

Charles Ritchie  
and the  
English Diary Tradition

A Thesis  
presented to the  
Department of English  
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In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the  
degree of Master of Arts

by  
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CHARLES RITCHIE



## Table of Contents

	Page
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgements	
Abstract	
Introduction	
Chapter 1 Defining Criteria	
Chapter 2 Discovering Motive	32
Chapter 3 Ego and Ideal	55
Chapter 4 Style, Tone and Self-Projection	
Chapter 5 Charles Ritchie: Serial Autobiographer	94
Chapter 6 Sensibility, Time and Place	117
Conclusion	140
Appendix	144
Select Bibliography	148

Dedication

To my daughter Kirsty  
who keeps a diary

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## Abstract

The literary merit of the diaries of Charles Ritchie is apparent to anyone who reads them. A more critical assessment is hindered, however, by the fact that there is as yet in Canada no literary context in which the writings of any indigenous diarists may be placed. In order to assess the literary merit of the diaries of Charles Ritchie, therefore, this thesis examines them in relation to the "conceptual perspectives" for English diary-writing as established in Private Chronicles: A Study of English Diaries, by Robert A. Fothergill of York University in Toronto. The introduction presents the case for such an examination and outlines the history of the English diary tradition and the scope of Fothergill's study. Chapter One defines the criteria which Fothergill believes have been developed for the diary genre by the "great" diarists themselves, and which are based on the two complementary concepts of "book of the self" and "imprint." These two concepts are then applied to the writings of Charles Ritchie, and his use of "new forms" containing "new expressive possibilities" is described. Various motives for diary-writing are discussed in Chapter Two, in relation to the discernable motives of Charles Ritchie. Chapters Three and Four divide the four volumes of Ritchie's diary into two distinct parts, with Chapter Three discussing the two earlier diaries as the work of a "Becoming" diarist, and Chapter Four treating the two later volumes as the work of a diarist

who has "Become". Ritchie's "autobiographical consciousness" is the subject of Chapter Five, which asserts his claim to the title of "serial autobiographer." Chapter Six looks at Ritchie's contribution to the "history of 'sensitivity'" and shows how his particular sensitivity reflects not only the age in which he lives, but also his Nova Scotian Canadian identity. This study concludes by determining that Charles Ritchie is a "serial autobiographer" with creative "sensibilities," who has found a "new form containing new expressive possibilities." As such, he deserves an honoured place in the English diary tradition and membership in that company of "great" diarists which includes such distinguished peers as Samuel Pepys and Anais Nin.

## Introduction

In the landscape of Canadian literature, the diaries of Charles Ritchie stand out like a mysterious erratic in a prairie field. Thanks to the science of geology, the presence of erratics in the natural world has been explained. But how to account for the literary phenomenon of Charles Ritchie?

Ritchie's published diaries (The Siren Years: A Canadian Diplomat Abroad, 1937-1945, Toronto: Macmillan, 1974; An Appetite for Life: The Education of a Young Diarist, 1924-1927, 1977; Diplomatic Passport: More Undiplomatic Diaries, 1946-1962, 1981; Storm Signals: More Undiplomatic Diaries, 1962-1971, 1983) impress even the most casual reader with their quality of style and content. When one seeks to place them in a literary context, however, a difficulty soon arises. For Ritchie is Canadian, and Canadian literature, despite its many accomplishments to date, cannot boast of an indigenous diary tradition.

For example, Volume One of The Literary History of Canada lists in its index precisely three entries under the heading of "Diary."<sup>1</sup> They are the diary of Mrs. Elizabeth Posthuma (Gwillim) Simcoe (1766-1850), who was the wife of Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe and who kept a diary between September, 1791 and October, 1796; Walt Whitman's Diary in Canada (1904), and The Diary and Narrative of Richard Henry Alexander, in a Journey Across the Rocky Mountains, which

was written in 1862 and remained unpublished until 1973. All three are essentially travel diaries, however, and thus limited in scope. As prose compositions, they can be classed with the many journals, letters and memoirs dating from the early days of exploration whose main interest for today's reader is not literary but historical.

Volume Two of The Literary History of Canada lists only The Diary of Samuel Marchbanks (1947), by Robertson Davies. Drawn from newspaper columns which first appeared in the Peterborough Examiner, the Diary is Davies' fictional means to a didactic end. Through the barbed wit of the "dyspeptic" Marchbanks, he seeks to provide a "frank and often critical illumination of the Canadian way of life" in all its North American provincialism.<sup>2</sup> Though obviously well aware of the existence of an English diary tradition, Davies cannot be said to belong to it with this fictionalized application of the genre.

Volume Three of The Literary History of Canada has no listing under "Diary" at all. Nor does it include an essay surveying the history of the genre in Canada, obviously owing to a dearth of material. It is to be hoped that future editors may decide to adjust this situation, particularly in view of the four diaries which Charles Ritchie has already published, and in light of even more recent developments.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, however, in what context may the Ritchie diaries, with their evident literary merit, be properly considered? The answer must surely be that the appropriate context is that of the English diary tradition.

By both background and upbringing, the youthful Charles Ritchie was strongly oriented towards Britain. Born in Halifax, Nova Scotia in 1906, he attended preparatory school in England and later Trinity College School at Port Hope, Ontario, where he and his friend Peter "had to take a lot of kidding because of our English accents."<sup>4</sup> At the commencement of An Appetite for Life, he is attending King's College in Halifax and living in a house he describes as "old, built in 1817, with a Victorian front added later." (5)

An avid reader throughout his life, Ritchie reveals that his early exposure to literature had a decidedly English slant as well. At age seventeen, he refers to "certain favourite books such as Rupert Brooke's poems [and] . . . Horace Walpole's letters." (7) In an interview in 1986, he recalled how "my mother read all the Victorian things to us," and that Walpole's letters "were one of my great solaces" while he was "a very miserable schoolboy" at Trinity College School in Ontario.<sup>5</sup>

In 1926, Ritchie arrived at Oxford, after paying a courtesy visit to his great-aunt Zaidee in Cheltenham en route. (107) After further studies at Harvard and in Paris, he essayed a "short-lived spell of journalism in London [and] an amateurish but exhilarating bout of teaching French irregular verbs in an 'experimental' school [Pickering College] in Canada."<sup>6</sup> In 1934 he joined the Canadian Department of External Affairs as a fledgling diplomat, and by 1939 was appointed Second Secretary at the Canadian High Commission in London,



where he remained until early in 1945. In his Foreword to The Siren Years, Ritchie describes some of the atmosphere of his formative years:

I was born at our family home, "The Bower" . . . the Halifax of those days--at any rate the Halifax of my [widowed] mother and her friends--looked back to its past as a garrison town and a base for the Royal Navy. I was brought up in an atmosphere--which must be incomprehensibly remote to modern Canadians--in which everything British was Best and "upper Canada" was a remote and unloved abstraction. Yet my family had been in Nova Scotia for four or five generations. Their devotion to Crown and Empire was a romantic fidelity, quite different from the satisfied acceptance of the English by themselves as English. They might look to England but it was hard for the individual Englishman to pass through the eye of their needle. (8)

In an apt description of his own colonial--yet clear-eyed--mentality, Ritchie has summed up the contents of The Siren Years as "scenes and people described as viewed by an insider-outsider--one immersed from boyhood in English life but not an Englishman." (7)

In the absence of an established tradition of diary-writing in Canada, Charles Ritchie's strong orientation towards England makes it reasonable to consider his diaries as a continuation of the English diary tradition. That tradition, explains Lionel Trilling, began with the birth of "modern" man: "[h]istorians of European culture are in substantial agreement that, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, something like a mutation in human nature took place."<sup>7</sup> As the old feudal order declined, and with it, the authority of the Church, psychological changes took place as well, until "at a certain point," man began to see himself as an individual. With this self-recognition, states Trilling, came "[t]he impulse to write autobiography."<sup>8</sup>

Two hundred years later, that impulse had produced what Roy Pascal describes as an "age" of great autobiography.<sup>9</sup> Citing the works of such figures as Rousseau, Goethe, Wordsworth and Gibbon, Pascal declares: "[p]erhaps because it was bound by no literary convention, the autobiography became a medium for new insights into man."<sup>10</sup>

The term "autobiography" first appeared in print when Robert Southey used it in an article for The Quarterly Review in 1809.<sup>11</sup> In the previous century, writing the story of one's own life was an activity for which a gentleman had found it necessary to apologize. After 1800, "apology was still necessary, but the indiscretion was all the more widely committed."<sup>12</sup>

Recognition of the diary as a separate (though related) genre, of legitimate interest in its own right, came even more slowly. According to P. A. Spalding, "[t]he first step towards an appreciation of diaries as a minor literary genre was the publication of Evelyn's in 1818," yet John Evelyn actually wrote his Diary from 1640 to 1706. Similarly, the manuscript of Samuel Pepys' diary "had lain unread in the [Magdalene] College [Cambridge] library" since shortly after Pepys' death in 1703, until public interest in Evelyn's diary at last prompted its examination.<sup>13</sup> Though an abbreviated version of Pepys' diary was published in 1825, a more complete edition did not appear until 1899. Continues Spalding:

It was not until after the 1914-18 war that increased freedom of speech and a new interest in social and psychological minutiae permitted and encouraged the publication of diaries hitherto unknown or buried in files of learned societies.<sup>14</sup>

That diary-writing had been practised, often in secret, for at least three hundred years was now common knowledge. That it had at last become respectable may be judged by the fact that Queen Victoria herself kept a diary, for sixty-eight years.<sup>15</sup>

Though the diary is now generally regarded as a literary genre in its own right, certain similarities between it and the autobiography are immediately evident. For example, Elizabeth W. Bruss, writing in Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre, selects four writers who represent "a moment in the history and the progressive articulation of the autobiographical act." One of them is James Boswell. Bruss then proceeds to quote numerous passages from Boswell's London Journal without ever referring to its author as a diarist. Instead, she confidently remarks, "In Boswell's day, journals were perhaps the most common form of autobiographical publication."<sup>16</sup> And Robert A. Fothergill, in Private Chronicles: A Study of English Diaries, coins the term "serial autobiography" to describe a particular type of diary which, when kept over a significant period of time, develops the literary character of an autobiography.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, there are certain marked differences between the two forms. William Matthews, in "The Diary: a Neglected Genre," points out that "[t]he true diarist writes for himself. The form is unique among literary genres in that it envisages no external audience and that peculiarity affects both the content and the style."<sup>18</sup> In fact, for Matthews, "The essential quality of a good diary is that it

should be truthful and sincere" in a way that the autobiographer cannot equal.<sup>19</sup> As Jane Carlyle once lamented:

Oh . . . if I might write my own biography from beginning to end, without reservation or false colouring--it would be an invaluable document for my countrywomen in more than one particular. But "decency forbids"!<sup>20</sup>

A more significant difference between the diary and the autobiography has been pointed out by Roy Pascal:

The . . . [autobiography] . . . is a review of a life from a particular moment in time, while the diary, however reflective it may be, moves through a series of moments in time. The diarist notes down what, at that moment, seems of importance to him; its ultimate, long-range significance cannot be assessed.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, compared with the autobiographer, who has the advantage of being able to look back on his life and perceive its patterning, the diarist, who is bound to the continuing present, is writing in the dark. For the gifted diarist, however, this limitation is not necessarily disadvantageous; "writing in the dark" has virtues of its own. As George Gusdorf has explained:

This constant tension, this charge of the unknown, which corresponds to the very arrow of lived time, cannot exist in a narrative of memories composed after the event by someone who knows the end of the story.<sup>22</sup>

William Matthews is co-editor of the eleven-volume edition of The Diary of Samuel Pepys published by the University of California Press in 1970, and one of the foremost authorities on the genre. Describing his research activities, the apparently inexhaustible Matthews has written:

My own list of published British and American diaries that have found their way into print totals about 7,000, and my annotated lists of American diaries in manuscript perhaps 5,000 more, even though it does not include manuscripts in private ownership or

those in a good many libraries whose holdings could not be examined.<sup>23</sup>

Of the intrinsic nature of the diary, Matthews remarks:

It is characteristic of the diary . . . that unlike biographies or autobiographies, it lacks pattern and design. As life-records, diaries present a natural disorder and emphasis which is artfully rearranged in biography and autobiography and so corrupted.<sup>24</sup>

With the words "natural disorder and emphasis," Matthews indicates both the diary's weakness and its strength as the record of a life. It may be trivial, long-winded, disorganized, hypocritical and in print only because of the historical or social information it may inadvertently contain. Or it may be a masterly reflection of an actual human life, of the sort that inspired Thomas Mallon to write of Stendhal: "So great are his diaries that by their end one would rather be him than read him."<sup>25</sup>

Critical examination of the diary as a distinct literary genre appears to have been surprisingly slow off the mark. In the words of Robert A. Fothergill, "in these days of critical over-population, the territory is almost entirely uninhabited." (5) Mention has already been made of the pioneering efforts of William Matthews, whose An Annotated Bibliography of British Diaries Written Between 1442 and 1942 (University of California Press, 1950) lists nearly 2,300 entries. Prior to Matthews' work, the most significant contribution to the study of English diary-writing was made by Lord Arthur Ponsonby, who published a series of books in the 1920's containing descriptive lists of hundreds of English, Scottish and Irish diaries, many of which were still in manuscript form and virtually unknown. The primary interest

of these early researchers, however, was to establish the boundaries of the field. It is to the work of Robert A. Fothergill, of York University in Toronto, that we must now turn for a critical survey of the terrain.

In his introduction to Private Chronicles, Fothergill pays tribute to the work of Ponsonby and Matthews in compiling "the corpus" of English diary-writing. He then continues:

This book undertakes to introduce some order into this welter of materials. It seeks to establish conceptual perspectives that will cause English diary-writing to appear not as a heap but as an intricate and complex pattern. What . . . [Ponsonby] . . . lacks is a way of perceiving the character and quality of a given diary not merely as a manifestation of the writer's personality, but as a function of its place in an evolutionary pattern. If the language can be found for treating diaries as books rather than as people, it will be possible to see diary-writing as a complex genre in which successive conventions of perception and expression impart a character to the most private and informal of writings. (2)

It is Fothergill's firm belief that "there is a perceptible evolution in the conventions of diary-writing," (3) and he affirms that it is possible to distinguish between "those diaries in which the main line of evolutionary descent is manifested and those which are merely the multiplication of species arrested at a particular stage of development." (7) Fothergill states that there are two ways in which the history of diary-writing reveals the evolutionary process at work. One of these is in the changing sensibilities of successive diarists. In fact, Fothergill believes, the history of diary-writing can be described as "a manifestation of the history of 'sensibility.'" (11)

Every diarist writes, not only as an expression of his own personality, but also in response to the world in which he lives. As

that world changes, culturally and socially through history, the sensibilities of the diarists who reflect it will change with it. This fact is the justification for Fothergill's statement that, as a contribution to the "history of 'sensibility,'" the "classic of gushing Victorian-ness" written by one of Queen Victoria's ladies-in-waiting has more value than the diary of George Eliot, which covers an identical period (1854-1880) and "consists mainly of notes on her reading and on her health." (12)

The second way in which the history of diary-writing reveals an evolutionary process at work is that it demonstrates to the discerning reader "the emergence of new forms, new expressive possibilities in the writing of people who have taken the diary seriously." Such people have discovered new methods of exploiting the diary's potential as a literary genre. Indeed, adds Fothergill:

. . . the diary . . . has its geniuses. . . . At any particular epoch . . . the outstanding diarist can be recognized as he who is richly expressive of contemporary sensibility while making a distinguished contribution to the art of serial autobiography. (12)

To support his thesis, Fothergill selects "six diarists to stand as milestones on three centuries of road," with each of the six representing "the fulfillment of a phase in the evolutionary movement." (12) The six diarists he chooses are Samuel Pepys (1633-1703), James Boswell (1740-1795), Benjamin Haydon (1786-1846), Francis Kilvert (1840-1879), W. N. P. Barbellion (1889-1919) and Anais Nin (1903-1977).<sup>26</sup>

It is the aim of the present study to examine and evaluate the diaries of Charles Ritchie in the context of the English diary

tradition. This study therefore begins by examining the "conceptual perspectives" which Robert A. Fothergill has established for English diary-writing, and relating them to the Ritchie diaries. Chapter Two discusses various motives for diary-writing, in order to determine the primary motivations in the case of Charles Ritchie. Chapters Three and Four divide the four published volumes of the Ritchie diaries between them, with Chapter Three viewing the two early diaries as examples of a "Becoming" diarist, in the conscious process of self-development, and Chapter Four discussing how style and tone are used to project a "Become" self-image in the two later diaries. "Charles Ritchie as serial autobiographer" is the subject of Chapter Five, which endeavours to assess Ritchie's claim to this distinction. Chapter Six looks at the issue of "sensibility," and attempts to show how Ritchie's sensibilities reflect not only his time and place, but also his Canadian nationality. Finally, this study concludes by attempting to determine, on the basis of its earlier findings, whether Charles Ritchie may be fittingly described as an "outstanding diarist" within the English diary tradition.



## Introduction

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English, ed. Carl F. Klinck, 2nd ed., I (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1976), 515.

<sup>2</sup>Brandon Conron, assisted by Donald Hair, "Essays 1920-1960," in Literary History of Canada, II, 123.

<sup>3</sup>Indications that a Canadian diary tradition may be in the process of formation include, in addition to the Ritchie diaries, the publication of Selected Journals of L. M. Montgomery, ed. Richio and Waterston, I (Toronto: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985), with volume two to follow, and of Necessary Secrets: The Journals of Elizabeth Smart, edited by Alice van Wart (Toronto: Deneau), 1987. Any future study of diaries in Canada should also make mention of the diary of David Fennario, Without a Parachute (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974).

<sup>4</sup>Charles Ritchie, An Appetite for Life: The Education of a Young Diarist 1924-1927 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1977), p. 10. Subsequent page references to this volume appear in parentheses following the quotation.

<sup>5</sup>Personal Interview with Charles Ritchie, 3 June 1986.

<sup>6</sup>Charles Ritchie, The Siren Years: A Canadian Diplomat Abroad 1937-1945 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974), p. 9. Subsequent page references to this volume appear in parentheses following the quotation.

<sup>7</sup>Lionel Trilling, Sincerity and Authenticity (London: Oxford Univer. Press, 1972), pp. 19-20.

<sup>8</sup>Trilling, pp. 24-5.

<sup>9</sup>Roy Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 36.

<sup>10</sup>Pascal, p. 52.

<sup>11</sup>John N. Morris, Versions of the Self (New York: Basic Books, 1966), p. 6.

<sup>12</sup>Avrom Fleishamn, Figures of Autobiography (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1983), pp. 313-4.

<sup>13</sup>Spalding, p. 73.

<sup>14</sup>Spalding, pp. 73-4.

<sup>15</sup>William Matthews, "The Diary: A Neglected Genre," Sewanee Review, LXXXV, No. 2 (Apr-Je 1977), 287.

<sup>16</sup>Elizabeth Bruss, Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre (Baltimore: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976), p. 63. Bruss, it should be noted, uses the word "journal"--as indeed Boswell does himself--in place of the word "diary." The index of Autobiographical Acts contains the following listing: "Diary. See Journal."

<sup>17</sup>Robert A. Fothergill, Private Chronicles: A Study of English Diaries (London: Oxford, 1974), p. 2. Subsequent references to this volume appear in parentheses following the quotation.

<sup>18</sup>Matthews, p. 287. There is evidence to suggest that some diarists, at least, are not averse to the prospect of acquiring an audience at an indeterminate time in the future. Charles Ritchie acknowledges this in his Foreword to An Appetite for Life (p. ix), when he describes his intention to prepare for publication those diaries which he wrote during the decade after 1945 and decided instead, after looking through his more "youthful" diaries, to give his younger self the chance to be heard which he had so badly wanted.

<sup>19</sup>Matthews, p. 295.

<sup>20</sup>Quoted in Andre Maurois, Aspects of Biography (New York: D Appleton, 1929), p. 166.

<sup>21</sup>Pascal, pp. 3-4.

<sup>22</sup>Quoted in Autobiography: Essays Theoretical & Critical, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980), pp. 40-1.

<sup>23</sup>Matthews, p. 286.

<sup>24</sup>Matthews, p. 289.

<sup>25</sup>Thomas Mallon, A Book of One's Own (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1984), p. 221.

<sup>26</sup>Fothergill justifies the inclusion of Nin, "an international writer," on the grounds that her diary "has already become one of the classics of the genre which no study of the subject could afford (or would want) to omit." (p. 4) In fact, Fothergill finds Nin's diary a most useful example of a new phase in the evolutionary movement which he is concerned to trace. Though at this early stage in the critical

literature on the diary Fothergill found it necessary to confine his remarks to the "English diary tradition," it is probable that the "conceptual perspectives" which he develops in Private Chronicles can be usefully applied to the genre as a whole. In any case, his inclusion of an "international writer" in a study of the "English diary tradition" makes it doubly appropriate to consider the Canadian Charles Ritchie within the same tradition as well.

## Chapter One

### Defining Criteria

Early critics of the English diary, though enthusiastic as to its merits as a form of prose writing, were not eager to judge it by the accepted standards of literary criticism.<sup>1</sup> Instead, the qualities they sought as evidence of a "good" diary were spontaneity, sincerity, innocence and naturalness. In this company, manifest literary talent was positively detrimental. Explains Fothergill, in Private Chronicles:

The attitude is comparable to that taken towards primitive art. Ideally the simple peasant should be discovered patiently chipping away at his soapstone or driftwood, marvellously reproducing scenes from his obscure environment. Protect him if possible from the corrupt sophistications of conscious artistry. Similarly the true diarist, immersed in the eddies of his days and ways, innocently dashes down whatever comes into his head and all unknowingly fashions a masterpiece. (38-9)

Behind the notion that the criterion of a "good" diary is its ingenuousness is the monumental figure of Samuel Pepys. As Thomas Mallon declares, in his wide-ranging survey of diarists and the diary, A Book of One's Own:

. . . if . . . [Pepys] . . . cannot be said to have invented the form as we now think of it, he very nearly did, just as he more or less perfected it within months of starting his book on January 1, 1660.<sup>2</sup>

Until the publication of the 1970-73 edition of The Diary edited by Robert Latham and William Matthews, it was generally believed that Pepys sat down at his writing table every night and simply scribbled down whatever came into his head regarding his day's activities. (42) If, by this method, he was able to produce what is still acknowledged

as a great work--Matthews, for example, believes that "No one else has ever composed so brilliant and so full an account of an actual man as he really was"<sup>3</sup>--then surely the key to a "good" diary must be its spontaneity, sincerity, innocence and so on. Therefore, instead of applying standard literary criteria to Pepys, the early critics of the English diary allowed their perceptions of his achievement to create a whole other set of criteria, by which the writings of all diarists were subsequently measured.

With the publication of the Latham-Matthews edition of The Diary, however, the notion of the ideal diarist as a literary innocent was dispelled for good. As Fothergill notes, Matthews' introduction to Volume One "presents an account of the diarist's habits of composition which must revise the general estimate of the work from miraculous to masterly." (42) Matthews' research has revealed that in fact Pepys made rough notes and first drafts, and copied the final entries neatly into his journal in shorthand, when he was satisfied. In addition, he did not always write daily but was careful to make it appear he had done so. "How ironic, then," concludes Fothergill, "that Pepys was not nearly so Pepysian as had been fondly believed." (42)

For his part, Fothergill believes that the most reliable criteria by which the diary as literature may be assessed are those which have been established by none other than the great diarists themselves:

[T]he major achievements in diary writing . . . have been produced out of a conscious respect for the diary as a literary form. . .  
[T]he criteria which [the great diarists] explicitly

aspire to meet are by far the most appropriate and rewarding to apply to all writing within the genre. (38-9)

By applying these common criteria, each in his own way, the great diarists have discovered new possibilities in the diary form, and thereby contributed to its evolution as a literary genre. It is against these criteria that the work of other diarists, including that of Charles Ritchie, may be measured.

