitzgibbon, impressed by his ability, promoted him to the rank of Captain and put him in charge of one of the militia companies at the battle of Montgomery's Tavern. On December 30, 1837 he was on a steamer opposite Fort Niagara defending against a possible American invasion in the wake of the burning of the *Caroline*. At the end of 1838, after the American raids along the St. Lawrence and Lake Ontario, he was Captain (the senior officer) of the militia company raised on Amherst Island⁶. The Preface to *Altham* gives him the title of Lt. Col. of the Canadian Militia.

He must have returned to Ireland in 1840 because he was married to Catherine Smith in Cork that year. He was on Amherst Island in the early 1840s,⁷ and was Chairman of the Midland District Council in 1844 and 1845⁸. The Preface to *Altham* is dated at Ernestown, October 1, 1848. Ernestown is on the mainland, close to the island.

After the publication of *Altham*, Cummins disappears from view, resurfacing in the Eastern Townships of Canada East six years later. He was the representative of the Township of Roxton on the Shefford County Council between 1855 and 1858.⁹ In the British American Land Company records¹⁰ there are official letters from him in 1859-60, dated at Cork, Londonderry, Sherbrooke and Bury, where he was obviously being employed both in recruiting new settlers and in assisting in their establishment in Canada East.¹¹ From October 1860 I have found no further trace of John Swete Cummins.

When Dr. Barker announced in 1847 that *Altham* was about to be published in London, he remarked that the English edition might never have any great sale in Canada because the price, 1.1, was too high. Because the high price of books printed in England was such a common complaint of Canadians at this time we have no way of knowing whether Dr. Barker's concern was genuine, or whether it was reflexive rhetoric, — nor whether his prediction was correct. The book was actually not published until 1849. A review printed in Barker's *British Whig* of September 19, 1849, was reproduced from the *London Nautical Standard* so we know that the novel received at least some notice in England. The lengthy article, which, in the manner of the time, contains a plot summary and an extract, was most laudatory, ending with a recommendation that all should read it.

Tales of the sea are no new things. We have had plenty in our time, and have thought the matter pretty well exhausted; yet it is not so. The one before us has excited a new and pleasing interest; we have in some passages of this well written book, identified ourselves with the feelings and actions of some of the characters, which are exceedingly well delineated, and have felt true pleasure at the graphic description of some of the incidents.

In the Preface, Cummins explains that the idea for the novel resulted from the conjunction of a remembered newspaper account of a lawsuit by James Annesley against his uncle Richard, Earl of Anglesey, over the Irish titles and estates of the family, with a suggestion once made to Sir Walter Scott of a novel which would take a young man from a poor district of Edinburgh and give him adventures among the French and Indians.

In the best early nineteenth century tradition the plot is complex, with several interpolated stories. In its simplest form the novel is a variation of the *bildungsroman*, in which the hero, through a series of trials, discovers who he is in both the legal and personal sense, and emerges to live happily ever after. To describe it at its most complex would require dozens of pages. Eliminating the interpolations for brevity, and concentrating on the main characters, the basic outline which follows is as brief as possible.

The story opens with a funeral. A young law student, Amos Bushe, observes that the service is evidently for someone who was a member of the nobility and notes that only one of the mourners, a boy of about 14, seems to be genuinely sad. The boy is obviously disliked by the man who appears to be the chief mourner. Enquiry yields the information that the youngster, James Annesley (called Jemmy), is the natural son of the deceased, Lord Altham, and that he has been raised by one of the family maids, Mary Weedon, who is evidently his mother. Bushe learns these details from the father of his friend Henry Dawkins. At the same time we are introduced to Mr. Dawkins' two nieces Alice and Isabella Brock, the daughters of Colonel Isaac Brock,¹² and to his daughter Mary. Bushe next meets Jemmy when he finds him seriously wounded in a street fight with young Mountmorris, the son of the new Lord Altham. Bushe, with the consent of Mary Weedon who wants Jemmy protected from her brutish husband John, takes the boy into his home. Mountmorris and Jemmy become friends, despite the opposition of Mountmorris' father. However, Lord Altham, with the assistance of John Weedon and of his agent, lawyer Quill, who is also Bushe's uncle, has been plotting. Bushe is sent to London on business and Jemmy is taken to Dublin to work in Quill's office. By deceit Quill arranges to be made Jemmy's legal guardian and then has him "apprenticed" to a pirate headed for the Cape. Effectively, Jemmy is kidnapped.