To describe the criteria which the great diarists "explicitly aspired to meet," Fothergill employs two complementary concepts. The first of these is "[t]he idea of the diary as the book of the self." (43, italics Fothergill's.) "Book of the self" can be defined as a private diary whose author has become aware that what he is writing is the story of his life. Contrary to generally held opinion, Fothergill believes that a private diary may well show signs of its writer's consciousness of form and purpose. The longer and more faithfully a diarist writes, in fact, the more likely he is to realize that he is embarked on a book, "whose final form is the shape of his life." (44) It is from this concept that Fothergill derives the term "serial autobiography," and in Private Chronicles he lists several examples of serial autobiographers in the process of conscious creation.

Foremost among them is W. N. P. Barbellion, who actually stage-managed his own apparent death at the close of Journal of A Disappointed Man. Wasting away with an incurable disease, the unhappy Barbellion not only recorded for posterity the process of his dying, but also edited and published his life story up to and including his death, which he expected to take place before publication. According

to the Journal, Barbellion's death occurred December 31, 1917.<sup>4</sup> In fact, he lived for nearly two more years, during which he excused his tampering with truth by saying "The fact is no man dare remain alive after writing such a book."<sup>5</sup>

A less melodramatic example of a diarist's awareness that he has written a "book of the self" can be seen in Pepys' decision to have his journal handsomely bound in leather in six volumes. On his death these, along with the rest of his valuable collection of books, were left to a nephew and in 1724, in accordance with the terms of his will, they were transferred to Magdalene College, Cambridge (where they were virtually ignored for nearly a century<sup>6</sup>).

In Fothergill's opinion, "[i]t is rare for a 'great' diary to be written unwittingly." (45) In this view, even though a diarist may feel a strong commitment to the diary habit, to be considered a major diarist he should also express his commitment "to the book that his living nourishes." (44) The point has been best made by James Boswell, who declared, "a man should not live more than he can record, as a farmer should not have a larger crop than he can gather in."<sup>7</sup>

Although a strong case can be made for Charles Ritchie as a "great" diarist in terms of Fothergill's remaining findings, the issue of Ritchie's diary as a "book of the self" is at first glance problematical. When asked directly, "Did you ever feel that you were writing your autobiography?" he replied:

No. I didn't feel I was writing my autobiography. I felt I was trying to pin down the moments . . . to pin something down--because

I had this sort of idea . . . as if everything slides away from you, escapes from you, slides through your fingers--your life, and to arrest it, and to pin it down. .<sup>8</sup>

This would seem unequivocal, yet in the words "everything slides away from you--your life, and to arrest it, and to pin it down," Ritchie does reveal an awareness that in writing his diary he was attempting to keep a record of his life. On the other hand, he is also quick to ascribe the diary he has kept for nearly seventy years to mere habit:

There are times when I just want to write, just like I want a cigarette . . . it's an addiction. I've always had that, it's perfectly true, and I still do it from time to time.<sup>9</sup>

Against this should be placed the evidence of the four volumes of excerpts from his diary which Ritchie has himself edited and published. To attempt for a moment to share the feelings of a living writer who has determined to expose his private life to public view is to understand, perhaps, the depth of commitment which such a writer has made to his "book of the self."

It is also possible to catch an occasional glimpse of commitment in the diaries themselves. For example, towards the end of The Siren Years, Ritchie states:

13 October, 1944

I have been re-reading my own early diaries written in my teens and at Oxford and I am so stifled by the fumes of my own personality that I have to overcome nausea to write at all. Yet I am glad to have the diaries. They . . . [describe] . . . a life which I had only remembered in a blurred way.<sup>10</sup>

Twenty-four years later, he makes this telling comment:

October 16, 1968

I have been rereading those diaries written when I was eighteen . . . . I started reading them with detachment, but I soon wanted to



change them, to leave out this or that which just would not fit in with my later edition [*italics added*] of my own youth. Then I began to realize that I was not reading the diaries of a stranger to see if they had any literary interest, but was involved in a more dangerous enterprise. Now I cannot get away from that adolescent that was--and is--myself. ; [H]ow little have I later achieved, except the damning diary.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, the fact that Ritchie is in the habit of re-reading his diary from time to time indicates his consciousness of its role in his life as "a book of the self." In this he exemplifies Fothergill's statement that

It is particularly common to find a diarist discovering in retrospect the book that he has been creating almost unwittingly; the diary so to speak becomes conscious of itself, and the writer grows to appreciate the shape that his own image and likeness have taken. (44-5)

In Ritchie's case, however, the word "appreciate" takes on its strictest meaning. Whenever he appraises his "book of the self," he persists in undervaluing it:

January 24, 1960

I had lunch today with David Walker. He has just finished a new book. He said that as he was getting towards the end of it he developed a fear that he might die before he had time to finish it and hardly liked to go near the tractor on his farm in case he met with a fatal accident. When David told me this I had a flash of the deepest, most hopeless envy. What would I not give to feel myself the carrier of a book in which I believed!<sup>12</sup>

Here, surely, Ritchie is revealing his awareness that he too is "the carrier of a book;" his envy is aroused because, unlike Walker, he cannot believe in it.

Still, no matter how unworthy Ritchie believes his "book of the self" to be, nothing can persuade him to destroy it. He occasionally contemplates the idea, as in

February 16, 1963

I had at one time thought of leaving my diaries on my death to my niece Eliza, but why burden the girl with these stale leftovers of a life? Better burn the lot.<sup>13</sup>

When asked at the age of 79, "Why were the diaries never thrown out?"

Ritchie replied:

Yes, and why don't I destroy them now? That's the problem, isn't it? . . . I never can make up my mind; they really should be burned, because there's a lot of stuff in there that shouldn't be. . . . If I don't destroy them I have to leave them in some way so they won't be published, because I have a phobia about hurting people's feelings, you know. I cannot make up my mind to destroy them.<sup>14</sup>

Here we see that even though four volumes drawn from his diaries have now appeared in print, Ritchie still cannot destroy his original notebooks. The reason is surely linked to an anecdote he related earlier in the same interview concerning his book-in-progress, which he describes as "not quite a diary, it's more pictures of people":

I said, "I have a block about this book, I can't finish it," and this man said, "The reason is, because you think that when you finish the book, you'll have finished yourself."<sup>15</sup>

Surely, the fact that Ritchie has continued to preserve his original notebooks, despite having edited them for publication and his frequently negative attitude towards them, is ample proof of his commitment to "the damning diary," whatever its faults, as his long-nourished "book of the self."

Complementing the idea of a "great" diary as a "book of the self" is the concept of "imprint." Though in theory "imprint" is a fairly straightforward concept, in practice it is rather slippery to

define. Fothergill calls it "the horizontal dimension of the diary," and goes on to explain:

The word was chosen in order to convey the dual power of a diary-passage to carry the writer's deliberate self-expression together with unintended and unconscious aspects of his personality. . . . The imprint is the mark on the page left by the person living. . . . [I]n the diarists one wishes to call great, the experience of being a person, living a life is really vitally conveyed. (55-6)

In essence, then, "imprint" consists of a combination of external (conscious) and internal (unconscious) elements. Fothergill believes that

The extent to which any diarist's imprint can combine these elements is an important measure of its achievement. A diary consisting of nothing but cogitation or self-analysis presents as distorted an imprint as one which only describes things seen and done. (57)

Also important is how the diarist organizes the external and internal elements. According to Fothergill, "[T]wo quite distinguishable forms" are evident. One is the traditional diary entry, in which the day's events are presented in an orderly, chronological fashion that incorporates the diarist's thoughts and feelings at the time. While narrating these outer and inner facts, the diarist may also choose to add whatever "judgements or sentiments" they may evoke. It is the diarist's "style and rhetorical tone" which integrates all this material into a "composite presentation" of himself. Part of this presentation is consciously created, part of it is unconscious.

The second organizing form of the diary imprint is what Fothergill terms "a soliloquy, an extempore effusion on anything that

comes to mind." Facts, details and personal history give way to "a scrap-book of the self, a receptacle for any movement of thought or feeling that wants to see itself in writing." (60-1) Fothergill illustrates the difference between the two forms by comparing the first to a microcosm, the second to a mosaic. Though he concedes that some diarists may blur the distinction by combining the two forms (he gives Byron as one example; Charles Ritchie is surely another<sup>16</sup>), Fothergill insists that the structural difference between the linear microcosm and the non-linear mosaic is real, and important. In fact, he goes on to argue that

. . . since the beginning of the nineteenth century the non-linear book of the self has tended increasingly to prevail over the more traditional format. . . .[I]n the twentieth century . . . unstructured, non-linear entries become the necessary concomitant of a sophisticated conception of ongoing autobiography. A diary nowadays that maintained the format of Pepys . . . or Kilvert would confine the author to an impoverished level of self-presentation. (62)

Fothergill takes this view because in his opinion, as he expresses it in Private Chronicles, the evolution of the diary as a literary genre has culminated in The Diary of Anais Nin:

. . . in her the consciousness which organizes experience into words has taken account of the radically new languages of psychic life, absorbed their syntax and been enriched by their perspective. She manifests also a still more acute awareness than any before her of the form [italics Fothergill's] of the diary and its function in the life of the one who writes it. (37)

Anais Nin's Diary is to the traditional diary what James Joyce's Ulysses is to the traditional novel. Each takes its non-linear form virtually as far as it is possible to go. Yet few critics today would consider a step away from what are essentially literary

cul-de-sacs as a regression. In fact, as early as 1956, V. S.

Pritchett was writing, in a newspaper column titled "Reassessments: Joyce's Ulysses":

We needed a memory as exhaustive as Joyce's to understand him with pleasure; we require now an even better memory of what his devoted and indispensable exegesisists [sic] and commentators have explained that he meant, as we sink into the bog--so misleadingly called a stream--of Irish consciousness. Joyce is the theologian of the inner morass.<sup>17</sup>

If James Joyce is "the theologian of the inner morass," then Anais Nin is its high priestess. Though one must acknowledge her achievement in The Diary of Anais Nin, it is inconceivable that many future diarists would wish to emulate it. Indeed, Thomas Mallon, referring to her remark in December, 1946 that "I am more interesting than what I write," comments:

Without putting too fine a point on it, one must express the wistful hope that she was. Because if life is short and art is long, she managed to make her diaries even longer.<sup>18</sup>

The following brief excerpt helps explain Nin's reasons for her extraordinary loquacity, which continued long after her youthful neurotic addiction to the diary as "an open letter to a lost father"<sup>19</sup> and "a retreat from the abrasions of the external world" (93):

Spring, 1966: It is not my destiny to live the drama of Spain, war, death, agony, hunger. . . . [I]t is my thousand years of womanhood I am recording, a thousand women. It would be simpler, shorter, swifter, not to seek this deepening perspective to my life, and to lose myself in the simple world of war, hunger, death.<sup>20</sup>

Small wonder that Nin herself once declared she was not "a real diarist, like Pepys or Amiel"!<sup>21</sup> Not content merely to record, she developed the soliloquy form as far as it was possible to go and remain intelligible.

The example of Anais Nin illustrates the inherent problem with the non-linear, mosaic approach as the organizing form of a diarist's imprint. As we have seen, Fothergill refers to this approach as "the necessary concomitant of a sophisticated conception of ongoing biography, and considers that "[a] diary nowadays that maintained the [traditional, linear] format would confine the author to an impoverished level of self-presentation." Yet surely the most versatile and productive organizing form for a diary is a combination of both approaches. For proof, we need only turn to the London Journal of James Boswell.

Though Boswell obviously lacks "the radically new languages of psychic life" which are available to Nin, he equally obviously gets on very well without them. In his Introduction to the London Journal, Frederick Pottle discusses the secret of Boswell's success in combining the linear and non-linear approaches:

To the modern age with its insatiable interest in psychology, the confessional element of Boswell's journal may well be its most interesting feature. His kind of confession is almost unique. . . . Boswell approaches the secret places of his own heart and mind with the detachment, the candour, and the responsibility of a historian . . . who considers history a branch of literature. That is to say, though he remains scrupulously within the bounds of historical circumstance, he seizes all his material imaginatively, he creates it.<sup>22</sup>

Though "new forms, new expressive possibilities, in the writings of people who have taken the diary seriously" have emerged since Boswell's day, the creative diarist will not be bound by them, just as Boswell was not bound by the traditional forms of his time. If "[t]he extent to which any diarist's imprint can combine [the

external and internal] elements is an important measure of its achievement," then surely the extent to which any diarist's choice of organizing form can combine the traditional, linear "microcosm" with the modern, non-linear "mosaic" will be a significant measure of its achievement as well. Only by combining these two forms, in fact, will a diarist achieve full expression of the balance between external (conscious) and internal (unconscious) elements which Fothergill sees as the concomitant of a "great" diary. Indeed, the evolution of the diary as a literary genre, like that of the novel, has not ended in the cul-de-sac of an exclusively non-linear approach to form; instead it has absorbed and begun to employ the contribution which the "new languages of psychic life" can bring to the diarist's art, in much the same way as an established plant produces continually fresh shoots and flowers.

As a significant example, consider the "mark on the page" left by the diarist Charles Ritchie. Though Ritchie's imprint changes slightly over the years, as he and his literary perceptions become more sophisticated, he continues to use both organizing forms--linear recording and non-linear soliloquizing--throughout, and often within a single entry.

The following excerpt from An Appetite for Life is but a small section from the first entry in the book. However, it contains a clear statement of what matters to Ritchie, and anticipates the form his future notations will take:

September 19, 1924

So little happens to me that is worth recording. No great

adventures or tremendous experiences, or passionate love affairs. I know no famous people whom I can describe for posterity. For instance, what has happened today? You may say, "Nothing at all." But something has happened to me. I have given up dreaming of being a great writer. That and nothing else, except that we had fried eggs and bacon for breakfast and Georgina, the maid, broke a coffee cup and Aunt Millie said, "Oh, for mercy's sake, that girl again." And Mother said to me, "When you are on your own and have to look after yourself perhaps you'll learn not to throw your clothes in a heap on the floor of the bedroom and just leave them there for someone to pick up." So what am I to write about? I think I will try my hand at describing this house where I live and the people in it.<sup>23</sup>

Here we are given a clear insight into Ritchie's priorities as a diarist. First, he wants to have something worthwhile to record; commonplace details will not do. He admits he has his eye on posterity, and wants to leave something worthy to be read. The significant event of his day is an inner experience: he has decided to give up "dreaming of being a great writer." He records what he regards as interesting trivia with an acute ear for dialogue and accuracy, in a wry tone which indicates his own attitude as an observer of life. Searching for a subject he considers suitable, he decides to set the scene of his life, much as a novelist would orient his characters. And he organizes his material in such a way that it utilizes both linear and non-linear methods, thus enabling him to convey with ease the outer and inner details of his age, situation, and state of mind at the time of writing.

Recognizing a diarist's imprint is a cumulative process, not unlike getting to know someone in real life. Though not every entry (or encounter) will be equally revealing, in time the diarist's essential personality becomes clear (quite possibly to a greater extent



than could ever be the case with an actual friendship). An excerpt from Diplomatic Passport, written thirty-seven years after the passage from An Appetite for Life quoted above, shows how a diarist's imprint remains substantially the same, because it continues to emanate from the same basic personality:

March 12, 1961

To put myself to sleep I tell myself stories. How flat, trivial, lacking in imagination, and repetitive they are, so that I go to sleep through boredom. By comparison my dreams are works of surrealist art, brilliant films in the newest continental mode, rich in endless invention, in scenes of hallucinatory brilliance. Even the small "bit parts" in these dreams are rendered with uncanny intensity. As to emotions--fear, love and desolation, danger and narrow escape, lust and nostalgia--the themes are endless and images crowd to express them. If I could tap the sources of dreams, no writer of this age could touch me. There is no doubt I dream like a genius.

At the close of my speech last night Dean Acheson said, "You were superb." "So were you," I replied. "I always am," said Dean.

Walked through the Park to the Plaza Oak Room bar for morning vodka martinis with Sylvia on my arm. She looked lovely, eyes very blue. She has been so patient and sweet during all the storms of the last few months and the strains of the General Assembly. Then we went to the French seventeenth-century exhibition at the Metropolitan, which was badly chosen and arranged. It left an impression of showy, mediocre pictures. Even the Poussins were the poorest I have ever seen; only two Claude Lorrains saved all.

I have been reading Pope's Rape of the Lock and now The Essay on Man--"in Folly's cup still laughs the bubble Joy".<sup>24</sup>

Here we see a similar preoccupation with worthy material, ranging from the primary subject, Ritchie's inner life, to the main outer event of the day: walking through the park with Sylvia and on to the art exhibition. Two quotations, one from life, one from literature, are selected as worth recording. Though Ritchie makes no overt attempt to reconstruct the day's events as they occurred, they serve as a frame on which to attach his observations. Presumably, he awoke to the memory of a dream; he then recalled a notable remark from

the night before; next comes an account of the chief business of the day, and finally, he ends the entry with a thought from his reading which pleases him and which he wants to preserve. As in the excerpt from An Appetite for Life, the organizing form is a pragmatic mixture of the linear and non-linear methods. In short, Charles Ritchie, in conveying his imprint as a diarist, uses whatever method he deems appropriate to the material he wishes to record. By doing so, he has developed a new and versatile organizing form, one which successfully liberates the diary from the soliloquizing cul-de-sac so thoroughly created for it by Anais Nin.

## Chapter One

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Robert A. Fothergill, Private Chronicles: A Study of English Diaries (London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1974), p. 38-9. Subsequent page references to this volume appear in parentheses following the quotation.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Mallon, A Book of One's Own (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1984), pp. 1-2.

<sup>3</sup>William Matthews, "The Diary as Literature," in The Diary of Samuel Pepys, ed. Robert Latham and William Matthews, I (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1970), p. cxiii.

<sup>4</sup>W. N. P. Barbellion, Journal of a Disappointed Man (London: Chatto & Windus, 1920), p. 305.

<sup>5</sup>W. N. P. Barbellion, A Last Diary (London: Chatto & Windus, 1921), p. vii.

<sup>6</sup>J. R. Tanner, "Pepys, Samuel," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1955 ed., XVII, p. 500.

<sup>7</sup>Quoted in Biography as an Art, ed. James K. Clifford (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1962), p. 57.

<sup>8</sup>Personal interview with Charles Ritchie, 3 June 1986.

<sup>9</sup>Personal interview.

<sup>10</sup>Charles Ritchie, The Siren Years: A Canadian Diplomat Abroad, 1937-1945 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974), p. 178.

<sup>11</sup>Charles Ritchie, Storm Signals: More Undiplomatic Diaries, 1962-1971 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1983), pp. 118-9.

<sup>12</sup>Charles Ritchie, Diplomatic Passport: More Undiplomatic Diaries, 1946-1962 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1981), p. 166. A footnote describes Walker as "Canadian novelist."

<sup>13</sup>Ritchie, Storm Signals, p. 37. Significantly, Ritchie concludes this entry with the words: "I am . . . fascinated by the idea of her future, of what the story of her life will be." (Italics added)

<sup>14</sup>Personal interview.

<sup>15</sup>Personal interview.

<sup>16</sup>Interestingly in this connection, when asked in 1986 to name his preferences among diarists, Ritchie remarked: ". . . and, of course, Byron--his Don Juan and his letters and diaries were a tremendous influence on me." (Personal interview)

<sup>17</sup>V. S. Pritchett, "Reassessments: Joyce's Ulysses" in New Statesman and Nation, LI, No. 1298 (Jan 21, 1956), 75.

<sup>18</sup>Mallon, p. 87. The Early Diary of Anais Nin (1920-23), for example, was compiled from 35,000 hand-written pages.

<sup>19</sup>Gunther Stuhlmann, ed., Pref., The Diary of Anais Nin, by Anais Nin, VI, 1955-1966 (New York: Harcourt, 1976), p. ix.

<sup>20</sup>Nin, p. 400.

<sup>21</sup>Anais Nin, The Early Diary of Anais Nin, II, 1920-1923 (New York: Harcourt, 1982), p. 110.

<sup>22</sup>Frederick A. Pottle, Intro., Boswell's London Journal, by James Boswell, ed. Frederick A. Pottle (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1950), pp. 13-14.

<sup>23</sup>Charles Ritchie, An Appetite for Life: The Education of a Young Diarist 1924-1927 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1977), p. 4.

<sup>24</sup>Charles Ritchie, Diplomatic Passport, p. 179.

## Chapter Two

### On Motive

According to Fothergill in Private Chronicles, the major diarists feel a "conscious respect for the diary as a literary form"; therefore, the most reliable criteria for judging the literary worth of a diary are those which the major diarists "explicitly aspire to meet."<sup>1</sup> This is not quite tantamount to allowing the diarist to make his own rules and then praising him when he follows them, because it includes the prerequisite of "conscious respect." Interestingly, in the case of Charles Ritchie, respect for the diary as a literary form is clearly present; equally clearly, however, this respect is largely unconscious. Why, then, did Ritchie decide to keep a diary, and why does he continue to do so, nearly seventy years after he first began?

In a chapter titled "Motive and Manner," (64-94) Fothergill lists various motives for diary-writing and concludes by declaring that while "[n]o two diarists are prompted by identical impulses no diarist writes for reasons unique to himself." It can be argued, however, that Charles Ritchie's dominant motive for diary-writing was indeed unique, and that it prompted him to find and develop "new possibilities" in the diary as a literary form. First, though, the more conventional motives described by Fothergill must be considered, and their relevance to Ritchie assessed, for "it should be emphasized that the operation of a dominant impulse to write does not exclude other motives." (94)

Fothergill opens his discussion of motive by pointing out that the impulse to write a diary is extraordinary. Many of us are in the habit of reflecting on, reliving in the mind, or even indulging in interior monologues about, our day's experiences, but very few people actually take the trouble to record their experiences methodically in writing. Surely, argues Fothergill, for those few, the act of diary-writing must play a part "in the total economy of the psyche." (64) That is, the effort expended in keeping a diary must "generate an unusually definite image of oneself"; how, then, does the creation of this image affect the life of the writer? "To some degree," declares Fothergill, "most diarists become what they behold in the mirrors of their own polishing." (65)

It is not surprising, therefore, that a prominent motive for keeping a diary is the desire for self-improvement. The exuberant Boswell shows many evidences of this, as in this quotation:

Since I came up [to London], I have begun to acquire a composed, genteel character very different from a rattling uncultivated one which for some time past I have been fond of. I have discovered that we may be in some degree whatever character we choose. Besides, practice forms a man to anything. I was now happy to find myself cool, easy, and serene.<sup>2</sup>

As a young man of eighteen, Charles Ritchie also shows a strong desire for self-improvement, and records his plans firmly in his diary as if expecting the act of doing so to help strengthen his resolve:

July 20 [1924]

Then I went up to my room and drew up a new plan for the rest of the summer; four hours' serious reading a day, no novels, exercise an hour a day, no movies, strict economy, no sundaes at the Green Lantern, walk into town instead of taking the tram, do not telephone Katherine unless she telephones me first, put a stop to

sensual thoughts and actions which lead nowhere, and concentrate on acquiring knowledge, enjoying scenery, etc.

This is promptly followed by:

July 23

A day passed in accordance with the new plan.<sup>3</sup>

That keeping a diary may have already had some effect on Ritchie's "psychic economy" is suggested by the contrast between these entries and one written seven months earlier:

January 8 [1924]

Today the sergeant-major has come for the last time, to my great relief. Mother hired him to come twice a week to the house to teach me exercises meant to broaden my chest and strengthen my muscles and make more of a man of me. I am supposed to practise these on the days he doesn't come, but all I do is to flail my arms about and take a deep breath when I have come out of my bath. I ignore the rest of them. . . . Of course [Mother] is right, but it is such a fag. (72)

By January 1927, when Ritchie is at Oxford, the habit of using the diary to record his self-improving resolutions is firmly entrenched:

. . . I woke up full of new resolutions. This term is going to be very different from last term. One difference will be that I am going to work five hours a day regularly. . . . Secondly, I am going to take more regular exercise. . . (157)

Nearly thirty years later, he is still confiding his plans for self-improvement to the diary, though now they are tempered by the knowledge that both time, and some resolutions, are fleeting:

May 15, 1955

I am in the mood for a fresh start. From now on not a single day is to be thrown away as you chuck in an unsatisfactory hand at poker. . . . Yet one must be wary of the dreams and projects which swarm in one's mind.<sup>4</sup>

Another motive for keeping a diary is what Fothergill terms "the impulse to deal truthfully with oneself." (74) It is larger than

the motive of self-improvement, which tends to spurn the nature of the "real" self in order to concentrate on emulating a real or imagined model. Fothergill sees the impulse to be true to oneself as fundamentally moral; its aim is to compile an "objective and trustworthy personal history" (70) in which one's clearest perceptions will be preserved. Its effect may well be to provide a sense of security for the writer by confirming his individuality.

One can see this motive at work in the diary of W. N. P. Barbellion, whose interest in natural history was extended to include searching examinations of himself. In his preface to A Last Diary, Barbellion's editor, A. J. Cummings, notes:

He regarded himself quite openly and quite naturally as a human specimen to be examined, classified and dissected, and he did his work with the detailed skill and the truthful approach of a scientific investigator. . . . It is scarcely possible, one imagines, to read Barbellion honestly without realising that he says in plain, forceful language what the rest of us often think but have not the nerve to say aloud, either to others or to ourselves.<sup>5</sup>

For Barbellion, succumbing slowly to an incurable disease, there could be no security either in this motive or any other. Yet in the opinion of H. G. Wells, who wrote the introduction to Journal of a Disappointed Man, the impulse to deal truthfully with himself brought Barbellion a certain grim satisfaction:

[A young naturalist, learning he will die young, finds] ". . . the habits of the observer rising to the occasion. . . . [H]ere is something close at hand to go on observing manfully to the end, in which self may be forgotten. . . . "I will go on with this diary," I read between the lines. "You shall have at least one specimen carefully labelled and displayed. Here is recorded unhappiness. When you talk about life and justice and its penalties, what you say must square with this."<sup>6</sup>



The impulse to deal truthfully with oneself, though everywhere evident, is not the primary motive for Charles Ritchie as a diarist. He is well aware, however, of the diary's function in helping to maintain a balance between the romantic and practical sides of his nature:

September 19, 1924

. . . on the walls are portraits, some real ancestors, others, the grander ones, bought by my great-grandfather at a sale, although I like to pretend to myself and sometimes to other people that one of these, a romantic young man wearing a flowered waistcoat, is really a relation of mine. Once someone said they could see a resemblance to me, and I agreed. Fortunately, Mother did not overhear us or I should never have been allowed to forget it. She despises affectation. (6)

There are also occasions when he uses his diary as a safe place in which to unburden himself of painful personal thoughts which he cannot confide elsewhere. Newly arrived at Oxford, for example, Ritchie has been drawn into an evangelical religious group where he now realizes he does not belong:

October 30, 1926

It would be a fraud for me to continue. In fact, I have been a fraud, and the sin that I should have "shared", but which I can only share with this diary, is that I have encouraged Morris and the others by putting on an interested, believing look while I was listening to them, and all the time I have had no real intention of joining the Oxford Group and I never have believed in Guidance, although I may have wished for it. (121)

There are moments when he is uncomfortable in the company of his pleasure-loving friends, as well:

November 18, 1926

This gambling is a real torment to me. It is such a waste of time and of my opportunities here at Oxford. . . . To a rich man . . . [my losses] . . . would not seem much, but when I think of the sacrifices Mother has made to give me my allowance and the way I am wasting it, I am truly ashamed of myself. (128)

Thirty-six years later, he is still using his diary as an aid to solving his moral dilemmas:

July 15, 1962

. . . the chauffeur was drunk again last night. I have seen this coming on. If I had spoken to him day before yesterday, when the first signs were visible, I might have stopped him. But as it was disagreeable, I put it off, as I always do disagreeable things. And now, I must get rid of him. . . . Yet Arnold Heeney kept him on for seven years, and never allowed it to come to this. Perhaps it is my fault, in the effect I have on him. I drove the chauffeur in New York nearly out of his mind, and now this chap has taken to the bottle. If he is dismissed at his age, what will happen to him?. How can I judge him?<sup>7</sup>

Though the ability to deal truthfully with oneself is always evident in the Ritchie diaries, it gains an added dimension as he sits down to edit them. In his Preface to Storm Signals, Ritchie comments:

It is a temptation to revise the record when one comes across opinions about people and events which have since proved to be wrong. That temptation has to be resisted.<sup>8</sup>

This maintains the principle which he established while editing The Siren Years, the first volume of his diaries to see publication:

I resist any temptation to patronise or justify the writer. His faults, follies and errors of judgement show plainly enough. To paper them over would seem a smug betrayal of my younger self. The diaries are as I wrote them at the time save for occasional phrases which have been altered for the sake of clarity.<sup>9</sup>

It seems evident from this that Ritchie's present sense of security is not only strong enough to permit publication of his private diary, it also allows him to respect the integrity of his younger, unwiser self. If this is what dealing truthfully with oneself in a diary for over sixty years can accomplish, then more people should take up the habit.

The third "rationale for diary-keeping" cited by Fothergill is what he terms "the prospect of future pleasure." (72) This is the motive to which Oscar Wilde wittily alluded when he remarked, "I never travel without my diary. One should always have something sensational to read on the train."<sup>10</sup>

It was also earnestly professed by Robert Francis Kilvert, the Victorian clergyman whom Fothergill describes as one of a company of diarists

possessed of a fugitive and cloistered genius, not bold enough to publish, [who] impressed upon experience the fittest words they could encompass, and secretly wished for readers. (12)

Asking himself, "Why do I keep this voluminous journal?", Kilvert replies:

I can hardly tell. Partly because life appears to me such a curious and wonderful thing that it seems a pity that even such a humble and uneventful life as mine should pass altogether away without one such record as this, and partly too because I think the record may amuse some who come after me.<sup>11</sup>

From this quotation it can be seen that a diarist may be motivated by the hope of providing future pleasure for others, as well as for himself. In the case of Charles Ritchie, however, any wish for a future readership remains largely unacknowledged. To him, the essential secrecy of the diary habit is one of its main attractions.

When asked in 1986 if he had ever shown his diary to anyone before revealing it to Elizabeth Bowen, he replied:

No. No, I hadn't. I was always terrified of anybody finding it. The element of secrecy is very much part of a diary, like the early diaries you sort of locked away. That was part of the charm of it in a way; it's a secret. And when you're writing it, especially the kind of diary which I wrote . . . it was like, "Oh, it would be too awful if anybody ever found this. And actually now, when I've

published without leaving out very much, instead of people thinking it was anything extraordinary, they just thought it was--[pause]--I think you've formed an idea that your own secrets are very remarkable, and that there are more fantastic notions and fantasies going on in your head than other people have, and actually you find that . [you] are quite wrong.<sup>12</sup>

There were also social reasons for concealment of the early diaries, as Ritchie notes in his Foreword to The Siren Years:

Their writing and subsequent concealment were intentionally secretive--to have them discovered and read would have meant to be caught in the practice of "solitary vice".<sup>13</sup>

With adulthood, however, Ritchie has come to realize that there is occasional pleasure and unique interest in perusing his earlier private thoughts:

I am glad to have the diaries. They bring before me a youth who appals me by his silliness and by the banality of his mind. Only the eager appetite for life is attractive. . . . The diary describes a life which I had only remembered in a blurred way.<sup>14</sup>

Yet he continues to doubt that anyone else could possibly share his positive feelings towards the diaries:

Well, back to this diary again. If I must do it, let me make my little messes in private. God knows who will clear them up after I am gone. I hope someone who will not be bored by them. It would be appalling to be a Bore after one was dead--an immortal Bore.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, for his own benefit he continues faithfully to write, and occasionally to re-read, his diaries. At the age of sixty-one he writes, in Storm Signals:

I have been looking, for the first time in years, at my old diaries. They summon up for me impressions, memories, colours, rooms, faces, which are not visible on the written page. It is like reading a play which I have seen acted with the original cast and others have never seen.<sup>16</sup>

Though the prospect of future pleasure is a minor motive in Charles Ritchie's impulse to keep a diary, that he is well aware of it

is further suggested by his confessed admiration for the writings of Marcel Proust:

I have a lot of favourite writers. Later on in life, of course, I was very impressed by Proust. He was tremendously interesting when he came into one's life in the twenties.<sup>17</sup>

It is reasonable to infer from this that Ritchie saw his diary as a means of providing his own future "remembrance of things past."

Indeed, the very act of keeping the diary was an outward sign of his inner belief in his own future:

I had a letter today from Anne in which she wrote to me of the time when we were young in the twenties . . . we must now wonder what did interest that generation. I can only speak for myself. I was after Experience. I lived in the private conviction that intense, strongly poetic, dramatic Experience lay in wait for me, I longed for a condition in which reality lived up to literature. Meanwhile, I did little to bring this state about.<sup>18</sup>

He did little, that is, except write faithfully in the diary, so that when "Experience" did occur, it would be recorded for--and available for vicarious re-living in--the future.

Another common motive for keeping a diary is what Fothergill terms "the gratification of projecting individual personality." Such gratification, he notes, should not be confused with simple egotism; it is more properly described as "an interest in oneself as an engrossing phenomenon." (77) As a prime example of a diarist who wrote to gratify this interest, Fothergill cites James Boswell:

Each entry is written as though in response to the question, How was I today?--which may mean, among other things, How did I feel? What kind of performance did I give? and Was I up to my usual standard? It is a book of the self in the fullest sense, the book of Boswell, intended for readers who love a parade. (77)

A brief excerpt from the London Journal will serve to suggest the degree of interest which Boswell took in what Fothergill calls the "documenting of the evolution of Boswell sapiens": (141)

I took a whim of dining at home every day last week, which I kept exactly to. The pleasure of gratifying whim is very great. It is known only by those who are whimsical.<sup>19</sup>

For the last word on the subject, however, we must turn to Christopher Morley:

No figure of speech can outsay the greatness of Boswell's achievement. He became a force of nature, a tropical cyclone on two wheels: the clockwise centred on Johnson, the counterclockwise on Himself. In regard to Johnson he was rather like our modern rain-makers: he seeded every likely cloud with his dry ice to see what precipitation he could deduct. And the other wheel of the storm? What is lovelier than his note . . . when, after conversation with the Doctor about Swift and Addison, Boswell says: "We then talked of Me."<sup>20</sup>

As a motive for diary-keeping, the gratification of projecting individual personality is immensely important to Charles Ritchie, especially during his diplomatic career. In fact, in later years the diary functions as a kind of life-line, to which he clings in order to save an important part of his precious "self" from being ground in the diplomatic mill. Ritchie acknowledges this in his introduction to

Diplomatic Passport:

Forty years in a career are bound to be conditioning. . . . [I]n this career the representational role tends to take over. The man sometimes merges into the ambassador. The result is not so much pomposity as a smoothness from which all angles and irregularities of temperament and opinion have been ironed out. From this fate diary-writing may have been an escape hatch for me. [I]t was a relief to break out, if only on paper.<sup>21</sup>

That he consciously acknowledged these sentiments at the actual time of writing the two later diaries is evidenced by the following:

One of the drearier diplomatic days. . . . The dinner party had no spark. Afterwards we sat islanded in little groups in the enormous rooms. First I bored the Greek Ambassadors, then I told two long and boring stories to some people on a sofa. Then we talked about why dentists become dentists. The Portuguese Ambassador talked about Goa, and we came home. (106)

The servants in this house impose their own restrictions. . . . How is one to resist this smoothing-out, flattening-out process which makes an ambassador of you from the collar-button inward? (82)

That he continues to acknowledge them may be seen in this statement, made in 1986:

You see, all the time I was working in the Department of External Affairs . . . especially when I was young, it took hours, every day, all day, and I was writing a lot, of course--despatches, memoranda. So that when I went to write the diary, it was really to shut out that world. . . . I never kept a political diary. A lot of my contemporaries did. . . . I was never at all tempted, because when I'd left the office I'd had enough of that.<sup>22</sup>

In the two earlier diaries, the "smoothing-out process" of diplomatic life is not yet a threat to Ritchie's sense of individuality. However, the need to project his personality through the diary is obviously present and important to him. In this connection, it is revealing to note that as a young man, Charles Ritchie showed a marked interest in acting and even toured the Maritime Provinces in a college production of Booth Tarkington's "Tweedles", designed "to raise money for King's University, which is perennially broke."<sup>23</sup> One of the earliest notations in An Appetite for Life suggests that acting a part helped satisfy a compelling need for self-expression:

I am seventeen years old at the moment but will be eighteen next week. . . . I have no character that I know of. . . . I try to be the characters I read about or the people I admire, to enter into their skins and act as they would, but no one notices. They think I am just the same as ever. (8)

Only a year later, now at Oxford, he writes:

I am possessed by the character of Lord Jim and all day I pretended that I was him, an infinitely interesting, essentially decent character. I am always pretending to be characters in books I am reading or heroes in movies, although I know it is childish. (77)

From these excerpts it is clear that Ritchie is so interested in the development of his personality that he will actually "try on" preferred role models in real life. For the purpose of self-projection, however, the diaries are even more satisfactory than acting an assumed part. This is evident in his account of his experimental flirtation with the visiting Geraldine. (95-100) It is not enough simply to describe what happened; he must also analyze it with the cool detachment that is the obverse side of his romantic nature:

When we are together I pretend to be a lover in a movie and imagine how he would behave, and by acting I become passionate and put on a performance. I think she is doing the same--acting a heroine. Sometimes we forget our lines or run out of them and as there is no prompter behind the scenes we just have nothing natural to say to each other, and there are awful pauses when I feel like saying, "Oh, do go away and let me read a book in peace," but of course I can't say that, so I burst into forced speech and end up telling her some long story about William and the stables or saying how much I love her, so then we begin making love again to fill in time. Sometimes I glance at my wrist watch, hoping she doesn't notice, and I am always surprised to find that we have been together such a short time when it seemed a century. (99)

At times, his thoughts are so caustic they are unacceptable anywhere but in the pages of his secret diary:

I sat next to Margo Asquith at dinner. . . . She is too old and there is nothing left but senile vanity and play-acting. . . . She horrified me by saying, "I should like to live forever." I was thinking at the very moment how tragic it must be for her not to have been able to die before now. . . . She looked like a witch--a surrealist witch--in a modern fairy tale.<sup>24</sup>



Because Ritchie has a decided talent for trenchant criticism, and because this talent is hardly compatible with his choice of career, the diary provides an ideal outlet through which to project this aspect of his personality. A visit to the Vanderbilt house at Newport in 1938 produces this description of a fellow guest:

She was one of those invulnerable American women set in motion by some secret spring of energy. . . . Her present husband is a pink-cheeked and amiable guardsman who, with a reckless courage which does more credit to a stout heart than to any appreciation of the laws of possibility, seeks to satisfy her. (23)

A day spent in the British House of Commons in April 1940 evokes this reaction:

Lloyd George attacked the Prime Minister--that old poseur, that mischievous mixture of statesman and minor prophet and tricky Welsh politician. But what an orator! His speech made me think of King Lear's ranting--shot through with gleams of vision. (51)

In June 1940, after chatting with an acquaintance from the Foreign Office in London, he notes:

If these politicians of ours ever read any serious modern literature they might not be so surprised at what is happening in France. For years now there has been bad news from France. Their writers have given a shaking picture of the dry rot which has overtaken the French bourgeoisie (58)

A related motive for diary-writing is what Fothergill calls "compensatory self-projection." This is the diarist's impulse to project an "official identity, an authorized self-portrait," in which the diary becomes "a selective and ameliorating memory, mitigating the less palatable aspects of experience." A prime example is the diary of Benjamin Haydon which, according to Fothergill, "[a]s things get worse resorts to increasingly obvious and bizarre shifts" in its story "until it is operating almost on the level of fantasy." (85)

A variation of the need for compensatory self-projection may be found in the diary of Barbellion, who must compensate for the fact that illness has cut him off from most worldly experience and so uses his diary as a "surrogate existence into which he projects all that he values of himself." (85)

Compensatory self-projection is not a significant motive for Charles Ritchie, who in emotional moments is more apt to disparage himself than strut in the Haydon manner. For example, at age eighteen he writes:

I don't feel that I will die. That seems to be something that happens to other people. No, I shall go on and on as a bank clerk in a small town, and take to drink like so many of my family, and day after day write this damned diary about nothing, and Nothing will be my name.<sup>25</sup>

In December of 1968, by now aged sixty-two, he is still quick to disparage himself:

In the evening chaired a big dinner at the Canadian Club. Wore a bloody silly chain and medallion round my neck like a Mayor. Made a fulsome speech introducing Earl McLaughlin--quite disgusted myself.<sup>26</sup>

Ritchie's distinguished public career and gratifying private life leave little room for the diary as a receptacle for compensatory self-projection of the type found in Barbellion. Only in a negative--and, one is tempted to add, a peculiarly Canadian--sense can the diary be considered as compensatory. An example is the excerpt for December 1968 above, in which Ritchie heaps scorn on himself. He does so, one surmises, because he is anxious to maintain a healthy balance between justified pride in accomplishment and inflated self-importance. In general, however, he is a happy man who believes himself capable of

satisfying in real life all but one of his main desires:

I remember walking in this part in 1939 . . . and how . . . biting into a peach at breakfast, fancied that I was biting into the fruit of my future in London . . . how I would write a masterpiece, meet the famous, have a flat of my own and a mistress to go with it. A bright dream--it all came true, except, of course, the masterpiece.<sup>27</sup>

And even that, one suggests, came true as well.

An important consideration for many diarists, states Fothergill, is that faithful recording of one's life provides "a kind of psychological solitude which may be cherished as a luxury." (91) Obviously, the serious diarist values his interior life. He may therefore be motivated by the discovery that keeping a "book of the self" can soothe his loneliness, provide "a route back into what [he] has been," or offer "a protection and a retreat from the abrasions of the external world." (91-3)

A major diarist who was so motivated is Anais Nin. For Nin, the psychological function of the diary was so important that her diary habit was finally diagnosed as "a neurotic solution to the problem of living" by her psychoanalyst, Otto Rank. (93) In The Death and Rebirth of Psychology, Ira Progoff summarizes Rank's theory of creativity as he expressed it in Art and the Artist, published in 1932:

Today the creative person projects his creativity into an external work in art or science or business, and he lives through it instead of through his own developed personality. The modern artist uses his art work, either as a means of livelihood in the commercial world, or more often . . . as a tool of personal therapy. Now, Rank says, if the creative person would fulfill the meaning of his life and play a heroic role in the modern world, he must forsake the use of his art work as a crutch on which to lean as he hobbles through life. . . . He must undertake a new art work that can be nothing else than his own personal existence; and in that work he

will find both the "new soul" and the intimate sense of connection to life that the modern personality requires.<sup>28</sup>

Anais Nin began her diary in 1916 at the age of thirteen.

"[C]onceived as an open letter to a lost father," it was to become "the opium pipe of a young woman's reflections" and the "final refuge of her self-esteem."<sup>29</sup> After accepting Rank's diagnosis, however, and giving up the diary for several months in 1933, she was able to return to it as a creative activity, rather than as a psychological crutch.

Though Charles Ritchie went on to "fulfill the meaning of his life and play a heroic role in the modern world," thus achieving the ideal state for the creative person as prescribed by Otto Rank, he too began his diary out of psychological need. Interviewed in 1986, Ritchie referred to his early self as "a very miserable schoolboy [who] started writing diaries when [he] . . . was eleven":

I think it puts things at a little distance from you, to write them down. And sometimes it takes some of the sting, or pain, or emergency out of the thing . . . it puts you at one remove from your own life.<sup>30</sup>

Describing his painful school years in an editorial addition to Storm Signals, Ritchie remarks:

My own experience in the conventional Canadian boys' schools I had attended was deplorable . . . (the English sergeant-major used to say, "come and watch Ritchie on the parallel bars, it's as good as Charlie Chaplin any day"). I was a natural bully-ee (if that is the word for the bully's butt) . . . a social misfit cursed with an English accent from my prep school in England; a garrison-town colonial Nova Scotian among the alien herd of Upper Canadians.<sup>31</sup>

That he became accustomed to regarding the diary as "a retreat from the abrasions of the external world" is shown in this passage from The Siren Years, dated 16 April, 1941:

The above gloomy entries in my diary have done me some good. It is better that I should pour all this stuff out in a private diary-- than after a drink or two begin to talk like this to my friends or write it in my letters. There is much self-pity here, mixed with the higher forms of gloom.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to providing "psychological solitude" and solace, the diary also helped a young lad far from home to establish his identity "among the alien herd":

It was with adolescence that the diary addiction fixed its yoke on me. . . . Its seed was perhaps already sown when I would write on the front of schoolbooks, Charles Stewart Almon Ritchie, King's Collegiate School, Windsor, Nova Scotia, Canada, North America, The World, The Universe, September 23rd, 1918, 3:17 p.m.--an early compulsion to fix myself in space and in time. Once given over to the mania there was no cure for it.<sup>33</sup>

Why there could be no permanent "cure" is occasionally suggested by such entries as:

I was led in a dream of circles through my private hell and all the images which congeal my blood and scarify my soul. My daytime self was abolished. I looked out from my window at the quiet moonlit valley and hoped for an air raid to break the silence and deliver me back in the world where courage and intelligence could still avail me.<sup>34</sup>

and:

I can't think why I am haunted by that bloody boarding school.<sup>35</sup>

Another psychological motivation is suggested by Ritchie himself, as he attempts to account for his "mania" in the opening entry in An Appetite for Life, dated September 10, 1924:

I am writing because I do not want my life to slip through my fingers like sand.<sup>36</sup>

Introducing Diplomatic Passport nearly sixty years later, Ritchie asks himself:

What is the compulsion that makes one put down on paper day after day such a personal record as this? Is it simply an exercise in

egotism, or a confessional? Perhaps a little of both, but it may also be an obsession with the passing of time, a sense that life is slipping like sand through one's fingers and that before it vanishes completely one must shore up these remains.<sup>37</sup>

It is unlikely that the above entries were made in moments of uncharacteristic egotism; they are more likely to have stemmed from Ritchie's humanist belief in the value of human life, and from his sense of sharing the common human need to assert man's own small significance in a world much larger than himself.