In the first of several naval chases, the pirate ship *Xarifa* escapes being captured by the 18-gun naval sloop *Savage* thanks to the seamanship of the captain Ingram and his chief mate Jake Van Ransallaer. On board, Jemmy learns seamanship, hears everyone's life story, and becomes a favourite of captain, mate, and crew, all of whom tolerate his refusal to fight against British ships. The *Xarifa* winds up as an American privateer in the War of 1812. Forced to scuttle the ship near the coast of Florida, Ingram sends Jemmy in a dinghy to Captain Brook in the pursuing vessel, *Shannon*, with a letter of introduction and some papers. Ingram had left British service earlier because of ill treatment. However, he had once saved Brook's life, and their relationship continued to be one of mutual respect. Jemmy is happy sailing under the British flag and makes himself useful to Brook as a midshipman. The first volume ends with the battle of the *Chesapeake* and the *Shannon*, with Jemmy aboard the *Shannon*. Ingram reappears to aid Brook and is severely wounded in the fight. Brook hears his dying confession, which, although the reader is given no details, obviously contains information to Jemmy's advantage.

Volume Two begins in a jubilant Halifax, where the *Shannon* has towed the *Chesapeake*. Young Jemmy is much favoured socially and enjoys the company of Mary Sherbrooke, daughter of the governor, Sir John Sherbrooke¹³. Brock and his daughters, along with Mountmorris who is attached to Alice Brock, happen to be in the city. Jemmy's interest in Isabella Brock is evident and, after Captain Brook tells the story of Ingram's confession to Brock, (and it is discovered that Ingram has left a large fortune to Jemmy), the interest is welcomed. When told that he is the legitimate heir of the late Earl, Jemmy nobly refuses to prosecute the matter because it would hurt his cousin Mountmorris.

However, back in Ireland, Bushe and Dawkins, trying to find out what has happened to Jemmy, uncover the plot. They locate Jemmy's mother, working incognito as housekeeper at the Altham family's country estate in Dunmaine. The late Earl had married her against her family's wishes and then got rid of her when she refused to condone his dissipated life-style.

All records of the wedding had been expunged by Quill and the wife was left with no legal recourse. The Earl believed that she was dead. Mary Weedon, on her deathbed, confirms both the story and the identity of the housekeeper, and John Weedon, reforming on the spot, announces that he is the only surviving witness to the marriage, as well as to the son's birth, and will now devote himself to seeing that justice is done. Informed of the existence of his mother, Jemmy agrees to allow action to be taken against the false Earl, in order to clear his mother's name. Brock and Mountmorris had already left for Upper Canada. Jemmy, who has volunteered for naval service on the Great Lakes, is ordered to escort the Brock sisters and Mary Sherbrooke to Montreal while on his way to take up his new duties.

In the Gulf of St. Lawrence they encounter a severe storm and are only saved by the actions of an American prisoner on board, whom Jemmy has recognized as Jake Van Ransallaer. While the vessel is being repaired in the shelter of the Saguenay they all go off on an expedition with Jake to meet a French recluse, and are told his story. Arriving in Montreal, they find that Brock and Mountmorris have both been killed at Queenston. With the consent of Jemmy's mother and Isabella's uncle, the couple are married in Montreal and set off by ship for England. The false Earl enters a monastery and Jemmy, now the Earl, punishes Quill, making him return land and money he has stolen from Bushe while acting as the young man's guardian, and installs Bushe as his agent. Bushe can now marry Mary Dawkins. In a curious concluding chapter, Cummins writes of the marriage of the son of a Loyalist friend and colleague of Sir John Sherbrooke, Harry Sherwood, to Mary Sherbrooke and of their trip to see the old Sherwood home in the United States, where they encounter Jake as a Yankee farmer and the husband of Sherwood's cousin.

Cummins is a natural storyteller, with the result that the dominant characteristic of *Altham* is its strong propulsive plot. In the beginning there is the mystery of Jemmy's birth. As in any good mystery, clues are given subtly, never so clearly as to give away the story, but always containing all appropriate information. It is only on second reading that the details can be distinguished. For example, Mary Weedon, when questioned early in the novel, convincingly implies that she is Jemmy's mother, although she never actually says that she is. In addition to the puzzle which must be solved, and the question of whether Jemmy will survive the plots against him, the narrative moves continuously from one variety of action to another. Even in the Irish sections, Bushe and Dawkins' mad dash on borrowed horses to reach Dunmaine before Lord Altham's henchmen, the question of whether they will or will not be admitted, and whether they will be able to interview Mary Weedon before her death, all command the reader's concentration. Where the sea is concerned, sailors always seem to be battling either a storm or an enemy. Although it is evident to an experienced reader that Jemmy, as hero, must survive, the survival of other principal characters is not nearly so assured. There is suspense attached to each battle and each storm. In fact, St. Aubin, the second mate of the *Xarifa*, who had befriended Jemmy, dies in one confrontation, dramatically taking with him the man who had enticed him into dishonour, and Ingram, also, does not survive the encounter of the *Chesapeake* and the *Shannon*. In the best nineteenth century manner he must die for the wrongs he has committed, but in dying on the right (British) side of the battle, and in confessing information that will resolve much of Jemmy's problem, and then in leaving him his money, he goes some way toward redeeming himself.

Another major characteristic of the novel is an abundance of detailed description. People are seldom described extensively, Cummins relying on certain characteristics to establish individuality. However, there is Niagara, the Saguenay, storms and battles, and the aurora seen and heard at sea. These descriptions are frequently a mixture of conventional phrases and the author's own individual observations. Although they must have been set pieces, they are well integrated into the text. The aurora, for example:

All was silence fore and aft, and for some minutes they walked the deck absorbed in the loveliness of the scene, — it changed, the perfect silence was

broken by a sound, the reality of which each doubted, so faint was it, yet, though neither at the moment mentioned it to the other, each at the same instant had perceived, — it was like the very distant wailing of a thousand Aeolian harps, so striking, yet so indistinct, that pausing in their walk, they bent themselves to catch it more clearly. This had not lasted many seconds, when the heavens put on one of their grandest but least accounted for appearances, — myriads of shooting stars glanced from the westward, shewing first as brilliant specks darting through space, anon, as glowing meteors, and, ere the eye had rightly fixed itself on their flying course, disappearing in some cases with a burst of flame like a rocket... [14](#)

There is a breathless, present tense immediacy to the battles:

Again a gust sweeps aside the smoke, and Annesley perceives that the Chesapeake's jib and fore-topsail are flying, the sheet of the former and the tye of the latter being shot away, and the ship having come to the wind, is drifting helplessly down. A waist anchor stowed in the Shannon's fore chains, catches in her quarter gallery, the impetus of the latter heaves her still farther into the wind, and the anchor holding, her decks are swept by the raking shot of the English to which her position only enables her to reply with a feeble fire. [15](#)

The description of the Saguenay is "Ossianic", that of Niagara contains the usual references to the Divinity. However, both descriptions return to a human scale, the former with a visit to the French recluse on his island, the latter with a description of entering the cave under the falls.

After having undergone the pains of suffocation, and being perhaps more than once baffled, you succeed in stemming the torrent of spray and pent up wind borne down by the falling river. Others have entered, and you resolve to do so or die, and are now probably successful. Oh! how magnificently are you rewarded for all your pains. [16](#)

The extended descriptions do not really interrupt the flow of the narrative, and in some cases propel it rapidly forward. The various life histories recounted to Jemmy while on ships and the resulting authorial digressions on the subjects of impressment, naval life, naval punishment, and the relationship between law and morality also compel interest because the author's indignation shines through so plainly.