Notwithstanding the many and compelling motives listed here, the depth of Charles Ritchie's compulsion to keep a faithful record of his life has not yet been fully accounted for. This is because not one of the motives listed by Fothergill describes a need that would seem unique to Ritchie, despite Fothergill's assertion that "no diarist writes for reasons unique to himself." (94) The plain fact is, Ritchie's main motivation to write is that, by both birth and conditioning, he is a writer.<sup>38</sup>

When the diaries are read in chronological order, the first indication of this compelling motivation occurs in the initial entry in An Appetite for Life, written September 19, 1924.<sup>39</sup> Ritchie begins by describing his efforts at writing a short story: "this morning when I re-read what I had written I was appalled. It is no good, no bloody good at all." (3) He then gives a perceptive explanation for his failure:

. . . looking out of the window . . . I watched Aunt Millie come out of the house. . . . "What is she thinking about?" I wondered. . . . She is a mystery, everyone is a mystery. But the characters in my story are not mysterious, they aren't people at all.<sup>40</sup>

He then arrives at the conclusion from which he does not vary for the rest of his writing life:

I cannot invent. I shall never, never be a novelist. At the same time, I must write. Why? God knows. So that I'm left with this diary, this useless, drivelling diary. If that is all I have, I had better get on with it. (4)

It would be a mistake to assume that Ritchie did not continue to believe every word of this youthful outburst. Interviewed in 1986, he stated:

I always had the idea that literature had a form, and that form to me was the novel, which I knew I couldn't write . . . so that as I thought of the novel as the literary form, and it was the form of literature that I read most, I thought that, as . . . I have no creative power whatever . . . and as I considered that to be essential to literature, I actually did not think jottings, even if they were quite vivid and could turn a phrase, were the same thing as literature as I saw it because of the novel. And because I always wanted to be a writer, that was the other thing . . . as I couldn't do that, then I could never really feel that my own diaries were what I really would have liked to do if I could have done it! They seemed to be rather like very much the next best thing.<sup>41</sup>

One must conclude from this that Ritchie had to write because writing satisfied his extremely strong creative drive, and that he wrote a diary because he was unable to write novels. It seems never to have occurred to him that he was a born diarist with the perceptions of a novelist, and that as a result, his writings have a depth and dimension that can be found only in the great diaries of literature.<sup>42</sup>

## Chapter Two

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Robert Fothergill, Private Chronicles: A Study of English Diaries (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974), p. 39. Subsequent references to this volume appear in parentheses following the quotation.

<sup>2</sup>James Boswell, Boswell's London Journal, ed. Frederick A. Pottle (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1950), p. 47.

<sup>3</sup>Charles Ritchie, An Appetite for Life: The Education of a Young Diarist, 1924-1927 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1977), pp. 77-8. Subsequent references to this volume appear in parentheses following the quotation.

<sup>4</sup>Charles Ritchie, Diplomatic Passport: More Undiplomatic Diaries, 1946-1962 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 100-1.

<sup>5</sup>A. Cummings, Pref., A Last Diary, by W. N. P. Barbellion, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1921), pp. x-xi.

<sup>6</sup>H. G. Wells, Introd., Journal of a Disappointed Man, by W. N. P. Barbellion (London: Chatto & Windus, 1920), p. ix.

<sup>7</sup>Charles Ritchie, Storm Signals: More Undiplomatic Diaries, 1962-1971 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1983), pp. 15-16.

<sup>8</sup>Ritchie, Storm Signals, p. ix.

<sup>9</sup>Charles Ritchie, The Siren Years: A Canadian Diplomat Abroad, 1937-1945 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974), p. 8.

<sup>10</sup>Quoted in A Complete Guide to Journal Writing by Curtis W. Casewit (Allen, Tex: Argus Communications, 1982), p. 39.

<sup>11</sup>Quoted in Self-Harvest: A Study of Diaries and the Diarist by P. A. Spalding (London: Independent Press, 1949), pp. 21-2.

<sup>12</sup>Personal Interview with Charles Ritchie, 3 June 1986.

<sup>13</sup>Ritchie, The Siren Years, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup>Ritchie, The Siren Years, p. 178.

<sup>15</sup>Ritchie, Diplomatic Passport, p. 47.

<sup>16</sup>Ritchie, Storm Signals, p. 117.



<sup>17</sup>Personal Interview. The 16 volumes of Remembrance of Things Past were published 1913-27; in English translation they appeared 1922-32. Ritchie, who during his student days had attended the Ecole Libre des Sciences Politiques in Paris, read French well.

<sup>18</sup>Ritchie, Diplomatic Passport, p. 128.

<sup>19</sup>Boswell, p. 80.

<sup>20</sup>Christopher Morley, Pref., Boswell's London Journal, pp. xxiv-v.

<sup>21</sup>Ritchie, Diplomatic Passport, pp. 43-4. Subsequent references to this volume appear in parentheses following the quotation.

<sup>22</sup>Personal Interview.

<sup>23</sup>Ritchie, An Appetite for Life, p. 38. Subsequent references to this volume appear in parentheses following the quotation.

<sup>24</sup>Ritchie, The Siren Years, p. 161. Subsequent references to this volume appear in parentheses following the quotation.

<sup>25</sup>Ritchie, An Appetite for Life, p. 20.

<sup>26</sup>Ritchie, Storm Signals, p. 122.

<sup>27</sup>Ritchie, Storm Signals, p. 9.

<sup>28</sup>Ira Progoff, The Death and Rebirth of Psychology (New York: Dell Publishing, 1964), pp. 251-2.

<sup>29</sup>Gunther Stuhlmann, Pref., The Diary of Anais Nin, VI, 1955-1966 (New York: Harcourt, 1976), pp. ix-x.

<sup>30</sup>Personal Interview.

<sup>31</sup>Ritchie, Storm Signals, p. 55.

<sup>32</sup>Ritchie, The Siren Years, p. 99.

<sup>33</sup>Ritchie, Foreword to The Siren Years, p. 7.

<sup>34</sup>Ritchie, The Siren Years, p. 62.

<sup>35</sup>Ritchie, Diplomatic Passport, p. 98.

<sup>36</sup>Ritchie, An Appetite for Life, p. 9.

<sup>37</sup>Ritchie, Introd., Diplomatic Passport, p. 1.

<sup>38</sup>When asked in 1986, "There were diarists in your family, weren't there?", Ritchie replied: "Yes. I've just got hold of-- somebody's doing a thesis on these letters which were written in about 1820 by my great-grandfather and I've just been reading them and I'm totally absorbed; I'm really living his life. He was a very spontaneous letter-writer."

Interviewer: "Was this on your mother's side?"

Ritchie: "Yes. He was living in Windsor, Nova Scotia, in 1825, and these letters are extraordinary and not that read. Of course, [like me] he was a great Byron enthusiast, and as I read him, I'm more and more sort of in his life, and I feel almost a similarity to some of his reactions. It's very odd." Personal Interview.

<sup>39</sup>Note that the first two diaries were not published in chronological order. The Siren Years came first, followed by An Appetite for Life and the remaining titles. Subsequent references to An Appetite for Life are in parentheses following the quotation.

<sup>40</sup>Though the seventeen-year old Ritchie is quite capable of coming to this conclusion independently, as an avid reader he may well have been influenced by Wordsworth here. Lines 594-597, Book VII, II of The Prelude read:

"How often in the overflowing Streets,  
Have I gone forward with the Crowd and said  
Unto myself, the face of every one  
That passes by me is a mystery."

<sup>41</sup>Personal Interview.

<sup>42</sup>The novelistic qualities of Ritchie's diaries would make a thesis topic in themselves. For example, writer-editor Lovat Dickson, reviewing The Siren Years in 1975, makes this comment on Ritchie's love affair with Elizabeth Bowen: ". . . it mesmerizes us as completely as it did him, proof that in getting a successful ambassador we Canadians have lost a novelist of the first rank." (Lovat Dickson, Rev. of The Siren Years in Canadian Historical Review, LVI, No. 1 (March 1975), 215-7.

A single entry on a different subject, because it provides an example of Ritchie's skill at setting a scene and delineating character, is worth quoting here:

"7 July 1945

Went to lunch at the Halifax Club. An old man sitting in his armchair said, 'When I get the fish smell coming up from the wharves and the oil smell blown across the harbour from Dartmouth and the smell of the nearby brothels, I ask myself whether I live in a very savoury

neighbourhood.' The brothels are usually ancient houses in Hollis and Water Streets solidly built in the late eighteenth century, once the homes of merchants, now encrusted with filth, infested with bed-bugs and snotty-nosed brats. Little girls of twelve and thirteen are already in the business, with painted faces and gyrating bottoms--they walk the streets in twos and threes giving a giggle for a leer. This part of Halifax is the old port-town shortly to be swept away. It is not far from Hogarth's Gin Alley. In the midst of these smells of fish, wharf and brothel lives my maiden cousin, Susie, in the last of the old houses to keep its character. On its outer wall is a mildewed brass plate with "A" engraved in flowery longhand upon it. The glass panel in the door is protected by a fortification of twisted wire-work to prevent drunken lascars from breaking in. This is a last outpost of gentility. It has an obdurate defender. Susie's face is the colour of a yellowing letter left in a desk. Her manner is gentle, her obstinacy does not appear on the surface. She would be a happy martyr for her obsessions--she loves resistance--she is the woman every underground movement is looking for. Thumbscrews would avail her enemies nothing--and she sees her enemies everywhere--the Catholic Church, the American Nation, Modern Commercialism--she tilts at all of them. As for the squalor around her, it shall be kept at bay. It is provided in her will that this old house is to be destroyed at her death. Meanwhile she writes in her childish hand long rigmaroles of family gossip to cousins in England or in Bermuda. She sits under the Copley portrait of the loyalist great-great-great-great-grandfather Byles. (Although practically penniless she refused to sell it to the Boston Art Gallery for \$20,000 lest it should fall into the hands of the Americans.) She looks out between the yellow lace curtains at the life of Gin Alley and knows herself as strong as the drunken bullies or the hardened tarts." (Ritchie, The Siren Years, pp. 204-5.)

Asked in 1986 to account for his conviction that he was unable to write novels, Ritchie replied, ". . . I lacked any capacity either for plot, for development of character, or dialogue, or the attributes of creating--I have no creative power whatsoever." (Personal Interview.) It is quite possible that his long association with Elizabeth Bowen had the effect of confirming Ritchie's youthful belief that novel-writing was beyond him. (Bowen's talent should not be underestimated; in fact, her work is currently enjoying a revival, with The Death of the Heart having been filmed for television--and shown on TV Ontario in the fall of 1986--and The Heat of the Day opening as a stage play in London, England in April 1987.) A close friendship with a "real" novelist would be sure to have an inhibiting effect on the ambitions of a "would-be" novelist. (On the other hand, their shared interest in literary matters not only contributed to Ritchie's decision to edit his diary for publication, it may also have spurred him to write it as well as he did.)

## Chapter Three

### Ego and Ideal

As a framework on which to hang his discussions of individual diarists within the English diary tradition, Fothergill divides the remainder of his remarks in Private Chronicles into three sections. The first of these, titled "Style, Tone and Self-Projection," discusses varieties of style in self-presentation as found in those major diaries which "may be said to express Being rather than Becoming."<sup>1</sup> The second, titled "Ego and Ideal," looks at diarists for whom "the shaping concern of their autobiographical activity" is the present state and future development of the self; that is, they are consciously in the process of "Becoming." (128) The third section, which concludes Fothergill's study, is titled "Forms of Serial Autobiography." In it he expands his explanation of the term he has chosen to describe diaries which, "by virtue of their authors' conception and practice, and the character of the written documents are best regarded as a synthesis" of the diary and its near relative, the autobiography. (152)

As Fothergill presents them, these three categories of diary appear mutually exclusive. Any attempt to fit the diaries of Charles Ritchie into one of them, however, must soon come up against the fact that Ritchie's writings contain elements of all three. An Appetite for Life and The Siren Years, which record his life from the age of eighteen in 1924 to his thirty-ninth birthday at the end of the Second World War, reveal a personality in the process of "Becoming."

Diplomatic Passport and Storm Signals, which continue the story from Ritchie's participation in the Paris Peace Conference of 1946 to a month after his retirement from the Department of External Affairs in October of 1971, reveal a diarist who has "Become"; that is, in his own mind he is now "settled in a coherent identity." (96) Taken as a whole, the four volumes describe the growth of an individual as he makes the transition from "Becoming" to "Become," and enters the category of "serial autobiographer," that special species of diarist who, according to Fothergill, produces "diary-writing in its most developed form." (192)

The simple explanation for this phenomenon is that because the Ritchie diaries span an unusually lengthy period of forty-seven years, various developmental changes in the diarist are inevitable. The more complex explanation, simply stated, is that because Charles Ritchie possesses a fine mind with unusually keen critical and aesthetic awareness, and because his experience of the world has been exceptionally wide, his diaries succeed in encompassing most of the qualities which Fothergill finds in all three categories.

To begin at the beginning, with the process of "Becoming": in his chapter titled "Ego and Ideal," Fothergill discusses three "diary-personae" who

. . . express degrees of disengagement from the characters of which they are an aspect and from the everyday conduct of life of which they are spectators. At the same time they are preoccupied with the cultivation of a character and conduct with which they can be satisfied, which conforms to their ideal of personal development and the well-lived life. The diary frame of mind is marked by the pursuit of critically considered truth about the self, and by the disposition to will changes. Unlike the autobiography, the

diary receives the actual form and pressure of these processes.  
(128)

Further, Fothergill explains that those diarists who take seriously such questions as Who am I? and How should I conduct myself? can be divided into two groups: those who view their lives vertically, as a struggle upwards toward a superior condition of self-development, and those whose perspective is "horizontal"; that is, they view their ideal identity either as "the one authentic role among two or more contestants, or as a complex unity of dual or multiple aspects." Since the eighteenth century, adds Fothergill, the "horizontal" perspective has tended to prevail, so that when a "modern" diarist exhibits self-consciousness, his predominant concern will likely be "to explore and be reconciled with the complexity of [his] nature."

(129) One obvious example of this is Anais Nin, who wrote:

My first concept about people around me was that all of them were coordinated into a WHOLE, whereas I was made up of a multitude of selves, of fragments.<sup>2</sup>

Of the three diaries which Fothergill selects to exemplify the process of "Becoming," two, by Dudley Ryder and William Windham, exhibit the vertical perspective. The third, by James Boswell, combines both the vertical or single, upward perspective with the horizontal view of self as a more complex combination of multiple aspects. In this way, Fothergill believes, Boswell's journals "register the experience by an individual psyche of the turbulent co-existence of old and new valuations of self-hood during a period of cultural transition." (130)

In analysing the perspective of An Appetite for Life and The Siren Years, the two Ritchie diaries in which the "Becoming" process is

manifested, it is important to recognize that Ritchie's early conception of self is strongly influenced by his reading. Thus he is quite as capable of viewing himself from an eighteenth century perspective as from a contemporary one. One of his favourite books as a boy, for example, was the Letters of Horace Walpole, who was born in 1717 and died in 1797:

. . . when I was a boy, they were one of my great solaces. Rather strange to be reading it at Trinity College School at the age of 13. . . . Yes, and eighteenth century letters and memoirs and all that, of course I read them but they didn't influence my style or anything like that. But I could gobble them up at that age, just as earlier one gobbled up endless books.<sup>3</sup>

Though the young Ritchie's literary style may not have been much influenced by his interest in eighteenth century writers, that his self-image was affected seems certain. A recurring theme in An Appetite for Life in particular is his dedication to self-development, which he sees as a goal at the end up an upward climb. Writing at home in Halifax in June 1925, he announces, "I intend from now on to be a different person, much more vigorous and enthusiastic."<sup>4</sup> The first entry to be written during his second term at Oxford opens with:

I gave up writing this diary during the vacation. I decided that it is unhealthy because it encourages me to see my life as a looker on; also it is a waste of time when I should be working. (157)

Of particular interest here is Ritchie's view of the diary as "unhealthy because it encourages me to see my life as a looker on." This is a clear expression of the conscious "disengagement" from outer self and everyday life which Fothergill lists as typical of a diarist in the process of "Becoming."<sup>5</sup>

That the young Ritchie is also keen to note "critically considered truth" about himself is shown by this remark, noted February 17, 1925: "Hearing this took me out of myself--a rare occurrence." (24) He makes a similarly self-critical remark two years later, at Oxford: "When I find myself in a group of really cultured people I am uncomfortably aware of my own ignorance." (148)

Clearly, the writer of An Appetite for Life sees himself as a young man with a future, for which he must be well-prepared. To this young man, the "vertical" desire for self-improvement which Fothergill finds in the eighteenth century perspective makes a great deal of sense. Yet, like Boswell, he is unable to be single-minded about his goals, and any concept of his ideal self must take into account the multiple aspects of his personality. Writing at home in Halifax, he reveals:

. . . [Mother] said she was going to ask Mr. Logan to dinner to-morrow. He seems quite devoted to her but I consider him a bore, especially as she unwisely said to me that she thought he would be a "good influence" for me. Who wants a good influence? (24)

Two years later, he notes: "In the morning read Aristotle's Politics. I like this--'To be always seeking after the useful does not become free and exalted souls.'" (148)

Obviously, the first of these sentiments--and to some extent, the second as well--contradicts the ambitious plans for self-improvement which the young Ritchie frequently records elsewhere. The reason for this is his avowed ground rule for keeping a diary: "I want this to be entirely truthful." (9) Ideally, Ritchie believes, his



attitude and conduct should conform to the vertical pattern with which his reading has made him familiar. Realistically, and therefore more truthfully, he knows that this is completely possible only in intent, as it is recorded in the pages of his diary. When Ritchie is being wholly honest with himself, he realizes that his personality is complex, and that simple solutions cannot satisfy him:

April 5, 1925 [in Halifax]

Professor Falconer talked to me after lectures today. He is a splendid person, so cultivated and civilized and calm. He seems miles away from me. How do people get to be so calm? I want to do so infinitely much, read so much and write so much, and love and travel and adventure. (36)

In The Siren Years (1937-1945), his concern with self-improvement has shed all traces of the vertical perspective. The "ideal self" is now to be arrived at through considered choice, rather than after an uphill climb. On January 15, 1941 he notes: "A routine day, worthy but not inspiring. This is the way my 'Better Self' would like me to behave all the time."<sup>6</sup> His entry for November 2, 1941 reads, in full: "I suppose I ought to cultivate the society of solid civil servants instead of rococo Romanian princesses and baroque dilettantes."<sup>7</sup>

By far the best example of Ritchie's awareness of himself as a complex personality, however, is the existence of the diary. As a troubled schoolboy, Ritchie used the diary as a self-preserving refuge. As an ambitious adolescent, he uses it as a record of his unique self and as an aid to transforming Charles Ritchie into the person he wishes to be. And as a dashing young man about town, he uses it as a record of his experiences and as an opportunity for introspection. In

Ritchie's hands, the diary becomes a necessary link between outer appearance and inner reality, between his public and private selves. It is also an invaluable aid in the ongoing process of "Becoming."

"I have no character that I know of," he writes in An Appetite for Life in September, 1924:

I am not altogether lacking in intelligence but I do not care about that. I want to be handsome and dashing and self-assured, but I am angular, beak-nosed, narrow-chested, and wear glasses. I am quite tall, but what is the good of that? (8-9)

To bridge the considerable gap between "beak-nosed" and "dashing," the young Ritchie tries on various guises and uses his diary as an aid to assessing their fit. One of the most important of these guises--partly inspired, no doubt, by his admiration for Byron--is Charles Ritchie as Romantic Lover.

Ritchie's interest in women is a constant in his life, and must surely stem, in part, from his evident affection and respect for his redoubtable mother. His lengthy first entry in An Appetite for Life includes this word portrait of her:

I suppose you would say she is handsome rather than beautiful but neither word is quite right. She has the most magnificent dark eyes that can fascinate or scare you depending on her mood. She is generous, compassionate, impatient and easily bored. She is a born mimic who could imitate anyone. She is a chain-smoker and a terrific tea-drinker. She would do anything for my brother Roley and me and she expects us to achieve something remarkable in life. (7)

Though there are sexual references to women throughout the two early diaries, one quite different notation indicates the complexity of Ritchie's interest in them:

26 October 1942

I lunched with Mary Bartlett at the Etoile. She showed me the

tongue motion that women make when they are cleaning lipstick off their front teeth and I feel that I have gained a valuable piece of information.<sup>8</sup>

This remark is worthy of that dedicated field naturalist, Barbellion.

At age eighteen, however, Charles Ritchie is as interested in his own behaviour as in that of his female friends. Though intent on describing his romance with Katherine Akroyd, he also manages to describe himself as well, as the following group of entries reveals:

January 1, 1925

I am in love with a girl called Katherine Akroyd. Or I imagine I am. (9)

January 5

Took Katherine to the King's College dance. I could see the other boys were surprised to see me with such a pretty girl. (10)

January 17

I took off my signet ring and asked her to wear it, explaining that it was only a loan. (15)

This love story, complicated by a rival suitor who happens to be Ritchie's best friend, continues until it becomes evident to Katherine that Ritchie's plans for his future do not include her. In September of 1925 she returns his ring, saying she is now engaged to an older man. With typical candour, Ritchie explains to his diary:

Of course, as she said, we were never really engaged, and she never loved me, and I did not love her enough to give up Oxford, but I did love her and no one else. (101)

This fraught scene occurs during the same fortnight as his flirtation with the visiting Geraldine, with whom, Ritchie confides, "I pretend to be a lover in a movie and imagine how he would behave." (99) He also notes the following inspiration, obviously designed to enhance his image as Romantic Lover: "I decided not to wear my glasses all day

in the hope of changing my appearance and my personality." (98) By the end of Geraldine's visit, however, it is a relief to be able to share his true feelings with the diary:

Geraldine is leaving here today to stay with the Kennedys and I must say it is a relief to me. I am tired of talking about the kind of love I don't feel and making the kind of love I do feel. (101)

By the time he is twenty, "Charles Ritchie as Romantic Lover" is a role with some foundation in real life; at the very least, it enables him to view his fellow Oxonians from the lofty height of genuine--if still limited--experience:

October 30 [1926]

It is quite true that these English undergraduates do seem incredibly young. . . . For one thing, they have never had anything to do with girls except sisters, and the odd girl they have met at a tennis party or a dance. . . . They are mostly virgins, though they would rather die than admit it, and they don't know anything about petting as we practise it at home. (118)

This is all the more reason that Ritchie feels qualified to take on "the famous Margot Poltimer, about whom there has been so much talk." (131) Another (and significant) reason is that "she reminded me of someone. It is Geraldine the same touch of the amateur actress, and I feel completely at my ease with her." (132) A week after he and Margot are introduced, he invites her to his rooms for a lunch of lobster and hock, with "flowers for the table" and achieves success. (135) The gap between role and reality is now closed, as he hastens to inform the diary:

I woke up feeling like a million dollars. I have done it. I have brought it off. Nothing can take this away from me, even if I never see Margot again . . . I feel so immensely pleased, as if some weight of doubt had been miraculously lifted. (137)

"Charles as Romantic Lover" has become "Charles is Romantic Lover." Illustrating the difference are his decidedly unromantic reports on the progress--and otherwise--of his pursuit of a "starry eyed little number" from Portland, Oregon.<sup>9</sup> In November of 1940 he writes crossly: "I could have strangled her today while she was eating her chocolate cake, but I was so disagreeable that I do not think she enjoyed it much." (78) A month later, he adds a remark so superlatively unromantic that it deserves to become a classic: "If that bloody ballerina does not come across tomorrow I am through with her." (79) That old habits die hard, however, is revealed during his final entry on the subject of the ballerina:

30 May, 1941

I told her today that I was falling a little bit in love with her and so I am a little bit. She is my perennial type. When I die they will find some woman's name written on my heart--I do not know myself whose it will be! (105)

After 1940 the diary--though not necessarily the young man--acquires more discretion on the subject of romance. When he falls in love with Elizabeth Bowen in 1941, however, the diary receives the imprint of a new self-image: Charles Ritchie as Grateful Disciple.

When Elizabeth Bowen met Charles Ritchie she was an established novelist and short story writer, with ten published books to her credit including The House in Paris (1935) and The Death of the Heart (1939).