Hear this, proud gentlemen of England!! Hear it, you English mothers!! . . . Hear it, and pause well before you entrust the children of your affections to a service where such punishment is entailed, by a high-spirited youth forgetting even for a moment the degrading shackles of the slavish condition to which he is reduced on entering it. . . . the sentence of the court . . . proves that the higher grades of the navy cannot bear to see an inferior braving, even though in a righteous cause, his superior. . . . But we forget we are merely writing a yarn, — your pardon, gentle reader. [17](#)

Cummins' scorn for the system of advancement in the navy is evident in his description of Smith, Captain Brook's mate.

Smith was a jolly good humored mate, who had passed for his lieutenancy some twenty years before, yet who never considered himself hardly used, although many a cub of interest, whether of his own or *his father's master's*, had been promoted over his head, without one-tenth of his practical knowledge. [18](#)

In the context of the novel Cummins is able to right the wrong, since Smith is rewarded for his role in the *Chesapeake* fight by promotion at the scene of battle, a promotion later confirmed by the Admiral in Halifax. He is in command of the ship on which Jemmy returns to England at the end of the novel.

When the *Shannon* takes an American ship, Captain Brook acquires as additional crew a group of impressed Irishmen. This is the occasion for Cummins to indulge in a three-page diatribe against the practice of impressment. He begins: "One word about impressment. What Briton is there who must not blush that such a practice is still sanctioned by usage?"¹⁹ His arguments against what he calls slavery, continue for over two pages, until the abrupt end of the chapter changes the scene.

Similarly, when the solicitor Torrens, a noted crusader against injustice, agrees to defend Dawkins, Bushe and, subsequently, Jemmy against the false Lord Altham, Cummins indulges in a long disquisition on law, truth, and morality.

In all these instances of moral indignation, Cummins shows himself to be very much on the side of the social underdog. He refers to Smith's lack of influence as holding him back, despite his merits; to St. Aubin's severe and unjust punishment by a superior officer; to the fact that only lower class males ever suffer impressment. When young Mountmorris attempts to pay off Jemmy after seriously injuring him in an unfair fight Mary Weedon erupts ". . . you great folks think money can cure every evil you do. . . ." ²⁰, a comment that, in the end, can be seen as applying to other activities of the family as well. However, despite Cummins' apparently enlightened view of class distinctions, he is unable to resist describing his hero as set apart from others of his seeming social class by his noble appearance and grace.

The least interesting parts of the novel, because they slow down the action, are the interpolated stories of Ingram, St. Aubin and the French recluse Louis. The two former at least are relatively short and have some connection with motivation and character. It would be difficult to remove them because the information they contain explains some of the action. The only excuse for the last, which takes up a hundred pages of the second volume, is that it pads the book to an appropriate length for a two-volume novel. It must have been a separate story, written for some other purpose, because it could be excised without any effect on the narrative. It may have been intended to build suspense, because it is inserted just at the moment when the final resolution is about to take place, but it only serves to frustrate the reader. The story itself is stereotypical: dashing young Frenchman flees with girl he loves to new world, she dies in wreck, he is saved by Indians, takes Indian wife and lives as recluse in the (very beautiful) wilderness.

All the above flows from the role of an omniscient narrator in the novel. Everyone is seen from outside, there is no character development, and the females, with the exception of Mary Weedon, are lovely cardboard cut-outs. Even the hero's personal growth and development are the result of action rather than reflection and his restoration to his heritage comes about through the actions of others outside his control.

Because of the narrative style, there is not a great deal of dialogue in the novel. Where it occurs, Cummins attempts to suit the style to the speaker. He uses dialect for the lower class Irish and American characters, formal nineteenth century standard English for most of the characters, and legal terminology for the lawyers. In action sequences, individuals speak in short, breathless sentences and words of one syllable.