Of her literary ability her biographer, Victoria Glendinning, declares:

. . . she is a major writer; her name should appear in any responsible list of the ten most important fiction writers in English on this side of the Atlantic in this century. She is to be spoken of in the same breath as Virginia Woolf, on whom much more breath has been expended.<sup>10</sup>



Angus McBean

ELIZABETH BOWEN

As for Bowen's personality, Glendinning pronounces it "overwhelming," adding:

She was vital, indefatigable, sociable, independent, extremely hard-working, brave, kind-hearted, perceptive. A respecter of the conventions, she was not a conventional person. She was sometimes formidable. She had a talent for friendship, and a large and unusually heterogeneous number of friends.<sup>11</sup>

In 1941, Charles Ritchie became one of them. Elizabeth's junior by seven years, Charles was well aware that here was a woman to be respected as well as loved. Consequently, at times The Siren Years records his conviction that their relationship--which continued until her death in 1973--in some ways resembled that between mentor and pupil. The full text of his entry for September 14, 1942 reads:

"Spent the day with dearest Elizabeth to whom I owe everything." (148)

Early in the New Year, he writes:

Elizabeth has borne with all my attempts to play-act my life, although she has so little patience with histrionic characters, without ever making me feel a fool. She has shown me up to myself--good money to some extent has driven out bad. (156)

A month later, he adds:

I asked Elizabeth last night whether it was possible to regard oneself--not with violent disgust but with a steady cold distaste as one might feel towards an unattractive acquaintance whose character one knew all too well. She thought, "Yes, if one had been over praised for the wrong reasons." (157)

Though in the early years of their relationship Charles tended to view himself as a grateful disciple, on the receiving end of Elizabeth's superior sensibilities, wisdom and charm, in actual fact, writes Bowen's biographer, Charles himself had much to offer also:

Clever, gay and gallant, with a love of talk and a "sensuous perception", he appealed and responded to these same things in Elizabeth. The relationship of each with London, with England, was

not so very different either--he as an Anglo-Canadian, she as an Anglo-Irishwoman.<sup>12</sup>

"She no less than he had been restless, uncertain, in her personal life over the past ten years," states Glendinning. She then adds:

Charles for her became a "habitat", as Robert was for Stella in The Heat of the Day. . . . Elizabeth settled, emotionally. Like Stella with Robert, in her novel: "To have turned away from everything to one face is to find oneself face to face with everything."<sup>13</sup>

One reason Ritchie tended to cast himself in his disciple role may well have been the inescapable realization that his close friendship with Elizabeth was an enormous coup. For this genuinely modest man--and a Canadian, at that--to have gained and kept the love of this exceptional woman--and a British literary lion, no less--was an achievement that was bound to have a lasting effect on his self-esteem. Far from preening himself on his success, however, Ritchie reacted by taking the low road of gratitude and humility, as we have seen. At the same time, the diary begins to receive the imprint of a personality that is learning to view itself with a minimum of false modesty:

20 January 1942

Elizabeth and I dined at Claridge's. She was in an easy and cheerful mood. She said "I would like to put you in a novel," looking at me through half-closed eyes in a suddenly detached way like a painter looking at a model. "You probably would not recognize yourself." "I am sure I wouldn't," I lied. (132)

and:

February 1945. Ottawa.

I suppose I could have gone on year after year representing my country abroad without knowing much about what was going on at home. I am in for an intensive bout of re-education. In the Department I feel like a new boy at school. . . . They all seem to know so much more than I do. I asked myself what I can have been doing in these years when they were informing themselves so fully. Living through the war must be the answer. (185)



Another important aspect of the "Becoming" diaries is Ritchie's view of himself as a Frustrated Novelist. He strikes this note at the outset, devoting the first three paragraphs of An Appetite for Life to an explanation of why his metier must needs be the diary, and concluding firmly: "If that is all I have, I had better get on with it."<sup>14</sup> He then proceeds to describe his surroundings in rather clinical detail ("On the right is the lodge, a little wooden house badly in need of painting, which we let to a family who are behind in the rent"), with the exception of the following:

. . . I love listening, especially at night, when I'm in bed, to the hooting of the engines, the ringing of the cow-bells, the jangling of the couplings, and the sound of the mournful whistle as the trains draw out in the distance, so that I picture them tearing along with their lighted windows through the darkness and dwindling away to the edge of sleep.<sup>15</sup>

Here, in the very first diary entry which Ritchie has seen fit to publish, are combined the two styles of writing which persist through the years to follow: on the one hand, a matter-of-fact recounting of actual events and details, often distinguished by a ruthlessly truthful or witty point of view, and on the other, a more imaginative flight which may take the form of a character sketch, an anecdote, an atmospheric description, an epigram or an impressionistic reverie. In a sense, the two styles find their parallels in Ritchie's double life as diplomat and diarist, and it is therefore significant to note that he seems equally adept at and interested in each. In the "Becoming" diaries in particular, however, he is not always successful at integrating the two styles into one distinctive voice. The occasional entry is noticeably self-conscious, as though its author has

succumbed to an excess of literary ambition. Describing his "digs" at Oxford, he writes: "There is an aspidistra in the window and a small fireplace with one log smouldering in it. The landlady is very toothy and genteel. Her husband, who is a plumber, lurks in the back hall."<sup>16</sup> Two months later, by now very much the seasoned man of the world, he writes:

Sunday afternoon in Oxford on a damp, dark day in December. Oh the charnel gloom of it. The feeling that nothing will ever happen again. The ivy climbing on an iron gate outside a red-brick North Oxford villa makes you turn your eyes away.<sup>17</sup>

At Newport in 1938 and apparently under the influence of F. Scott Fitzgerald, he notes:

The young girls at the dance had skins the colour of warm sand which the sun has burnished and the grace of movement and easy buoyancy of those who swim through life on golden tides.<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, this passage, written during the Normandy landing in 1944, seems constrained to be original:

All [the troops] were top-heavy with the weight of their equipment . . . blundering about helplessly like cows caught in a too narrow lane. Their tin helmets covered with camouflage to look like leaves were like some stylised headgear of the kind worn by peasants participating in a fertility ritual.<sup>19</sup>

Other indications that the diarist is in the process of "Becoming" may be found in his accounts of his flirtation with the Oxford Group,<sup>20</sup> in his view of himself as a dashing fellow running with a fast crowd,<sup>21</sup> and in the conscious aestheticism which he frequently displays in The Siren Years. Also in this volume, Ritchie portrays himself as a graduate of more than Oxford: as a rising young diplomat at the Canadian High Commission in London, he is now in a position to satisfy his "appetite for life" on a grander scale than ever before,

and thus his assumption of the mantle of Collector of Experience. In February of 1938, for example, attending a levee at Buckingham Palace, he describes himself "in my diplomatic uniform, hired for five guineas from Morris Angel, theatrical outfitters, Shaftesbury Avenue."<sup>22</sup> In December 1940, by now a seasoned "week-ender," he writes:

Week-end with the Sacheverell Sitwells. . . . He would disappear after tea with, "I am going to my room to scribble for a little while" or "I will withdraw to my apartment." It was exciting to feel that up there he was distilling another of those magic potions of his. (80)

Mingling with celebrities is a common occurrence by November 24, 1941, on which date he squires Miriam Rothschild to a party for Beatrice Lillie and describes the scene thus:

Noel Coward sang "London Pride" in a manner which I found all the more revolting for being sincere. There was a gathering of pansies and theatrical blondes interspersed with Lord S. and latest girl-friend and Hore-Belisha--an obscene spectacle. (125)

In June 1944, realizing that the war is almost over, he writes:

At this point I became unendurably restless and determined by hook or crook to get to the Normandy beach-head. This was strictly forbidden to all civilians. . . . However, I had the inspiration to sell Mr. Massey [Vincent Massey, then High Commissioner in London, to whom Ritchie was private secretary] the idea that a message of good wishes should be sent to the Canadian troops in Normandy from Mr. McKenzie King. (167)

Lest the evident satisfaction in these excerpts make the diarist seem shallow, an entry on the experience of living in wartime England serves as a corrective:

28 October 1941

Until the war began I never felt that I was a member of a community and that I had an obligation to others. The idea of "doing my bit" had always seemed to me a piece of schoolboy morality, not applicable to me. I was still the bullied schoolboy who gets his own back in the end. Now this attitude seems to me not so much wicked as childish and dangerous too. It was because so many of us

thought that "the world" was something alien to ourselves which owed us the plunder of a living and as many privileges as we could lay our hands on that we are in our present spot. . . . After this [war] we either have a state based on human relationships or we have civil war. (123)

In this revealing passage, Charles Ritchie touches on a major reason behind his many ambitions: those bullies who made his schooldays miserable would pay for their sins by leading dull, commonplace adult lives, while his own would be filled with "love and travel and adventure." Having succeeded in making his wildest dreams come true (excepting always the dream of becoming a successful novelist), Ritchie is moving closer to assuming the more sober role in life that befits his status as a successful career diplomat. The final entry in The Siren Years, written at the classic turning point of his thirty-ninth birthday, marks his conscious recognition that the "Becoming" stage is reaching its close, and that the time has come to accept the transition from "Becoming" to "Become":

I have come up against a blank wall. There is nothing to do but turn around and face things. I feel myself hardening. I will not be one of life's casualties, nor just a sympathetic character. Middle-age is the time when one is supposed to concentrate on the world's game, care about making a grand slam and watch other people's play. The game has always interested me but never enough to overcome my love of talking and of sensuous perception, but now I am bloody well going to have my fling at it. The trouble is that it is only for two or three days at a time that I can deceive myself that I do care about this success game. Then I long to throw my cards in and clear out. (209)

Of particular significance here is the sentence: "I feel myself hardening." In these few telling words, Ritchie describes his sense of having very nearly "Become" a coherent identity, of having

almost solidified into the mould of his future self. The nature of that future self is revealed in the two diaries that follow.

## Chapter Three

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Robert A. Fothergill, Private Chronicles: A Study of English Diaries (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974), p. 96. Subsequent references to this volume appear in parentheses following the quotation.

<sup>2</sup>Nin, quoted in Fothergill, p. 129.

<sup>3</sup>Personal Interview with Charles Ritchie, 3 June 1986.

<sup>4</sup>Charles Ritchie, An Appetite for Life: The Education of a Young Diarist, 1924-1927 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1981), p. 65. Subsequent references to this volume appear in parentheses following the quotation.

<sup>5</sup>Ritchie did not, of course, renounce the diary for long. In fact, he concludes the subject in this entry by adding, "I know it is a bad habit, like smoking or drinking, but I cannot give it up any longer." (p. 157)

<sup>6</sup>Charles Ritchie, The Siren Years: A Canadian Diplomat Abroad, 1937-1945 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974), p. 85.

<sup>7</sup>Ritchie, The Siren Years, p. 123.

<sup>8</sup>Ritchie, The Siren Years, p. 150.

<sup>9</sup>Ritchie, The Siren Years, p. 70. Subsequent references to this volume appear in parentheses following the quotation.

<sup>10</sup>Victoria Glendinning, Elizabeth Bowen (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1985), p. 1.

<sup>11</sup>Glendinning, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup>Glendinning, p. 138.

<sup>13</sup>Glendinning, p. 140.

<sup>14</sup>Ritchie, An Appetite for Life, pp. 3-4.

<sup>15</sup>Ritchie, An Appetite for Life, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup>Ritchie, An Appetite for Life, p. 109-10.

<sup>17</sup>Ritchie, An Appetite for Life, p. 155.

<sup>18</sup>Ritchie, The Siren Years, p. 23.

<sup>19</sup>Ritchie, The Siren Years, p. 170.

<sup>20</sup>Ritchie, An Appetite for Life, pp. 116-127.

<sup>21</sup>See in particular his account of "my dinner party to celebrate the Peninsular War Madeira," in An Appetite for Life, pp. 149-53.

<sup>22</sup>Ritchie, The Siren Years, p. 129. Subsequent references to this volume appear in parentheses following the quotation.

## Chapter Four

### Style, Tone and Self-Projection

To examine Diplomatic Passport (1946-1962) and Storm Signals (1962-1971) as the work of a diarist who has "Become," or "settled in a coherent identity that can speak in the first person singular without misgivings,"<sup>1</sup> is not as arbitrary an activity as it might appear. For one thing, as we have just seen, Ritchie himself recognizes a demarcation line between the two phases of his life. This is hardly surprising in a sensitive and intelligent man whose thirty-ninth birthday coincided with the end of the Second World War and completion of five "siren years" in London. Diplomats lead measured lives. Assignments abroad are interspersed at regular intervals with periods in Ottawa, an arrangement which encourages personal stock-taking. Further, the later diaries themselves reveal changes in style, tone and self-projection. They are the work of a man who has made his major choices and who is satisfied, on the whole, with the course of his life. How, then, does Charles Ritchie present himself in the "Become" diaries, and how does this presentation differ from his diary persona in An Appetite for Life and The Siren Years?

In his discussion of "Become" diaries in Private Chronicles, Fothergill stresses the importance of the diarist's imagined reader. Unlike other authors, who tend to write with a specific reader in mind, the diarist addresses "a certain kind of responsiveness," and creates his own reader "as a projection of the impulse to write":



Whether identified as a listening friend, future generations, or God the Father . . . the reader is literally a figment of the writer's mind, a completion of the circuit. (96)

To understand the particular nature of a diary persona, then, it is useful to establish what sort of response it envisages. A related consideration, according to Fothergill, is "prevailing conventions of style, and their effect on the diarist's self-presentation." Writing style can be likened to a costume, which . . . may be consciously selected as suitable to a role, or it may be thrown together without deliberate consideration--either way it expresses the wearer." (96)

Fothergill then proceeds to analyze the writing styles of several major diarists, noting the particular characteristics of each and determining what sort of response is envisaged, as well as whether the writer is influenced by "prevailing conventions of style." This method is particularly useful in the case of Samuel Pepys, whose extraordinarily "natural" style merits Fothergill's detailed examination. Certain of the qualities which he discovers in Pepys' style are surprisingly relevant to the style of self-presentation developed by Charles Ritchie. For example, Fothergill notes what he terms the "moral appeal" of Pepys' self-image, explaining: "[s]urely to be able to articulate the best and the worst of oneself with such unreserved directness must be a kind of sanctity." (97)

Though one hesitates to pass judgement on the degree of "sanctity" in a writer still living, it is nevertheless clear that a large part of the Ritchie persona's appeal to the reader lies in its

apparently "unreserved directness" and willingness to cast itself in an unflattering light. These qualities, while consistently evident in the "Becoming" diaries, are all the more appealing in the two diaries which follow because they were penned by a writer at the height of his considerable public career. A typical example, not previously cited, is this passage from Storm Signals, written when Ritchie was sixty-two:

Dined with the Hardys and found myself face to face with their son, a boy of eighteen--me at the age when I wrote my early diaries. I imagined myself skinned alive by his electric eye. What would he write in his diary? Myself--a gabbling, infinitely old parrot, quite outside the range of human sympathies.<sup>2</sup>

That Ritchie's modesty and rueful charm are intrinsic, and not a pose, has been verified by no less a judge than the acute Miss Bowen, who based a character in The Heat of the Day on Ritchie and also dedicated the novel to him. Readers of the diaries who might wonder whether they will recognize the "Ritchie character" in Bowen's novel (a reasonable concern, considering Miss Bowen's assumption that Ritchie would not recognize himself) can rest easy: in his very first appearance the "Ritchie character," whose name is Robert Kelway, is unmistakable:

He then broke out: "I'm very glad you are here. I was certain something had happened to you."  
"Why should it?"  
"Because that would be exactly the sort of thing that would happen to me."<sup>3</sup>

This rings particularly true because early in the diary, Ritchie establishes himself as the sort of person to whom things happen--not all of them good. During his first posting abroad, for example, he writes:

1 July 1937. Washington.

There are two other junior secretaries at the Legation with me. We share offices on the top floor. When I arrived they told me that it was a tradition in the Legation that the most newly arrived officer must walk along an extremely narrow parapet running under the office windows. I obediently climbed out of the window and took a few precarious steps looking down at a drop which would have brained me if I had faltered. Then I climbed back in again to be told that I was the first person to be such a bloody fool as to believe this story.<sup>4</sup>

This, one gathers, is the sort of trial which dedicated seekers after experience must learn to accept as an occupational hazard.

Discussing the natural modesty of Pepys, Fothergill declares: "[i]t takes phenomenal talent to be able to tell a nine-year story of himself without seeming egotistical. His manner is so consistently disarming." (99) Fothergill then quotes Pepys' account of making a speech that was obviously a "prodigious triumph before a parliamentary investigation of the Navy," but which Pepys himself describes in a tone of "pleased surprise." (100)

Equally disarming is Ritchie's sole comment<sup>5</sup> concerning his successful speech to the General Assembly of the United Nations on March 12, 1961 (quoted earlier, as an example of "imprint"). The comment is an advance in sophistication over the kind of self-deprecating remark which Ritchie tends to make in the "Becoming" diaries, for it is an adroit and witty blend of unassuming reportage (Dean Acheson's compliment is recorded, but not dwelt on) and revealing remark (both men's characters--one modest and generous, the other generous and smug--are exposed). In contrast, the mixture of modesty and generosity contained in the following remark from The Siren Years displays the self-consciousness of a diarist who is still "Becoming":

15 December 1938

If I have learned anything . . . [in Washington] . . . it is thanks to Hume Wrong, the Counsellor of the Legation. Each of my draft despatches has been returned to me with detailed emendations in his elegant script. He has applied acid to what he terms my "impressionistic" manner of expressing myself. . . . The most gratifying moment of my time here has been seeing his report on my work which states that I have "an instinct for political realities."<sup>6</sup>

Considering Ritchie's considerable accomplishments, even at this early stage in his career, his high degree of natural modesty may seem incongruous. The fact remains, however, that incongruous or not, it is genuine, and that in telling a forty-seven year "story of himself without seeming egotistical," Charles Ritchie matches and even exceeds the "phenomenal talent" of Samuel Pepys.

Like Pepys, Ritchie writes his diaries with a minimum of ostentation. Also like Pepys, who was similarly active in public life, his straightforward style is "a choice among genuine options." (98) As government officials, each was comfortable with a more formal writing style than that which appears in their diaries. And Ritchie, who early in his career often wrote speeches for other men, was especially aware of individual variations in style. Here, for example, are his comments on the wartime style of Winston Churchill:

12 June 1941

He indulged in one of his usual diatribes against the Nazis with all his usual relish. These terrific castigations always make me feel a little uneasy. He so obviously enjoys piling into Hitler and the Nazis--and you feel it is just too easy for him. Also you wonder if he won't one of these days overdo it and reduce the whole thing to a music hall level.<sup>7</sup>

In Diplomatic Passport, the more sophisticated but still candid diarist gives a succinct--and witty--description of the writing style he employs while wearing his professional diplomat's hat:

How to put things--in a way--you know--in a certain fashion which does not offend and yet disturbs. How to hide the needle in the bundle of hay.<sup>8</sup>

Another revealing remark occurs in Storm Signals as the diarist, now Canada's Ambassador in Washington, lists the qualities which he dislikes in his staff:

Sept 15, 1963

What do I chiefly deplore? Long-winded wordiness in speech or on paper. . . . Then I don't like fluffiness of mind which cannot get to the naked point. That is not so much stupidity as superficiality, often accompanied by self-esteem.<sup>9</sup>

Another Pepysian characteristic which Ritchie shares in his self-presentation is a preference for "reasonableness and good will rather than the power of asserted ego" in his personal politics. (101) One can observe this characteristic in Ritchie's amusing account of his dealings with a friend's black butler, Vernon, in The Siren Years.<sup>10</sup> There is, however, a noticeable difference between "I nearly asked him to make me a small picnic luncheon, but although I felt better about Vernon I did not feel equal to this," and this passage from Diplomatic Passport, written eighteen years later when Ritchie's resourcefulness in dealing with servants has matured:

There was a domestic crisis today. . . . I am very anxious to keep Erich as he is an extremely good butler. . . . I have suggested to him that I would pay the rent of his wife's house in Munich if she wanted to go there and he could join her at some indefinite period in the future.<sup>11</sup>

Ritchie's "reasonableness and good will" in dealing with others, whatever their status, are an important aspect of his self-presentation; so is his deeply imbued humanitarianism, which he reveals in a variety of entries, from:

Feb. 27, 1954--Viceroy's house, New Delhi  
 [Indira Ghandi] talked humanitarianism and social reform but in a bloodless fashion, tinged with immense smugness and self-righteousness. I took strongly against her.<sup>12</sup>

to:

Jan. 27, 1969  
 Poor Bruna--she goes into hospital tomorrow to have a cyst or cancer removed from her breast. Think of her on these black London mornings, getting my Goddamned fried egg ready, toting it up in the lift, toting it--untouched--down again, taking the dog round the block in the dark morning air, and all the time worrying, worrying, "Will they remove my breast?"<sup>13</sup>

An important aspect of the "Become" diaries, which has no parallel in Fothergill's analysis of Pepys' self-presentation, is Ritchie's evident competence in his diplomatic career. By 1954 he can deal with virtually any social situation, no matter how unpromising:

I am trying to learn German. The woman who is teaching me is making me learn the German version of Little Red Riding Hood by heart. This is the only German I so far know. Last night we went to a German dinner party. I was seated between two wives of German high officials . . . [with] . . . not a word of English. Finally, unable to stand the silence any longer, I turned from one to the other and launched into Red Riding Hood . . . in quite fluent German. The two ladies stared at me in dumb amazement. One of them asked on a questioning note, "Bitte, Exzellenz?" Otherwise, no reaction. However, the German official on the other side of the table, who could not hear what I was saying, came up to me afterwards and complimented me on my fluent German.<sup>14</sup>

His grasp of political situations seems equally resourceful:

March 23, 1959  
 Talking about work, I have done about five drafts of a long paper on Germany, German rearmament, the possibilities of reunification, Canadian policy towards Germany, and I was pleased to hear that my

piece is to be used by the Prime Minister as the basic paper on the subject for his talks with Harold Macmillan.<sup>15</sup>

Storm Signals, which opens with Ritchie's appointment as Canadian Ambassador to Washington and ends with his retirement, reveals the diarist's deep interest in the public issues of his time. In this volume, although he continues his regular recording of selected personal activities and private musings, Ritchie includes far more political material than in any of the previous volumes. He gives eyewitness accounts of such events as "Mike" Pearson's startling confrontation with L. B. Johnson at Camp David.<sup>16</sup> He contemplates the Canadian position on such issues as the future of Rhodesia.<sup>17</sup> He notes his views on the personalities of such political acquaintances as Dean Rusk, Anatoly Dobrynin and Edward Heath.<sup>18</sup> In short, in Storm Signals Ritchie has "Become" the elder statesman, whose views on political matters are worth recording because they are touched by the wisdom of experience.

Such passages make impressive reading, and explain why the Ritchie diaries are catalogued in Canadian libraries as "Political Science" or "Modern History." To grasp the diaries' true focus, however, the reader must take into account this characteristic declaration, made in July of 1962:

The more I am involved in diplomatic and political affairs, the more I set store on private feelings. I prefer my loved ones to any political allegiance, and hope I always shall.<sup>19</sup>

The diary of Charles Ritchie is the work of an ambitious man who discovered a way to live his life which not only made him successful, it made him happy. The diary, which was begun in childhood as an act

of self-preservation and expression, was a vital component in that discovery, for it enabled Ritchie to remain true to himself.

Ritchie's high degree of personal insight, which modern self-consciousness makes possible for him, is an important difference between his self-presentation and that of Samuel Pepys. Take for example this cool self-assessment, which is quite plainly the work of a diarist who has "Become":

All-out decisions, unqualified statements, irreconcilable antagonisms are foreign to my nature and to my training. In these ways I reflect my political masters, the inheritors of McKenzie King, and I am fitted to work with them. I believe, too, that such temperaments are needed in this dangerous period of history, which is no time for heroics to be paid for in a currency of disaster.<sup>20</sup>

This remark, combined with the foregoing examples of Ritchie's self-presentation, makes it very clear that when it comes to "naturalness," Charles Ritchie is a worthy successor to the mighty Pepys. It is probably true to say, in fact, that Ritchie's self-revealing candour, combined with his generally unostentatious writing style, are the two most appealing traits in his entire diary.