Other than the location of over half the action, what makes *Altham* a Canadian novel? First, it was written in Canada, for Canadians, by a Canadian resident, which is surely in itself enough to make it Canadian. A further question is whether those parts of the action set in Canada could have taken place anywhere else? The answer must be in the negative. The

War of 1812 was site specific, as was privateering, as were the *Chesapeake* and the *Shannon*. Brock was, of course, a Canadian hero, although his specific role in the novel is mostly that of a kindly father. Neither he nor Sir John Sherbrooke needed to be invested with a domestic life and named as specific characters, except that Cummins was writing for Canadians and deliberately used names that resonated in Canadian ears. The Canadian certainty that they had won the war is echoed in one of the author's lengthy asides. Complaining of American boasting, "So often and so vauntingly have they sung their Paeans of victory, that they actually have the impertinence to believe that they have *whipped the Britishers*"²¹, Cummins, defending the British, makes the distinction between naval battles on the lakes and on the Atlantic, saying further that more American ships were taken than vice versa, and that the Americans were indulging in propa ganda in order to justify the high prices of supplies owing to the naval blockade.

The greater portion of our national vessels which struck to those of American, were hastily constructed for the defence of the Canadian lakes, and manned chiefly by raw levies, who fought bravely, (indeed, then ill-equipped vessels,) [sic] but fell an easy prey to fleets having full resources on the spot. In Commodore Perry (that sucking Nelson's) [sic] action, for instance, he was only opposed to fifty British sailors, *including officers and boys*, scattered through six vessels, the rest of the crews being made up of *soldiers* and Canadian voyageurs.²²

The Americans in *Altham* are rarely portrayed as villains, but Cummins' comments about the nation itself are more ambivalent.²³ For example, Jake, the Xarifa's mate, an American who pops up repeatedly in the story, is seen as a rough and uncouth, but basically good-hearted, man, and an admirable sailor. His dominant characteristic is energy. He is initially antagonistic to Jemmy, but is soon won over. Where the war is concerned, America is to blame and has been deservedly beaten. However, just as there is an element of admiration when Cummins describes Jake's energy and ingenuity, there is an element of admiration in his cautionary comment,:

... a land invincible so long as its citizens, content with the exhaustless treasures which nature has provided them, in a region of measureless extent and teeming wealth, shall avoid *aggressive warfare*; that sin, before which, if we [sic] should unhappily for themselves and for the world become habitual; as surely as they have now for half a century, presented the glorious spectacle of unexampled growth and vigour, under free republican institutions: these institutions will sink; that free republic vanish, and give place to be blighted rule of military chiefs, and. . . shrink into premature decrepitude.²⁴

Cummins' comment on the end of the War of 1812 is pacific. "Let England and America vie in good feeling one to the other, and give liberty to the world, not by force, but by the influence which such a joint example must exert throughout the globe."²⁵

As a novelist, John Swete Cummins appears to have been a one-book man, although the final sentence of *Altham* ("Kind reader, for the present farewell — if *Altham* gives us the privilege, we hope soon to renew our acquaintance."²⁶) suggests that this may not have been voluntary. This limited publishing exposure accords with the Canadian experience of his time. Before mid-century, of the eight English-language novelists who resided in the Canadas, only John Richardson and Julia Beckwith Hart published more than one novel. Among poets, the percentage of one-book authors is even higher. Cummins was not alone either, in publishing his completed work outside Canada. Although John Richardson's *Canadian Brothers* was published in Montreal in 1840, his other "Canadian" novel, *Wacousta*, was not published in Canada until 1868, thirty-six years after its London publication, and Richardson's European

and American novels have still not been published in Canada.²⁷ Similarly, while Julia Hart published *St. Ursula's Convent* in Kingston in 1824, *Tonnewont* was published in the United States (Watertown, 1825), as were Charles Beardsley's *The Victims of Tyranny* (Buffalo, 1847) and Abraham Holmes' *Belinda* (Detroit, 1843).

Locally-written novels were uncommon in the Canadas before Confederation. Novels were still not, of course, considered by many people to be suitable reading. Fiction and imagination were regarded with considerable suspicion, while poetry — moral, genteel and controlled — was acceptable to society as a whole. The nine novels in English²⁸ which can be considered as products of Upper and Lower Canadian literary activity before the middle of the nineteenth century are a varied lot, with few common characteristics, except that all but *The Coiners of Pompeii* were, in whole or in part, set in past time in Canada. In the tradition of Sir Walter Scott, Bulwer Lytton and Captain Marryat, who wrote many of the "best sellers" of the period, most contained a mixture of adventure and romance, although the romance and adventure in *The Victims of Tyranny* are only a thin disguise for a political statement, and the romance in *Belinda* is satirical and psychological. In the Canadian novels, as in others of the early Victorian period, the plot was perceived to be more important than the protagonists, who, if they were male, tended to be identified by one or two characteristics, and if they were female, were dependent and monochromatic at best. Elements of the exotic or gothic, popular components of much of the fiction of the time, appear occasionally to titillate the reader. *Altham*, with its supposedly-orphaned hero, its adventures leading to a happy ending, and its setting in the recent Canadian past, is part of this amorphous group, all of which owe more to European influences than they do to any North American vision.

Cummins was also not alone in publishing his work serially before it appeared in book format. Susanna Moodie did the same thing with *Geoffrey Moncton*, *Matrimonial Speculations*, *Mark Hurdlestone*, and parts of *Roughing it in the Bush*, all of which appeared under various titles in the *Literary Garland*, and with *Flora Lyndsay* (Rachel Wild) in the *Victoria Magazine*, before these novels were published in England and the United States. John Richardson's *Hardscrabble* appeared as a serial in *Sartain's Union Magazine* before its New York publication in 1851. Even the poets of the time had usually published all, or almost all, of the contents of their verse volumes in local newspapers and periodicals before they were collected and offered to the public. Because the author's names had become familiar and their work was already generally known to the literate part of Canadian society, the books had a better chance of selling — and since literary works in the Canadas were published by advance subscription or entirely at the author's expense the only chance of making a profit was to sell many copies. It is not surprising, therefore, that a writer with British connections would wish to publish in England where there was a larger market and where there was the possibility of some payment, however small, from publisher to author.

By the standards of novels produced in the English-speaking world in the first half of the nineteenth century *Altham* is a fine piece of work. Its action holds the reader's interest, it persuades one to care about the fate of its hero, its wry and impassioned asides delight. It is also a very good Canadian novel, which deserves to be reprinted, read and studied.

Notes

1. *Barker's* published all of Volume I and the first 95 pages of Volume II. [\[back\]](#)
2. October 30, 1847. [\[back\]](#)