This is all the more remarkable because Ritchie, with his twentieth century insight into his own psychology, does not share what Fothergill terms Pepys' "kind of ingenuous candour": (102)

Doesn't this "naturalness" of Pepys in some ways appear like the persistence into adult life of a child's habit of confiding everything to God? . . . Samuel the diarist preserves something of this soul-before-its-maker directness. (102-3)

Here Fothergill clearly suggests that Pepys, who wrote his diary for his own satisfaction, and took care to record its more inflammable passages in a primitive private code, was all the while



aware that he was addressing "a certain kind of responsiveness"; in short, Pepys' "imagined reader" was God. This interpretation does much to account for the relatively innocent self which this evident man of the world presents in his diary. However, it is not much help in explaining the remarkably "natural" self-presentation of Charles Ritchie.

We know, from Ritchie's accounts of his encounters with the "Oxford Groupers," that he "had always had a great wish to believe," and that he is impressed by the ability "to combine simple faith with a clear mind."<sup>21</sup> We also know, from the entries which describe the remorse he feels over his gambling adventures at Oxford, that Ritchie has a powerful conscience.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, forty-three years later he is still confessing to "words and actions" which trouble his conscience:

December 16, 1969

Since I was eleven years old, perhaps before, I have at intervals played a kind of game in which I opened my eyes, looked about me, and willed myself to blot out all except what I at that moment saw before me, pretending that all was completely new, seen for the first time. So, too, with people. I have looked at my loved ones with an eye, and listened to them with an ear, from the outside. I have had at such times a sense of moral irresponsibility, a sort of self-induced drugged state, intensification of vision, dissociation from the human element. This game is dangerous. It has sometimes led to words and actions which would never have been in the linear order of my behaviour. These "fresh beginnings" have in fact not been beginnings, but escapes from habitual behaviour. They are a form of aesthetic immoralism, often bringing later remorse, but highly delightful at the time.<sup>23</sup>

Without doubt, Ritchie's respect for both "simple faith" and his own conscience was a strong motivating factor in his decision to write an "entirely truthful" diary. In fact, at the age of forty-nine

he makes a diary entry in Diplomatic Passport which reveals he believes God may actually be listening, though without much interest:

. . . it is only a sort of acknowledgement for a day of life to write the diary at all, a "bread-and-butter" to God but one that must more often bore than please Him.<sup>24</sup>

Yet the "responsiveness" which Ritchie addresses in his diary is not really Divine, for he would not go to so much trouble to write well for a bored listener. His true "imagined reader" is suggested in the very first entry in An Appetite for Life as it declares: "I must write."<sup>25</sup>

Ritchie's "imagined reader" is what was once termed "the Muse"; today one would describe it as his own awareness of his literary vocation. Born to write, but unable to succeed in his preferred field of imaginative fiction, he is determined to write the diary in the best way he can. Disrespectful of the diary as a form of literature, he is nevertheless entirely respectful of the art of writing. That "the Muse" remains an important part of his life long past the age of eighteen can be seen in the entry from Storm Signals for December 16, 1969, in which he describes himself in what is really the process of authorial detachment.<sup>26</sup> Still unable to take himself seriously as a writer, Ritchie expresses remorse at what he terms his "aesthetic immorality," but which is actually the writer's unquenchable compulsion to observe his fellow man "from the outside." Ritchie's ample conscience unfortunately prevents him from casting his keen descriptive eye on his "loved ones" in anything like the detail which he devotes to acquaintances such as Nancy Mitford and Vincent Massey--or at least

from publishing the result--with one exception. She is, of course, Elizabeth Bowen.

One reason for this exception must be Miss Bowen's literary prominence, which makes any information regarding her of value. But another, and perhaps more significant, reason is that in the diarist's mind, Elizabeth Bowen belongs to that half of his double life which is recorded in the diary. Earlier in this study, it was noted that an important motive for writing the diary is the gratification of projecting individual personality. In order to excel in his diplomatic career, which Ritchie had every intention of doing, he had either to subordinate the artistic side of his nature or find an acceptable outlet for it. Maintaining the diary was the ideal solution because it allowed him an always available and private opportunity for creative expression, as well as incontestable proof that the "smoothing-out process" of becoming a diplomat had not submerged the "real" Charles Ritchie. As he comments in his Introduction to Storm Signals:

. . . a word of advice to any fellow diplomatic diarist--keep diplomatic discretion out of your diaries, and keep the diarist's indiscretion out of your diplomacy. A double life is doubly enjoyable.<sup>27</sup>

It is probably not too much to say, in fact, that keeping the diary enabled Ritchie to remain loyal to two women simultaneously because it helped him to separate them in his mind. Sylvia, his Nova Scotia cousin whom he married in 1948, is mentioned in the diary but the references, though fairly frequent, are brief and not particularly revealing. One of the more significant occurs in Storm Signals; it is

not part of a diary entry at all, but occurs in an article titled "Diplomatic Attitudes," which Ritchie used to conclude the book:

. . . the wife of a foreign service officer can make all the difference to the success or failure of the husband's posting abroad. If she enjoys the stimulus of meeting a variety of people, if she finds an interest in getting to know other countries and cultures, the husband and wife make a doubly effective team. I don't know how effective Sylvia and I have been as a team--I do know that without her I could not have carried on. She has risen to every occasion with zest and without fuss.<sup>28</sup>

Clearly, Sylvia belongs to that part of the diarist's life which receives small mention in the diary. Elizabeth, on the other hand, with whom Ritchie frequently talks of literature and writing, and whose very presence in the diary confirms the diarist's early conceptions of himself as Romantic Lover and Grateful Disciple, belongs to the diary as she did not "belong" in Ritchie's diplomatic life. By keeping the two women separate, in the diary as in life, Ritchie can be loyal to both. In this connection it is revealing to note this comment, made after a conversation with Elizabeth in 1969:

She thinks that one is born with "innate ideas", reflections of the social and mental climate of one's parents. If this is so, in my own case the idea of loyalty (and its obverse, disloyalty) was a dominant. Loyalty, but not necessarily fidelity.<sup>29</sup>

One further point: fittingly, it was Elizabeth who suggested the idea of publication to Charles. The first indication that he has spoken of the diary to her occurs in the entry for April 13, 1960:

"Elizabeth says hang on to the diaries--they could be pruned and published as "The Diaries of Mr. X."<sup>30</sup> In October she writes to him, "encouraging me to keep my old diaries rather than burn them and to

consider later publication."<sup>31</sup> Fortunately, he respected her good judgement.

Though Elizabeth Bowen was obviously a very important person in Ritchie's life, she was not his "Muse"; with a few exceptions, Ritchie writes in his own voice to his own exacting standards. To him, the goal to strive for is truth, and therefore:

[S]tyle is a question of trying to find the right words--the right word! And that's all one can really say, except that you walk up and down the room and think, "Now what is it? I don't mean that he was "acquisitive," I mean that he was . . . "--or something like that; and then I walk up and down or smoke a cigarette and think, "Now let me see, what was it, or what did she look like?"--that sort of thing. The attempt to get it. That's what I mean by style. The one word, the one description, which is best.

Asked whether he was influenced by reading other diarists, he replied:

I sometimes pick up diaries by people who are completely forgotten--obscure characters--they rather fascinate me. Not because of their literary quality, but because they're odd, immediate, unstudied things. I found an old diary, by . . . it doesn't matter . . . she was an American. In the 1840's she went to Venice, and . . . she met an old Italian woman, and Byron had used a house where this old woman was a char and she said, and it's recorded in this diary, "I can still hear the sound of his club foot, dragging on the marble floor as he came into the house"; this sort of detail. Now that, to my mind, is exactly the sort of thing, in my diary, that I'm trying to get.<sup>32</sup>

That he did indeed "get" it can be seen in this realistic description, noted March 20, 1952:

Spring in Ottawa is not a season but one vast mopping-up operation. . . . The Parliament Buildings, like the Ark, ride high above the surrounding slush and puddle. . . . The melting ice discloses an old overshoe, or a French safe, buried throughout the winter under the snow--our Ottawa version of the spring crocus.<sup>33</sup>

and also in this flight of fancy, written after touring an ancient castle in Germany:

October 7, 1956

The horrid life lived in that castle by those medieval troglodytes in armour; the small, dank, dark, slit-eyed rooms into which they crowded! The Ritterhall was full of armoured figures and one imagined the echo of the brutish laughter of these sinister iron robots who, once unarmoured, must have thronged around the fireplace roasting an ox or a disobedient serf. It was a giant's lair from a frightening fairy tale, a place for tortures, with dungeons deep in the rock.<sup>34</sup>

Ritchie is also adept at pithy descriptions of people, as in:

February 11, 1963

Today we lunched with Mr. and Mrs. Phillips of the Phillips Gallery. . . . He is a bald, rather tired millionaire, with a wedge-shaped head. Mrs. Phillips is a painter and a gallery politician. Her face is worn, not by wind and weather but by exposure to masterpieces.<sup>35</sup>

and:

November 24, 1969

Lunched with a group of super-rich oil men at the Dorchester, organized by Roy Thomson, who said it did him good to hear talk which seldom got below the level of a billion dollars. I found the conversation fascinating, though sometimes incomprehensible. Plainly I had been invited as a social or symbolic gesture--I came with the flowers, the smoked salmon, and the wine, to show that the old pirate knew the amenities.<sup>36</sup>

As for the influence of "prevailing conventions of style," it is possible that prolonged acquaintance with diplomatic documents made Ritchie veer towards a witty and entertaining tone in his diary. In the two later diaries, his ability to describe an amusing incident suggests he is transferring to paper the raconteurial skills which he has honed at the diplomatic dinner table. The "Red Riding Hood" anecdote quoted earlier is a typical example. Though Ritchie's style may be somewhat affected by his reading, he reads so widely that specific influences are impossible to pick out. In any case, the overall impression is very strongly that of Ritchie's own voice, which,

though always unmistakable, grows increasingly sophisticated as he "Becomes." Compare, for example, the first two excerpts quoted below with the two that follow:

August 9 [1925]

Working with me is a man from the Hebrides. . . . He is deaf and dumb and I pass the time by telling him all the secrets of my soul and body as they are safe with him.<sup>37</sup>

30 April, 1945

Miss Smithson, my secretary, says that agencies--the hotel authorities? or F.B.I.--have put up a small photograph of me in the women's washroom with printed underneath, "Avoid contact with the above person who is suffering from a contagious disease." This will cramp my style in personal and diplomatic contacts.<sup>38</sup>

September 16, 1956

I shook hands with the manager of the hotel responsible for the catering and said, "Good evening, Your Excellency," mistaking him for one of my obscurer colleagues. He looked profoundly gratified.<sup>39</sup>

March 12, 1968

Once, at a reception in Ottawa, I encountered an ex-butler from one of our embassies, now--with his wife--catering for parties there. An old Cockney he was. He greeted me with the remark, "I just said to my wife when I saw you: "My God, how Mr. Ritchie's aged; my God, how he has aged!" I tried to indicate my lack of interest in this train of thought, but he went on repeating it with intense conviction.<sup>40</sup>

Though all four excerpts exhibit the same droll humour, the tone of the two "Becoming" entries seems deliberately ingenuous. In contrast, the tone of the two "Become" entries is confidently urbane. Taken together, the four excerpts illustrate the passage of a human personality from adolescence to late middle age; though their tone alters as the writer increases in sophistication, the "imprint" of his individual personality remains distinctive and recognizable throughout.

"I think it's a question of a voice, coming through," said Ritchie in 1986. He was attempting to answer the question "What style(s) influenced you?" He then added:

I suppose all the things that I read influenced me, and it's very personal; what you put in the diary are the things that you see and notice. Eighty per cent of the other things that are going on around you, you don't notice. And then of course the diaries, when they come into the political world, it's a different matter.<sup>41</sup>

As that "political world" looms larger in the diarist's life, more space is devoted to it, and more entries are couched in the solemn tones of the mature professional diplomat. Never, however, does Ritchie neglect the personal side of his "double life." And the fact that the diary continues to receive a variety of impressions, from frivolous to weighty and from factual to abstract, shows that its writer is influenced by "prevailing conventions of style" only when they happen to suit his purpose. That purpose, which does not change from the moment it is first declared at the tender age of eighteen, is to be "entirely truthful," in the very best way that he can.



## Chapter Four

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Robert A. Fothergill, Private Chronicles: A Study of English Diaries (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974), p. 96. Subsequent references to this volume appear in parentheses following the quotation.

<sup>2</sup>Charles Ritchie, Storm Signals: More Undiplomatic Diaries, 1962-1971 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1983), pp. 115-6.

<sup>3</sup>Elizabeth Bowen, The Heat of the Day (London: Reprint Society by arrangement with Jonathan Cape, 1950), pp. 92-3. When this passage was quoted to Ritchie during a personal interview in 1986, he recalled having actually used these words himself, in conversation with the novelist.

<sup>4</sup>Charles Ritchie, The Siren Years: A Canadian Diplomat Abroad, 1937-1945 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974), p. 14.

<sup>5</sup>Charles Ritchie, Diplomatic Passport: More Undiplomatic Diaries, 1946-1962 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1981), p. 179.

<sup>6</sup>Ritchie, The Siren Years, p. 27.

<sup>7</sup>Ritchie, The Siren Years, pp. 108-9.

<sup>8</sup>Ritchie, Diplomatic Passport, p. 164.

<sup>9</sup>Ritchie, Storm Signals, p. 166.

<sup>10</sup>Ritchie, The Siren Years, pp. 14-15.

<sup>11</sup>Ritchie, Diplomatic Passport, p. 89.

<sup>12</sup>Ritchie, Diplomatic Passport, p. 67.

<sup>13</sup>Ritchie, Storm Signals, p. 125. Interestingly, when asked in 1986 whether he had recognized "kindred spirits" among other diarists in his youth, Ritchie replied, "I don't know that I read very many diaries in my youth--Pepys, of course everyone read Pepys, but he never appealed to me, and he never worked on my imagination. He can be quite boring from time to time, too." (Personal Interview)

<sup>14</sup>Ritchie, Diplomatic Passport, pp. 81-2.

<sup>15</sup>Ritchie, Storm Signals, p. 156.

- <sup>16</sup>Ritchie, Storm Signals, pp. 79-84.
- <sup>17</sup>Ritchie, Storm Signals, pp. 109-110.
- <sup>18</sup>Ritchie, Storm Signals, pp. 19, 13, 46.
- <sup>19</sup>Ritchie, Diplomatic Passport, p. 17.
- <sup>20</sup>Ritchie, Diplomatic Passport, p. 56.
- <sup>21</sup>Charles Ritchie, An Appetite for Life: The Education of a Young Diarist, 1924-1927 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1977), p. 113, 117.
- <sup>22</sup>See, for example, An Appetite for Life, p. 128.
- <sup>23</sup>Ritchie, Storm Signals, p. 141.
- <sup>24</sup>Ritchie, Diplomatic Passport, p. 110.
- <sup>25</sup>Ritchie, An Appetite for Life, p. 4.
- <sup>26</sup>This entry, from Storm Signals (p. 141), is quoted on the preceding page.
- <sup>27</sup>Ritchie, Storm Signals, p. 2.
- <sup>28</sup>Ritchie, Storm Signals, pp. 160-1.
- <sup>29</sup>Ritchie, Storm Signals, p. 133.
- <sup>30</sup>Ritchie, Diplomatic Passport, p. 170.
- <sup>31</sup>Ritchie, Diplomatic Passport, p. 176.
- <sup>32</sup>Personal Interview with Charles Ritchie, 3 June 1986.
- <sup>33</sup>Ritchie, Diplomatic Passport, pp. 51-2.
- <sup>34</sup>Ritchie, Diplomatic Passport, p. 115.
- <sup>35</sup>Ritchie, Storm Signals, p. 35.
- <sup>36</sup>Ritchie, Storm Signals, p. 136.
- <sup>37</sup>Ritchie, An Appetite for Life, p. 88.
- <sup>38</sup>Ritchie, The Siren Years, p. 190.
- <sup>39</sup>Ritchie, Diplomatic Passport, p. 155.

<sup>40</sup>Ritchie, Storm Signals, p. 101.

<sup>41</sup>Personal Interview.

## Chapter Five

## Charles Ritchie: Serial Autobiographer

At the commencement of this study, it was noted that the significant difference between diarist and autobiographer is the difference in their perspectives. As Roy Pascal has explained:

The . . . [autobiography] . . . is a review of a life from a particular moment in time, while the diary, however reflective it may be, moves through a series of moments in time. The diarist notes down what, at that moment, seems of importance to him; its ultimate, long-range significance cannot be assessed.<sup>1</sup>

Robert A. Fothergill is quick to point out that there are other differences between the two forms as well.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, he believes that

. . . certain diaries . . . by virtue of their authors' conception and practice, and the character of the written documents--their texture and the shape of their "authorized" version--are best regarded as a synthesis of the two types. (152)

To describe the result of this synthesis, Fothergill coins the term "serial autobiography." This is not "necessarily the ideal by which all diary writing may be judged," he adds, but rather "an organizing conception within which the salient features of diaries of a particular and well-developed type may be related and compared." (152-3)

What, then, are the "salient features" of the serial autobiography? First, according to Fothergill, is that unlike a good many diaries, it "cover[s] fairly continuously a good number of the significant years of the writer's life." Second, at some point in the diary, either from the outset or beginning at a later date, there

exists "an autobiographical consciousness on the part of the writer." This Fothergill defines as "the sense that one is living a Life, that an organic story links one's days together and makes them significant and interesting." (153) Third, the diarist-autobiographer "sets a standard for himself" which can be seen in "certain formal characteristics" such as concern with telling a coherent and interesting life story that manages to be both comprehensive and selective, and concern with projection of self, so that the resulting "book" is "more than a mere narrative of events." (153-4)

As examples of serial autobiographies, Fothergill cites The Diary of Benjamin Haydon (1808-1846), and describes Haydon's view of his life story as "the melodrama which results from the impact upon the world of a Herculean hero"; Kilvert's Diary (1870-79), which is "attentively and lovingly written, embodying a deeply implanted literary conception of the texture and value of his experience"; Barbellion's Journal of a Disappointed Man (1903-17), in which the diarist tells his "bitterly tragic" life story with "heroic truthfulness"; The Diary of Ivy Jacquier (1907-26), which contains "the ambiance [sic] of time remembered" and views the author's life story as "archetypal--typical of her generation and typical perhaps of a pattern discernible in the experience of women generally," and The Diary of Anais Nin (1931-47, Vols. I to IV), which records the author's "search for a viable orientation to life," which "[a]s rendered by the diary has the character of an archetypal quest." (155-190)

When one seeks to determine whether the diary of Charles Ritchie belongs in this august company, it is immediately apparent that it qualifies for membership on the first count; in spanning his life from adolescence to retirement, Ritchie's published diaries (1924-1971) extend over a longer period of significance than do any of the serial autobiographies studied by Fothergill. Second, despite Ritchie's belief that he was not engaged in writing his autobiography, his diaries reveal many of the qualities which Fothergill finds in the "autobiographical consciousness" of others. Finally, there is no doubt that as a diarist, Charles Ritchie sets very high standards for himself. He strives for no less than the best writing of which he is capable, on whatever subject seems sufficiently interesting to justify the effort. That subject is as likely to be himself as the events to which he is witness, for the self which Ritchie projects in his diary is a vital complement to the self which he projects in real life; together, the two selves comprise the whole man. Reading the diary, one senses that preparing it for publication filled a greater need than finding a worthy project for retirement: by publishing the diary, Ritchie was finally able to show his true face to the world. For a man who as a diarist felt compelled to be "entirely truthful," this must have been particularly gratifying. Furthermore, in deciding to publish the truth about his inner life, Ritchie publicly vindicated his belief in its importance. Publishing the diary was not only a courageous act; it was also a consciously autobiographical one.

There can be no question that in editing and publishing the four volumes of his diary Charles Ritchie recognized he was committing an "autobiographical act." However, this recognition may have come about by degrees. With a combination of the practicality and modesty that are so typical of the diarist, Ritchie began his voyage of self-exposure by publishing The Siren Years first. His reason for this--which his publishers surely shared--is apparent in the book's contents: what better way of introducing an unknown diarist to the public than to begin with his "siren years" in wartime Britain, amid the glittering constellation of his eminent friends?<sup>3</sup>

When The Siren Years was so well received (it won the Governor-General's Award for non-fiction for 1974), a second volume must surely follow. It is at this point that Ritchie's autobiographical intent becomes absolutely clear, even to himself:

After the appearance of my book The Siren Years . . . I intended to follow it up with the records of the next decade. . . . While pulling notebooks at random from the stacks, I happened to open one much earlier in date than those I was looking for. . . .

I began to read. . . . As I did so, an idea struck me. Why not--instead of plodding on with my middle-aged diaries--go back to the youthful ones? . . . I could not resist giving . . . [the youthful diarist] . . . a chance. It seemed callous to leave him to rot in the cellar when he was plainly dying to get out and tell all.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, apparently by accident, Ritchie's attitude to the diary underwent a profound change. From viewing it as mere "records" of the past, containing "some measure of historical interest,"<sup>5</sup> he began to perceive it as the voice of the diarist himself. Though his literary judgement informed him that it was a voice worth hearing, his essential

modesty made him conclude his "Foreword" to An Appetite for Life with these words:

It is with some trepidation that I introduce my earlier self to the reader in the hope that his company may prove enlivening. For with all his faults and absurdities, he had a great appetite for life, and not least for the comedy of life.<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this incredible-but-true series of events is Ritchie's evident respect for his earlier self. Though tempted to revise him for publication, Ritchie as editor did not succumb:

I didn't rewrite, but . . . you know how an adolescent goes on, and I've telescoped it, and brought things together. . . . So that was sort of worked on, but it wasn't worked on in the sense that anything was imagined into it, or it was tarted up in the sense of changing the opinions or the dialogue.<sup>7</sup>

What Ritchie heard in the voice of that eighteen year-old diarist was precisely what Fothergill means by the phrase "autobiographical consciousness." What is "an appetite for life" but the determination "to live a Life"? And what is Ritchie's forty-seven year diary, but the "organic story" of that Life?

I was after Experience [writes Ritchie at fifty, recalling himself as a young man]. I lived in the private conviction that intense, strongly poetic, dramatic Experience lay in wait for me. I longed for a condition in which reality lived up to literature.<sup>8</sup>

Could it possibly follow, then, that this very literary young man, who knew himself to be a frustrated novelist, unconsciously hoped that by recording his destined-to-be-extraordinary Life in the diary, he could create literature after all? If this suggestion is true, it certainly helps explain Ritchie's compulsion to keep the diary, and to write it to the best of his ability.



There is no indication, anywhere in the diary, that Ritchie consciously acknowledged any such secret hope or, for that matter, had enough respect for the diary as a literary genre deliberately to act on it if he had.<sup>9</sup> Yet the fact remains that he kept the diary more or less faithfully all his life, he took pains to write it well, and he preserved it from loss and destruction through more changes in residence--and indeed, of country--than the average man would experience in several lifetimes. It is tempting to speculate that this extraordinary devotion to the diary may have stemmed, at least in part, from Ritchie's unacknowledged respect for it as a literary creation. Because his literary judgements of others are frequently very acute, it seems reasonable to suppose that in some part of his thinking he could be as acute on the value of his own work as well. If this is going too far, does not his devotion to the diary reveal Ritchie's deep attachment to it as the story of his life? And even more important, as the sole witness to that other half of himself?

As for the diaries themselves, "the sense that one is living a Life" is quite clearly conveyed from the beginning. In An Appetite for Life, the young diarist presents himself as a potential hero, impatiently awaiting his appointment with destiny:

Tomorrow is my nineteenth birthday. My life is slipping away so fast I shall be an old man before I have accomplished anything. This time next year I should be at Oxford. One chapter finished . . . another begun. I can't help seeing my life as a book and myself as a character in it.<sup>10</sup>

Note that although the young Ritchie modestly uses the word "character" instead of "hero," his writing occasionally reveals that he dwells in

an emotional climate in which a literary hero would feel quite at home.