3. *Burke's Irish Family Records* gives his parentage, birth and marriage dates (p. 306). *The History of the Cummins Family in Cork* (Cork: H.M. Cummins, 1952), gives more detailed information about the family. This is the source for the commendation by Fitzgibbon, quoting a certificate in the family's possession. It is interesting to note that the sister who came after him, Martha Swete Cummins "was an authoress of some repute and wrote amongst other novels — 'Esther O'Donoghue' ". Every detail about the John Swete Cummins mentioned in the family records agrees with what we know about the Canadian author. [\[back\]](#)
4. Copies of some of the account books for the Mount Cashel estate on Amherst Island are reserved as an incomplete series in the Burleigh Collection in the Queen's University Archives. Cummins first appears in the account books in November 1836. He seems to have been paid 100 p/a, plus expenses. The basic outline of Cummins service to Lord Mount Cashel is confirmed in the John Clark Diaries in the same collection. The Clark diaries also confirm the Militia rank. [\[back\]](#)
5. Three letters, rich in detail, in the Ontario Archives Miscellaneous Collection, dated December 13, 1836, February 17, 1837, and Dec. 30, 1837, from Cummins to his father, a sister, and a young friend describe life at Delaware, and on the Niagara frontier. A newspaper report (*Kingston Chronicle*, November 8, 1837) places him at an anti-reform meeting in London, C.W. early in November. [\[back\]](#)
6. *Kingston Chronicle*, December 12, 1838. [\[back\]](#)
7. Queen's Archives, Burleigh Collection #2324, Box 16, files 13, 17, 20A. [\[back\]](#)
8. Various official notices in Kingston newspapers: for example; *British Whig*, January 31, 1845. [\[back\]](#)
9. Cyrus Thomas, *History of Shefford* (1866). [\[back\]](#)
10. National Archives, MG 24 I 54, Vol. 2, 416-432; Vol. 3, 440, 472-474, 480-483. [\[back\]](#)
11. I am certain this is the same person because one of his children, whose name is confirmed in the Cummins genealogy, was christened in Bury in 1858. The content of the BALC letters is consistent with what we know of biographical data. [\[back\]](#)
12. Brock was, in fact, a bachelor. Since the date of this section of the novel is unclear, his rank of Colonel may or may not have been correct. [\[back\]](#)
13. The real Sir John Sherbrooke was married, but had no children. He was Lt. Coy, of Nova Scotia 1811-16. [\[back\]](#)
14. *Barker's* 9 (January 1847): 479. [\[back\]](#)
15. *Barker's* 10 (February 1847): 535. [\[back\]](#)

16. *Al tham* 2: 281. [\[back\]](#)
17. *Barker's* 8 (December 1846): 464. [\[back\]](#)
18. *Barker's* 9 (January 1847): 479. [\[back\]](#)
19. *Barker's* 10 (February 1847): 528. [\[back\]](#)
20. *Al tham* 1: 28. [\[back\]](#)
21. *Al tham* 1: 246. [\[back\]](#)
22. *Al tham* 1: 248. [\[back\]](#)
23. In the political rhetoric surrounding the War of 1812, Americans were always portrayed as ruthless invaders. Richardson's *The Canadian Brothers* is the fictional work that makes greatest use of this attitude, although by no means all individual Americans in the novel are "bad" men. In the short fiction of the time the United States was generally portrayed as a distant place which people visited, or to which they escaped to avoid punishment. Fictional individual Americans ran the gamut of human behaviour from devil to saint. Cummins' ambivalence about America and Americans is typical of Canadian attitudes in this period. [\[back\]](#)
24. *Al tham* 1: 220-21. [\[back\]](#)
25. *Al tham* 2: 279. [\[back\]](#)
26. *Al tham* 2: 309. [\[back\]](#)
27. *Westbrook, The Outlaw* was reprinted in a limited edition by Grant Woolmer Books (Montreal, 1973). The text was compiled from a serialized version printed in the New York *Sunday Mercury* between September 4 and October 26, 1851. [\[back\]](#)
28. Julia Beckwith Hart, *St. Ursula's Convent* (Kingston, 1824), and *Tonnewonte* (Watertown: 1825); James Russell, *Matilda* (Three Rivers, 1833); John Richardson, *The Canadian Brothers* (Montreal, 1840); Abraham Holmes, *Belinda* (Detroit, 1843); Richard Ryland, *The Coiners of Pompeii* (Toronto, 1845); Charles Beardsley, *The Victims of Tyranny* (Buffalo, 1847); H.H.B., *The Last of the Fries* (Simcoe, 1849); and *Al tham*. I do not count Joseph Abbott's *Philip Musgrave* (London, 1846) which is basically autobiography; David Wylie's *Recollections of a Convict* (Montreal, 1847), biography; Mary Ann Madden's *Tales of the Olden Time* (Montreal, 1845), short stories; nor John Richardson's *Wacousta* (London, 1832), published for a British audience at a time when Richardson seemed unlikely to return to Canada. Various novels, published in England, which were set in Canada, but whose authors in many cases do not seem to have even visited Canada, have also been excluded. [\[back\]](#)