At age eighteen, for example, he notes in An Appetite for Life:

Reading Swinburne's Mary Stuart all morning when I should have been preparing for my mathematics exam. Mother's favourites are Byron and Keats in poetry and Scott in prose, but Swinburne is my discovery. The colour and music carry me into an enchanted haze. I am reading Chastelard's Love for the Queen. It is the most sensuous poetry I have ever read. I am waiting for a girl on whom I shall hang Chastelard's passionate words and be ready to die for her. (34)

Two years later, he writes:

In the evening to a roulette party at Matza's. Once again I lost. My bad luck is something phenomenal. I tried to imitate an Austrian gambler I have read about who remained impassive as the luck went against him by digging his nails into the palms of his hands until they bled. (125)

Occasionally, an opportunity for heroism occurs in real life.

When it does, the young Ritchie is prepared to seize it, as the diarist describes with gusto:

March 16 [1925]

. . . I had decided last week that I would intervene in the college debate on the future of India despite the fact that I know nothing whatsoever about India, but I could not know any less than that stupid dolt Anderson who has been holding the floor on the subject. I felt very nervous beforehand and went over my speech walking up and down in my bedroom about a hundred times. Then I tore up my notes and threw them in the wastepaper basket as I despise reading a speech from notes. All the way to King's along the railway cutting I was sweating, really sweating, with the fear that I was going to make a fool of myself, but the moment I got to my feet my self-consciousness vanished. I felt as though I were on the stage, not myself but another person, quite at my ease. In my speech I argued that India should remain under British rule, that it would be worse off free than it is now. I chose this line because Anderson was bleating about freedom. Professor Walker said afterwards that he disagreed with everything I said but that it was an exceptional speech and that I had a great future before me. (31)

One concludes from this that the young diarist's conviction that

"Experience" awaits him is not unfounded.

In The Siren Years the diarist, now in his thirties, has found the "Experience" which he craved as a youth--in fact, for a Canadian abroad he is astonishingly successful, if one is to judge from this very English assessment by Elizabeth Bowen's biographer:

No one's idea of a Canadian, Charles was one of those North Americans to whom background, education, travel and elegant physical type give all the patina that the European upper middle class liked to claim as its own: learning easily worn, stylishness, finesse, savoir-vivre. . . . Charles was gregarious and he had charm; in his London posting he made quantities of friends, dined out and weekended continuously, and generally had a good time.<sup>11</sup>

At times during this period, the diary reads like a Rake's Progress ("If that bloody ballerina does not come across tomorrow I am through with her"<sup>12</sup>); at others it records the sensations of an aesthete:

12 June 1941

Crossing the park I took a minute or two off and sat in a deck-chair beneath two May trees of varying hues of pink--under a parasol of blossom. I thought that I would like to spend the day drifting through the parks without object and without personality, watching the lovers, looking at ducks and flowers, listening to the bands . . . just drifting--as if into a sunny impressionist picture where everything swims vaguely in light and colour. (109)

To the diarist of The Siren Years, exploring the world of "Experience" would be unthinkable without keeping a record of his discoveries. What is recorded here is important because it preserves a part of his life story that has been eagerly anticipated, and that he may one day want to look back on, as a remembrance of things past. It is a very personal story, written by a man who knows that life is precious, and that his own perceptions are unique. As writer-editor Lovat Dickson observes, in a review of The Siren Years which appeared in the Canadian Historical Review:

All diarists--and here is plainly a gifted one--are really autobiographers in disguise. What . . . [The Siren Years] . . . is about is what the younger Charles Ritchie thought of life, of the characters he met and the events he observed. It [also] confesses his dedication and long apprenticeship to writing.<sup>13</sup>

Also in this volume, the diarist begins seriously to address the question that is to become the unspoken theme of the diary: How best to live one's life? On holiday in Nova Scotia in October 1944, he begins his personal stock-taking by re-reading his early diaries, and notes: "I am glad to have [them]. . . . The diary describes a life which I had only remembered in a blurred way." (178) Two weeks later, back in London, he writes:

I reflected coming over on the plane on how obsessed I have been all my life by my determination to forgo nothing. How gently but ruthlessly I have insisted on my pattern at the expense of other people's feelings and my own. Has it all been downright silly? Am I like the man in Henry James's story The Beast in the Jungle who found in the end that it was his singular fate to be the man to whom nothing happened? (178-9)

Having sought "Experience," and having found it, the diarist is now beginning to wonder what he might have missed while so "obsessed by [his] determination to forgo nothing."

Then, in September of 1945, he decides to take charge of his life. Until now the diary has been a story of youthful ambitions gradually fulfilled. As a conventional work of art, it might have ended with their fulfillment. As the story of a life, however, it must continue--but in which direction? The final entry in The Siren Years records the diarist's decision:

23 September 1945. Ottawa.  
I have come up against a blank wall. There is nothing to do but turn around and face things. I feel myself hardening. I will not be one of life's casualties, nor just a sympathetic character.

Middle-age is the time when one is supposed to concentrate on the world's game. I am bloody well going to have my fling at it. (209)

Diplomatic Passport (1946-1962) is the story of a man who has determined how best to live a life. He has a distinguished career, beginning as advisor to the Canadian Delegation to the Paris Peace Conference of 1946 and continuing on to the positions of Counsellor at the Canadian Embassy in Paris (1947-49); Assistant, Deputy and Acting Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs in Ottawa (1950-54); Canadian Ambassador to Bonn (1954-57), and Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations (1958-62), which included a term as President of the Security Council. He has a happy marriage. And he has the diary, whose role in his life seems as necessary as ever:

There was the risk that one's sympathies and amusements with people, one's reaction to the visible world about one, would evaporate, leaving one A Dedicated Civil Servant. The diaries were an escape from this admirable but arid fate. They shut out politics and the office, in an attempt to rediscover an appetite for life.<sup>14</sup>

None of this is enough to make Ritchie smug, however:

February 4, 1956

Have been staying with Norman and Jetty Robertson in London, where he is now High Commissioner. I measure myself against Norman and I know that he is a wiser and better man than I am. I came away even fonder of him than I was before and I tremble to think what he would make of this diary. "Burn it," he would say, and I have little doubt that he is right. (105-6)

Yet partly because of the diary, Ritchie is in full control of his life. Having one's past contained between covers enables one to see its pattern more clearly; knowing one's future will be recorded persuades one to make the better choices. For example, stationed in

Ottawa in October 1953, he writes:

I feel a break in routine. I am once again on the edge of one of those trans-Atlantic migrations which have been the pattern of my life. I am going back to Europe, away from the mindless beauty of these woods and lakes, away from the daily reassurance of making good in a community where there is no attractive way of going to the bad. One fact about Ottawa has from the first been clear--that for me there is only one temptation here, whisky. How often have I vowed that whatever else this place does to me it is not going to make me into a drunk. (55)

Even the obsessive "determination to forgo nothing" has been successfully dealt with, as he reveals in a vivid description of his "rich" dreams, saying, "If I could tap the sources of dreams, no writer of this age could touch me. There is no doubt I dream like a genius." (179)

Also in this volume, Ritchie's "autobiographical consciousness" becomes more overt. Marriage to Sylvia has put this much-travelled Nova Scotian in closer touch with his roots; as a result, the diary begins to receive a variety of entries with an autobiographical slant:

April 6, 1954--Amherst, Nova Scotia  
My mother's family came from here. The only traces left of them are the stained-glass windows (ordered out from England) in the little Anglican church, and the graves on the windy marsh side. . . . No one in Amherst even remembers the Stewart name now, yet the old man aspired to Found a Family only a hundred years ago and we still live on what is left of his money. We are children and grandchildren of the small town, and have never quite got free of its influence. Those dire words, "What will the neighbours say?" still echo in the ears on a hung-over morning.<sup>15</sup>

The self which Ritchie presents in this portion of the diary is a well-adjusted and charming man at the peak of his powers. Instead of forever seeking after "Experience," he is prepared to make the most of what comes his way. Armed with intelligence, love and irony, he need

fear nothing but the past. ("I can't think why I am haunted by that bloody boarding school." [98]) Yet even Ritchie's unhappy memories have their positive function, for they are a constant reminder that the best revenge is living (and writing) well.

His active interest in the question of how best to live a life is reflected in several diary entries from this period, from the romantic extreme of:

May 9, 1947 [in Paris]  
 Reading Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet--one could get caught in Shakespeare and spend one's whole life (and it would not be long enough) in that world of clues and whispers, glorious vistas, sweet songs and perfumes, breath-taking glooms--in that world so monstrously larger than life. (25)

to the realistic necessity of:

June 8, 1954 [in Cologne]  
 Developing an anonymous public face which expresses only cautious benevolence, controlling the spasms of nervous exasperation or high spirits, getting into the groove, the ambassadorial groove. It is a game, like learning German. Whether it is a game worthy of a grown man I cannot say. (76)

On a more serious note, he gives advice to the young:

October 31, 1956--Halifax, Nova Scotia  
 I am to make a speech to--among others--the King's College students. . . . The speech itself is a respectable collection of second-hand ideas expressed in the usual cliches. As I walked across the old golf links . . . I thought of what I should be saying to these young men. "Don't be taken in by vain old buffers like me. Escape if you can from the terrifying conventionality of this atmosphere. Don't be trapped by fear or affection into conforming over anything that matters." (119)

and contemplates his own good fortune:

March 17, 1957 [in Cologne]  
 Went to the airport to meet Sylvia on her return from Canada. What my life would be without her I cannot imagine. . . I am a lucky man and I know it.<sup>16</sup>

Earlier, it was noted that Ritchie's presentation of himself as a modest man has been corroborated in print by Elizabeth Bowen. The following anecdote from Diplomatic Passport illustrates that Ritchie's presentation of himself as well adjusted and charming is also a case of accurate reporting:

June 21, 1948 [in Paris]

Not long ago I was sitting next to Diana [Cooper, wife of Duff Cooper, British Ambassador to Paris] at a lively luncheon party where the cross-fire of conversation was sizzling away. Twice--three times--I attempted to join the fray without success. Turning to Diana I said: "I cannot understand it. Am I invisible, or inaudible? I have so much to say and no one pays attention to me." She fixed me with her azure eyes. "Something," she said, "must be done about that." Something was--with Nancy Mitford acting as her lieutenant, Diana organized a Ritchie Week, a week of non-stop parties, dinners, even a ball in Ritchie honour. She roped in half Paris. . . . Old and new friends showered us with invitations. Whenever we appeared, a special anthem was played to signal our entrance . . . a clutch of coloured balloons inscribed "Ritchie Week" were let loose over Paris. . . . On the last night of the week, feeling like Cinderella at the end of the ball when she must return to obscurity, I said to Duff, "You don't think, do you, that now we have an embarras de Ritchies?" He politely demurred. (38-9)

In his preface to Storm Signals (1962-1971), Ritchie observes that "It is a peculiar book because it reflects the changing moods of the writer, ranging from gloom and nostalgia to exhilaration and amusement, written from day to day, sometimes from hour to hour."<sup>17</sup> This portion of the diary is indeed reflective, in both senses of the word, for not only does it mirror the writer's moods and selected happenings in his life, but also it is thoughtful and introspective to a greater degree than ever before. Storm Signals is the story of a man who finds himself growing old and whose reaction to this state of affairs ranges from resignation to dismay. After a visit to Ottawa during his tenure as Canadian Ambassador to Washington, he notes:



August 28, 1962

The Department of External Affairs is becoming more and more a branch office of a huge expanding bureaucracy. Our Foreign Service is becoming more and more like other Foreign Services. This is inevitable, but it does not suit me. I loved the old, small, ramshackle Department where eccentricity was tolerated and where everyone was a generalist who flew by the seat of his pants. (19)

In London, nearing retirement, he wryly contemplates the future:

March 16, 1969 [in London]

Two and a half more years, with luck, of living on a millionaire's income in a London mansion of the kind that disappeared from ordinary life thirty years ago, with five servants, a chauffeur and the biggest car in London, with whisky and cigarettes virtually free--and presto! down we go to a heavily taxed middle-class income; from invitations to Buckingham Palace and Chatsworth to the company of a few old friends, if any left after absence of years; from being surrounded by the young, who find it convenient to lodge here, to seeing only contemporaries; from a diversity of company to relative isolation; from influence and inside information to neither of either. On top of all this--old age, impotence, loss of hair and memory! (127-8)

There are worse problems than changes at work and in one's way of life, however. Growing old may also bring the loss of those one loves:

January 24, 1969

Went down in the train from Charing Cross to Hythe for the day. There was Elizabeth waiting at the Central Station, Folkestone. God! how will it be if I must outlive her. (124)

Thus advancing years mean advancing loss of control over the course of one's own life. In gloomier moments, the diarist even decides that his earlier sense of control was an illusion, and his sense of achievement a fraud:

October 16, 1968 [in London]

I have been rereading those diaries written when I was eighteen. . . . [H]ow powerfully, when I thought myself alone, was I the subject of influences and policies on the part of others; how little have I later achieved, except the damning diary. What has it all amounted to, these forty-five years since I wrote in my bedroom at The Bower as now I write in my bedroom here in London? My "career"--the work and interest--yes; the achievement I count for little. Only love in one form or another, social exhilaration,

solitary walks, and a few books, have left traces. Everything else has slipped between my fingers. (119)

There is, however, no remorse. And in lighter moments, the diarist is quite prepared to have some fun at the expense of those who presume to know how best to live a life:

June 2, 1962 [in Washington]  
 Encounter with a leading name-dropper. He began in top form, firing two governors general, the Leader of the Opposition, a French duchess, and John D. Rockefeller across my bows, and all but sinking me. Then he began to talk of the Art of Living. I told him that the words meant nothing to me. He admitted modestly that his own understanding of the Art went back to his aristocratic Viennese origins, but he thought I had mastered it, up to a point. "But no," I insisted, "I shall never understand the Art of Living." After three cocktails he rather relaxed and I found myself remembering that I had liked him when we were younger, perhaps before he had so completely mastered the Art of Living. (8-9)

Ritchie's "autobiographical consciousness" is increasingly apparent in Storm Signals. He fills in an important gap in the story of his life, describing his experiences as a teacher at Pickering College in Newmarket, Ontario in 1931. (54-8) He is concerned to record his impressions of significant men and events, such as the tensions between the Kennedy administration and the Diefenbaker government (1-2, 32-3) and the leadership style of the newly-elected Pierre Trudeau. (136-9) He discusses his forbears, as though aware that they have an important place in his "Life":

May 28, 1962  
 My grandmother, Eliza Almon, was a girl of eighteen in the year 1838 when she wrote her diary, which I have just been reading. Her life was outwardly narrow and funless. It was the inner life that absorbed her (7)

July 1, 1963--Washington  
 I believe that my two uncles, Harry and Charlie, one dead the year I was born, the other hardly known by me and dead when I was a child, have by their legends influenced me more than any living

man. There must be a medium to carry the current from the dead to the living, sometimes a living survivor, sometimes the written word. My mother was such a medium. The dead lived through her talk. Even their voices and gestures were in the room with you. (51)

He also tells amusing stories about himself, as though to preserve them.<sup>18</sup>

Especially interesting in both Diplomatic Passport and Storm Signals is the diarist's projection of himself as a would-be writer. Evidently, increasing age has brought no decrease in this lifelong, and still unsatisfied, ambition. During a posting to Ottawa from 1950-1954, he muses: "The subject I should like to write about is love between brother and sister, growing up together as children in an old house with their grandfather and a couple of aunts, his daughters. . ." (19) Seventeen years later, while Canadian High Commissioner in London, he writes, "[f]or some reason, when I woke up this morning I was thinking about butlers. I could write a book about "Butlers I Have Known."<sup>20</sup>

Throughout the four volumes, Charles Ritchie's standards, both as writer and as editor, remain consistently high. Although the two later diaries, and particularly Storm Signals, contain a greater proportion of political comment and observation, these passages sit side-by-side with notations on such thoroughly private subjects as the personalities of Ritchie's elderly aunts and the adventures of Popski, the Ritchies' mischievous puppy. Thus the balance of the diary, when considered as a whole, is not upset. It is likely, in fact, that Ritchie's original diary entries are as well balanced in this regard as

his edited ones, considering his conscious preference for "loved ones" over "any political allegiance."<sup>21</sup>

Fortunately for his readers, the principles of selection to which Ritchie adheres in life have had their effect on his diary. Although it appears very comprehensive, covering many and various aspects of its writer's life and thoughts, it is actually highly selective. Never does the diary give the impression of having been written as a nagging daily routine; what appears in print is there because it is superior in interest to what was left out, either by Ritchie-as-writer, rejecting unpromising subject matter, or by Ritchie-as-editor, omitting repetitive, possibly hurtful, or potentially "boring" entries.

It should be evident from the preceding remarks that the diary of Charles Ritchie can indeed be regarded as a serial autobiography. Yet perhaps the most telling proof is the fact that Ritchie decided to edit the diaries himself, and to publish the results during his lifetime. In this way he was able, not only to select and reject whatever material he wished, but also to tell the story of his life as he wanted it to be told.<sup>22</sup>

In his prefaces to each of the four published volumes, Ritchie reveals some of the concerns which he feels in his role as editor. In An Appetite for Life, he refers to "'culling'" and "telescoping" the adolescent's "spate of words." Certain scenes and episodes, "originally scattered in fragmentary form over a number of entries," were joined together, and some names were changed.<sup>23</sup> In The Siren

Years, he affirms he has not changed the material "save for occasional phrases which have been altered for the sake of clarity":

I resist any temptation to patronise or justify the writer. His faults, follies and errors of judgement show plainly enough. To paper them over would seem a smug betrayal of my younger self.<sup>24</sup>

In Diplomatic Passport, he hints at something closer to major surgery:

Some diaries are written with an eye to publication as a conscious contribution to history. My own were of the private kind. It is true that in my old age I went public, or partly public [emphasis added], but when I wrote them they were for my eyes only.<sup>25</sup>

In Storm Signals, after reaffirming his decision not to revise, he turns to the subject of excision:

It is a temptation to revise the record when one comes across opinions about people and events which have since proved to be wrong. That temptation has to be resisted. Also, one does not want to hurt the feelings of the living or cause distress to the friends and relatives of the dead. Yet if one irons out all pungency of comment the sanitized text becomes so bland as to be unreadable. The only real answer to the problem would be for the diarist to die before publication or for those mentioned in the diary to die before him--either seems an extreme solution.<sup>26</sup>

This explanation is so deliberately unspecific that one suspects it is the voice of the professional diplomat speaking. Asked, during an interview in 1986, to clarify his editing principles further, Ritchie replied that his two main considerations were the feelings of people still alive and his own feelings concerning certain details about himself. "I didn't want to put in any malicious gossip that I'd overheard [and] might have recorded," he explained, "[and] I didn't want to put in a lot of things which I thought were discreditable." He also revealed that any editing done by his publisher was largely limited to matters of judgement: "I would

say 'I want to drop that bit, because I think it's very boring.'  
 And the editor would say, 'Now that's the bit to keep in.'" Asked if he  
 had made any changes to the actual text, he replied:

Surprisingly little . . . in one case only that I can remember,  
 I transposed a scene, and I took the real character and gave  
 that character another name, as you would in a novel. And put  
 the thing in another setting, because it was a question of  
 identification. . . That was the only case in all the four  
 volumes, I know. It was only about five pages, and it wasn't an  
 invention; it was simply that I put it in a different room, so to  
 speak.<sup>27</sup>

Two pages from one of Ritchie's original notebooks are  
 reproduced in an Appendix to this study, together with the edited  
 version of the same material as it appeared in The Siren Years.  
 Comparison between the two versions of the entry for January 12, 1945  
 reveals that in his role as editor, Ritchie was concerned to reduce  
 repetitive references to drinking and to remove a derogatory reference  
 to "the Americans." A slighting remark concerning Hume Wrong was also  
 removed from the entry for February 3. It is worth noting that these  
 excisions, which were made prior to the publication of The Siren Years  
 in 1974, closely correspond to the "two main considerations" cited as  
 editing principles by Ritchie in 1986.<sup>28</sup>

In acting as his own editor, Charles Ritchie brings the diary  
 closer to the realm of autobiography than do any of the diarists whom  
 Fothergill discusses in Private Chronicles--including such diarists as  
 Barbellion and Jacquier, who also edited their own work. First,  
 Ritchie's diary not only covers the significant years of its writer's  
 life, it also spans an unusually lengthy period of forty-seven years.  
 Second, Ritchie's "autobiographical consciousness," while implicit in

the diary, becomes explicit as he proceeds to edit it himself. Third, in encompassing so many facets of its writer's life and thought, the diary tells a comprehensive yet selective story of interest to the general reader, the political scientist or historian, and the student of literature alike.

Furthermore, what makes Charles Ritchie's serial autobiography a particularly valuable contribution to the evolution of the diary as literature is his firm commitment, in his role as editor, to the integrity of his earlier self. Though Ritchie is prepared to excise material that may be hurtful to others or damaging to himself, he is not prepared to "revise opinions about people and events which have since proved to be wrong," or to "paper over" the faults and follies of his younger self in "smug betrayal."

Thus the serial autobiography of Charles Ritchie, though it resembles the art of pure autobiography in some obvious ways, also illustrates the unique nature and value of the diary genre. As Ritchie himself explains, at the tender age of eighteen, "I like a diary better than memoirs; it is less made up afterwards to favour the writer."<sup>29</sup>

## Chapter Five

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Roy Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Robert A. Fothergill, Private Chronicles: A Study of English Diaries (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974), p. 152. "Other differences" between the two forms as cited by Fothergill include "differences in intention, interpretive standpoint, significant shape and aesthetic design." Subsequent references to this volume appear in parentheses following the quotation.

<sup>3</sup>Ritchie's choice of title for this volume of his diary is interesting. On one level, "the siren years" denotes that period when the air raid sirens sounded night after night in wartime Britain. On another level, however, it connotes a time in which a serious young man was deflected from his proper course by the seductive charms of life and love among the glitterati.

<sup>4</sup>Charles Ritchie, An Appetite for Life: The Education of a Young Diarist, 1924-1927 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1977), p. ix.

<sup>5</sup>Ritchie, An Appetite for Life, p. ix.

<sup>6</sup>Ritchie, An Appetite for Life, p. x.

<sup>7</sup>Personal Interview with Charles Ritchie, 3 June 1986.

<sup>8</sup>Charles Ritchie, Diplomatic Passport: More Undiplomatic Diaries, 1946-1962 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1981), p. 128.

<sup>9</sup>Respect or no, his interest in the genre was very--perhaps even competitively?--keen. See the following, noted November 30, 1956: "Reading Beckford's diaries. They are very fascinating reading but any diary has a certain fascination for me, even the most trivial ones." (In Diplomatic Passport, p. 124.)

<sup>10</sup>Ritchie, An Appetite for Life, p. 101. Subsequent references to this volume appear in parentheses following the quotation.

<sup>11</sup>Victoria Glendinning, Elizabeth Bowen (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1985), p. 137.

<sup>12</sup>Charles Ritchie, The Siren Years: A Canadian Diplomat Abroad, 1937-1945 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974), p. 79. Subsequent references to this volume appear in parentheses following the quotation.



<sup>13</sup>Lovat Dickson, Rev. of The Siren Years, Canadian Historical Review LXII, No. 1 (March, 1975), 216.

<sup>14</sup>Ritchie, Diplomatic Passport, p. 44. Subsequent references to this volume appear in parentheses following the quotation.

<sup>15</sup>Ritchie, Diplomatic Passport, p. 71. Further examples of autobiographical entries may be found on pp. 93-4 and 101. Subsequent references to this volume appear in parentheses following the quotation.

<sup>16</sup>Ritchie, Diplomatic Passport, p. 130. See also p. 168, for Ritchie's comments on the life of his friend Billy Coster, and p. 190, for his perceptive assessment of Dag Hammarskjold. Subsequent references to this volume appear in parentheses following the quotation.

<sup>17</sup>Charles Ritchie, Storm Signals: More Undiplomatic Diaries, 1962-1971 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1983), p. x. Subsequent references to this volume appear in parentheses following the quotation.

<sup>18</sup>An example is the Incredible Women's Washroom Caper, in Storm Signals, pp. 20-21. Once again, Ritchie is presenting himself here as the sort of person to whom things happen.

<sup>19</sup>Ritchie, Diplomatic Passport, p. 47

<sup>20</sup>Ritchie, Storm Signals, p. 101.

<sup>21</sup>Ritchie, Storm Signals, pp. 1-2.

<sup>22</sup>Contemporary readers can be grateful for this decision. If Ritchie had chosen either to destroy the diaries or to lock them away for perhaps fifty years (after which time, presumably, they could no longer cause offense), we ourselves would be the losers. That the diaries might eventually have been edited by someone with possibly inferior literary judgement--and certainly inferior knowledge of the diarist's own literary priorities--may also have been a factor in Ritchie's decision to edit the diaries himself.

<sup>23</sup>Ritchie, An Appetite for Life, p. x.

<sup>24</sup>Ritchie, The Siren Years, p. 8.

<sup>25</sup>Ritchie, Diplomatic Passport, p. 1. Obviously, judicious cutting would have seemed necessary, in an "entirely truthful" private diary whose last entry was made less than twenty years before the editing process began.

<sup>26</sup>Ritchie, Storm Signals, p. ix.

<sup>27</sup>Personal Interview.

<sup>28</sup>Quite clearly, the diaries were edited by someone skilled in diplomacy. Also quite clearly, the unedited version should be preserved for possible publication, when a sufficiently diplomatic interval has elapsed. Ritchie's eye and ear are too sharp, his wit too keen and his viewpoint too informed, for suppression of his frankest remarks to remain justified forever.

<sup>29</sup>Ritchie, An Appetite for Life, p. 66.

## Chapter Six

## Sensibility, Time and Place

In Design and Truth in Autobiography, Roy Pascal pinpoints the unique contribution to literature which only the autobiography (and, he might have added, the diary) can make:

[T]he decisive achievement of the art of autobiography [is] to give us events that are symbolic of the personality as an entity unfolding not solely according to its own laws, but also in response to the world it lives in.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, any study of a serial autobiography such as the diary of Charles Ritchie must take into account not only the personality of the diarist and the means by which it is presented, but also the social environment in which the diarist lives. "Like the best literature," writes Fothergill, " . . . [the best diaries] . . . extend our realization of what being alive is like."<sup>2</sup>

The time and place in which a diarist happens to live will have a far-reaching effect on his personality. They will affect his writing style, his perception of himself and the world, and his subject matter. According to Fothergill, because any diary reflects, on an individual level, something of the character of its age, it may be described as a contribution to the "history of 'sensibility.'" (11)

Obviously, some such "contributions" are more valuable than others. The great diarists, states Fothergill, are "richly expressive of contemporary sensibility." (12) As examples he cites James Boswell, whose journals "register the experience by an individual psyche of the

turbulent co-existence of old and new valuations of self-hood during a period of transition," and Benjamin Haydon, who as the superlative Romantic diarist "habitually enacts in the presence of the reader states of emotional arousal which his pre-Romantic counterpart [such as Pepys] only describes." (160) By the nineteenth century, Fothergill continues, there is a "quality of 'literariness' common to virtually all diaries of any substance, from Francis Kilvert's to Queen Victoria's." This came to pass, he explains, because as imaginative writers began to probe their own emotions as "a primary resource" for the fashioning of creative literature, "that mode of writing whose substance has long been the personal life [namely, the diary] came to regard itself as literary, and to adopt literary conventions." (33) As for modern diarists such as Anais Nin and Virginia Woolf:

In cultivating an openness to the "loose, drifting material of life," they are not opening their pages to the price of hay or the doings of a neighbour's pig, but endeavouring to preserve the fluctuating quality of an individual's responsiveness to life. (52)

One can see a similar "openness to the 'loose, drifting material of life'" in the consciousness of Charles Ritchie, whose "responsiveness to life," particularly in the early diaries, certainly fluctuates. In Ritchie's case, however, the diary exhibits an awareness of the importance of discrimination that is absent in both Nin and Woolf. As Fothergill points out, the latter adopt

. . . what one might call an actively indiscriminate attitude to what goes into the book; they envisage, if they do not actually undertake, an editorial process that will bring the work to fruition, not eliminating contradictions and variety, but enhancing them and exposing their patterns. (52)

There is no question that Anais Nin in particular made a significant advance in the evolution of diary writing: "Thus far has the diary come--from the unconscious by-product of some other activity to the crucible of consciousness itself," declares Fothergill, who, writing in 1974, places Nin at the leading edge of the diary's evolution. (37) However, Nin's "actively indiscriminate" example is not one that many future diarists are likely to follow; in his Preface to The Diary of Anais Nin, editor Gunther Stuhlman notes that "the slim volumes of her youth had become, by 1965, a massive accumulation they now filled two five-drawer file cabinets in a Brooklyn bank vault."<sup>3</sup>

To the "history of 'sensibility,'" Anais Nin contributes an awakened awareness of the complexity of human personality. As Fothergill accurately declares:

By 1930 Freud and Proust and Lawrence and Joyce--to name only these--had made it a formidable task to say who you are and what you did today. By 1930 the diary that really counts must express in the complexity of its organization and texture a creative response to this challenge. One who ignores it, like Harold Nicolson, may very well write something entertaining, full of interest and personal truth, but cannot have any importance in the development of the genre. (37)

As the diary of Charles Ritchie demonstrates, it is indeed possible for the post-"Freud Proust Lawrence Joyce" diarist to express "complexity" and "creative response" without indulging in excessive navel-gazing. Ritchie's contribution to the "history of 'sensibility'" is his recognition that both the self, and the world in which it lives, have grown increasingly complex. His contribution to the evolution of the diary as literature is his

recognition that knowledge of this complexity need throw neither the man nor the diarist into confusion. Ritchie's solution was consciously to divide his self, between life and the diary. In this way (and without the aid of psychoanalysis, it should be pointed out), he was able both to satisfy conflicting worldly and creative ambitions and to write a coherent, always self-conscious but never self-absorbed, diary. In the age of information, Ritchie's strategy was to develop his powers of discrimination. The result was that the editing process began in real life, before it ever appeared in the diary. It can therefore be argued that his diary marks a further stage in the evolution of the history of diary-writing, for the self which Ritchie brings to flower in the diary possesses not only a high degree of literary ability but also the critical acumen needed to transform his "book of the self" from a mere "Life" into Art.<sup>4</sup>

Ritchie's superior achievement has been widely acknowledged by contemporary critics in both Canada and England. In his review of The Siren Years, Canadian critic Claude Bissell stated:

He challenges comparison with the best diarists in the language. Indeed I can think of none who excels him in grace of language and fertility of wit.<sup>5</sup>

Canadian reviewer John Bird also singled out Ritchie's writing ability for particular praise:

Anyone who knew him would have predicted that . . . [The Siren Years] . . . would be highly amusing and full of critical insight. What has surprised even his friends is the sheer excellence of Ritchie's writing, the sustained brilliance of his lean, uncluttered style. . . . This is a slim volume but not a slight book. Charles Ritchie is a master of English prose.<sup>6</sup>

Maclean's reviewer Barbara Amiel, discussing Diplomatic Passport, made this comment on Ritchie's contribution to Canadian letters:

If Canada had produced no other writer of note, Charles Ritchie the diarist, alone, could establish our literary presence.<sup>7</sup>

Impressive as these praises are, perhaps the most significant appraisal appeared in a review of An Appetite for Life written by Victoria Glendinning, in the year following publication of her biography of Elizabeth Bowen:

[I]f this selection from his very first diaries proves anything, it is that adolescent experience is without frontiers in either time or place. These diaries, with only superficial changes, could have been written by a boy today or a hundred years ago, and anywhere. "I have no character that I know of," he says, revealing his character with every word that he writes.<sup>8</sup>

As Glendinning suggests, in An Appetite for Life Ritchie achieves a quality of timelessness that would not be surprising in good fiction but that is virtually foreign to the autobiographical genre. By doing so, and by exhibiting such literary "brilliance" in the succeeding volumes, he has elevated the standards of diary-writing to new and demanding heights. Earlier, it was noted that Fothergill, paraphrasing Oscar Wilde, says of Boswell and Anais Nin: " they put their talent into various undertakings, and their genius into recording their lives. They are unsurpassed because they are the only ones to treat diary-writing as truly their vocation." (p. 12) After Boswell, Nin, and now Charles Ritchie, who would deny that the diary must be regarded as a full-fledged form of literature?

The enthusiasm with which contemporary critics greeted Ritchie's diaries was not inspired by their literary merit alone.

Another strong appeal is the charm of Ritchie's personality, which the many excerpts previously quoted in this study have revealed. In fact, it is probably correct to say that a diary written by an attractive personality will grip the reader in a way that not even the best imaginative literature can equal. The opportunity to share the true and private thoughts of another person is the principal attraction which any diary holds for its readers, and this power of attraction should not be undervalued merely because other forms of literature cannot offer an identical reading experience. Yet the diary of Charles Ritchie has an additional strong appeal, one which its writer is particularly well suited to make: it is not only the story of an unusual life, it is also a revealing portrait of the unusually large and complex world in which that life was lived.

For a private diarist, Charles Ritchie was an extraordinarily well-informed eyewitness to a good many of the major public events that took place during his working career. He frequently mingled with the great, from Greta Garbo to Queen Elizabeth II. As a result, his diary contains scores of immensely readable notations such as the following, noted after dining at London's Conservative Club in February, 1942:

"Gossip about Stalin [he] hates bores but takes a great interest in the Windsor-Simpson story. He cannot understand why Mrs. Simpson was not liquidated,"<sup>9</sup> and this brief extract, taken from a much longer--but equally rivetting--narrative:

December 29, 1963

The three of us looked out again at the terrace--the two figures were still there and the drama seemed to be approaching a climax of physical violence. Mike [Pearson], only half seated, half leaning



on the terrace balustrade, was now completely silent. The President [L. B. Johnson] strode up to him and seized him by the lapel of his coat, at the same time raising his other arm to the heavens. .<sup>10</sup>

Such "inside" comments have a very strong appeal for contemporary readers. More valuable in the long run, however, are those entries which reveal the diarist as a man of his time and place.

Ritchie's awareness that he is a witness to history begins with The Siren Years (1939-45). Newly posted to London after a year and a half in Washington, he notes:

The war feeling is swelling. I believe it would sweep aside any compromise with Germany if the Government at the twelfth hour could secure one. . . . No one who has not felt this war-feeling inside him can know how it shakes the foundations and lets loose hate, generosity, lust, fear, courage, love--all the bag of human tricks. Some thought they had been analysed away, but it was just that the right button had not been pressed.<sup>11</sup>

After seeing "a typical American comedy film," he observes the contrast between the U. S. and England as the war begins:

There is a country thirty-eight hours away by Clipper where it is still important that women should be smart and attractive[,] where the most irreverent wisecracks are permitted, where people are still trying to get rich, where individual happiness is still an aim. The selfish, free world of America seems electric with vitality and with hope compared to this scene of grey submission. (46)

By April of 1940 he has decided that the war is the end of the old order:

Went to the House of Commons to the last day of the great debate on the conduct of the war. There they sat on the front bench . the old-fashioned, solid, upper middle-class Englishmen, methodical, respectable, immovable men who cannot be hurried or bullied, shrewd in short-term bargaining or political manipulation, but with no understanding of this age--of its despair, its violence and its gropings, blinkered in solid comfort, shut off from poverty and risk. Their confidence comes from their certainties. They are

the old England. When Chamberlain goes, that goes and it will not return. (51)

"Our standards are being overturned," he writes, in June 1940:

What is brought home to me is my existence as a member of a community in a way that I never dreamed of before. I rather fancied myself as a cosmopolitan who laughed at blimpish patriotism. Now I subscribe to all the old cries--"My country right or wrong," I could have my room plastered with these cracker mottoes which have now become for me eternal truths. Meanwhile we are all waiting, almost longing for these bombs. . . . This must be the mentality of the civilians behind the lines. The soldiers do not swell the chorus, nor have I heard any women express a pious hope for a bombing raid. The soldiers and the women must be right. (56)

A few days later, he adds: "The sense of the dissolution of civilised society is overpowering." (60) The following year, he notes: "These high explosions and incendiaries are like the falling stars and blazing comets--noted of old as foretelling great changes in the affairs of man." (93) The effect of Hitler is perceptively observed as well:

27 February 1941

[T]he biggest influence on all our lives at present is Hitler. . . . [H]is phrases have got under our skins, affected our language, made it impossible to think without his shadow falling across our thoughts. . . . [N]ever has one man so dominated the imagination of the world. Even if the Nazis went on his death would be release from an evil spell. He is the incarnation of our own sense of guilt. When he attacks our civilisation we find him saying things that we have thought or said. In the "burrows of the nightmare" such a figure is born, for as in a nightmare the thing that pursues us seems to have an uncanny and terrifying knowledge of our weakness. We spawned this horror; he is the byproduct of our civilisation; he is all the hatred, the envy, the guile which is in us--a surrealist figure sprung out of the depths of our own subconscious.<sup>12</sup>

Being Ritchie, he is increasingly driven to take refuge in cultural pursuits. In September 1940, he attends a "lunch-time" performance of Les Sylphides and notes: "Aesthetic standards are the only ones that stand up in these times. In this world there is

still an escape - not away from reality, but back to reality." (67)

Ten days after the attack on Pearl Harbour, he reads Peter Quennell's Byron in Italy and arrives at this conclusion: " what puny creatures we all are beside the Great Originals. Hamlet and Byron--the modern world is unthinkable without them." (129)

These comments from The Siren Years are valuable because they reveal the psychological effects of war; as an observer of his time, Ritchie is an honest reporter with the perceptive sensibilities of a novelist. The effect on the diary is a striking richness of texture.

In Diplomatic Passport, his sense that he is witnessing the breakdown of western civilization has intensified. In August 1946, while attending the Paris Peace Conference, he muses:

Fighting the Germans brutalized our methods of warfare to meet theirs; the struggle for power with the U.S.S.R. will brutalize our methods more and more. They do not believe in our morality for a moment. They think it clever hypocrisy. . . . Yet . . . [the narrow] . . . difference [between the Russians and ourselves] only divides us from the jungle world they inhabit. And the difference we must stick to--we must think it a strength, otherwise we shall be too much tempted to throw it over. . . . Every act of hypocrisy in which our governments indulge weakens our own faith in that difference.<sup>13</sup>

Six years later, during a posting in Ottawa, he writes:

From the world into which I was born, cruelty, violence, and coarseness were altogether excluded. Pain, and even discomfort, were fended off wherever possible. Apprehensions of illness were always in the air, perhaps because illness seemed the only enemy likely to penetrate the defences of my home. Security was--or seemed--complete in those days before 1914 as it has never seemed since. (51)

Three years later, by now Canada's Ambassador to Bonn, he makes this comment:

The possibility of nuclear warfare looms over all hopes. It looks as though this unhappy generation will have to pay an enormous overdue bill for all the follies and sins of the human race, and by comparison every previous generation, whatever its fate, may have been lucky not to be born in the twentieth century. (98)

Unwelcome changes are taking place at the more immediate level as well, whether on the social scene:

May 8, 1947 [in Paris]

The Poles invite us to the magnificent Hotel de la Rochefoucauld which is now their Embassy. . . . These cocktail parties and official receptions where dull and tired officials are crowded with tiresome women into brilliant rooms made for leisure, for conversation, for the mannered comedy of intrigue! Clumsy attempts of the state robots to be gay! (24)

or at work:

May 21, 1951 [in Ottawa]

It is not the work in the Department that I dislike. . . . It is the "surround" that goes with it. There is the underlying assumption that anyone who is not overworked, underpaid, eye-strained, joy-starved--in fact, not a senior civil servant--is frivolous or materialistic, that these are the hallmarks of a higher calling, the stigmata of the faithful. "Poor so-and-so, how tired he looks, how overworked," we murmur in tones in which respect mingles with compassion. Why respect? Why not contempt? That a man should so mismanage his life as to be totally immersed in office work is lamentable. . . . A civilized, curious, pleasure- and thought-loving man, reduced to a dreary, weary automaton. What is there to respect in that painful spectacle? (46-7)

In Storm Signals, on the other hand, after over twenty years of peace the diarist sees grounds for hope:

[T]he notion that England was a "sick society" was a superficial judgement. The country was indeed suffering from social and economic ailments. . . . But the disease was to spread to other industrialized nations, including our own. Throughout the stresses and strains of these years the underlying strength of British character and British institutions remained intact. The English themselves were--as they had always been--kindly, ironic, and stoical. Britain remained one of the most civilized countries in the world, if civilization is to be judged by standards of tolerance and humanity.<sup>14</sup>

One of the last entries in this volume includes a discerning prescription for the future:

December 11, 1969

[T]he great task that faces our political leaders is to humanize the computer age, to give back to people a sense of connection with the growing scale and impersonality of modern technology. . . .

[T]his question of the dehumanization of our life and environment . . . is really behind so many of the protest movements of our times.<sup>15</sup>

Ritchie's many observations on the character of his age form an additional layer of meaning in the diary, for they reach far beyond the routine eyewitness report. Discussing Diplomatic Passport and Storm Signals, reviewer John English states, " these diaries are a monument to the perceptions of a diplomat."<sup>16</sup> This is certainly true; it is also true, moreover, that the entire diary is a monument to its writer's awareness of the necessity for discrimination. Surrounded by information, much of it new and alarming, Ritchie's response is to sift through it in search of "the needle in the bundle of hay." Whether as an eighteen year-old youth, searching through his day's experiences for details worth recording, or as a sixty-three year-old diplomat, pointing out "to humanize the computer age" as "the great task that faces our political leaders," Ritchie consistently turns his mind to what the technocrat might describe as the analysis and interpretation of data. In this he reflects our modern realization that man must learn to understand his world in a hurry if he hopes to survive.

Thus the "history of 'sensibility'," as mirrored by the diary, has progressed from an awareness of the complexity of self, as manifested in the diary of Anais Nin, to an awareness of the complexity

of both the self and the world in which it lives, as manifested in the diary of Charles Ritchie. Ritchie is able to achieve so much because like Boswell, he too is a transitional figure. Fully at ease in the old world of gracious living, he is learning to adapt with good grace to the demands of the new order. He adapts so well, in fact, that some of his observations have the ring of prophecy. On June 19, 1948 for example, he writes:

[T]his is a conspiratorial age. Power is running new channels. This is still only true of half the world, but will that half corrupt the other? Is this one of the clues to what is going on around us? Where there is power there is also conspiracy? Perhaps this has been true in the most respectable parliamentary democracies, but there are conspiracies and conspiracies. What faces us now is something secret, violent, and fanatical, calling on all the excessive will--the inhuman, single-track obsession--which can apparently be found in the most commonplace men. . . . Could this not become a new form of excitement, as necessary to the nerves as smoking?. . . . Is part of our rage against communism the rage of Caliban at seeing his own face in the glass?<sup>17</sup>

Though Ritchie's developing awareness of self and the world makes the diary an invaluable record of its era, for the general reader there is much satisfaction to be gleaned from the diary's dramatic progression, as well. As Ritchie's account of his life and times advances, from high drama through outspoken pessimism to wary optimism, the diary develops a pleasing dramatic pattern that is comparable to what one might expect from a well-written novel.

For the Canadian reader in particular, however, there is also much interest in an aspect of Ritchie's self-presentation which quickly caught the eyes of his reviewers in Britain. This is, of course, Ritchie's identity as a Nova Scotian Canadian. For example, reviewing The Siren Years for the London Observer, Stephen Vaughan remarked:

As a diplomat and (dare one say it?) a Canadian diplomat to boot, Charles Ritchie is an unexpected delight. . . . [He was] coolly equipped to diagnose our shortcomings and read the writing on the wall. Some of his prognostications reveal him as a notable prophet of social change and the coming recession, of which the good Canadian in him must approve while the spirit can't help grieving.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, British reviewer Angus Calder, writing in the New Statesman, noted:

There are now all too many books documenting how the wealthy went on drinking wine in wartime Britain. But the cryptic Canadian flavour makes this one refreshing.<sup>19</sup>

Evidently, the "cryptic Canadian flavour" of Ritchie's writing has had a great deal to do with his contemporary success. But what is this "flavour," and how is it revealed?

To begin at the beginning, Ritchie's loyalty to his Nova Scotian roots is made plain from the start, and throughout the diary it does not waver. After walking through the woods on his way to King's College in 1925, for example, he writes:

. . . I felt a kind of rush of love for Nova Scotia, for these woods and this place where I was born. I thought of the games we used to play in these woods when we were kids and we pretended that the stream was the St. Lawrence River and Roley and I and the three Wainwrights divided into two camps: English against French. I was the French commander Montcalm . . . and . . . we enacted the battle of the Plains of Abraham. One time we would let the English win and the next time, the French.<sup>20</sup>

Thirteen years later and stationed in Washington D. C., he confesses:

I am longing to get to Nova Scotia. I want to breathe air from the Atlantic, to lie in bed at night and listen to the fog bell's warning and to live in a family again. <sup>.21</sup>

In New York nearly twenty years later, he remarks:

Had dinner last night with an old friend from Nova Scotia, now a very successful New York career woman. It was interesting to see

how the acquired layers of New York "graciousness and culture" came peeling off after the third drink. Thank God they did.<sup>22</sup>

At sixty-one he writes, while on holiday in Chester, Nova Scotia:

. . . I love this house as if it were my own. And I am happier here than anywhere.<sup>23</sup>

Another important component of the "Canadian flavour" is Ritchie's complicated attitude to Britain. As the well-brought-up son of an old Nova Scotia Conservative family, Ritchie feels a strong loyalty to Britain--within limits, that is. His impatience with "the kind of Englishman who 'gives the Empire a bad name'"<sup>24</sup> is well expressed in this notation:

23 June, 1942 [in Ottawa]

Had lunch with the new Dominions Office appointee to Canada. . . What a man to send to Ottawa to cope with the little group of bristling professional Canadian nationalists who would welcome him as a heaven-sent confirmation of all they have ever said about the Old School Tie! The anti-British members of the Canadian intelligentsia will never be happy until they have pulled down the Old England of Tradition and can dance on its grave. He is the sort of Englishman who makes one understand why.<sup>25</sup>

However, despite his personal disapproval of British imperialism during the Suez crisis, for example, he can write this:

November 25, 1956 [in London]

I hope that in Ottawa they realize that the time has come to help to save the face of the British over Suez. The British . . . will remain the best bet in a bad world. They should not be humiliated, and Canada should be the first to see that.<sup>26</sup>

Ritchie is also conscious of the contradictions in his attitude towards the Americans. On the one hand, he feels a certain loyalty to them as good friends whom he understands. In London on December 7, 1941 he writes:

We Canadians feel all the same that once the Americans have got over the initial shock [of Pearl Harbour] they will get on the



band-wagon and will get into the war one hundred per cent and be producing tanks, planes, etc., by the million when the Japs are finished. The English have no real faith in the United States. Now it is our business to begin boosting the Americans here.<sup>27</sup>

Twelve years later, while accompanying Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent on a visit to India, he notes:

There is a great deal of harping on American materialism in contrast to the spiritual values of India. I am beginning to find this very irritating. As a Canadian, I feel quite free to criticize the Americans, but when other people do it I instinctively rally to their defence.<sup>28</sup>

On the other hand, at times his attitude to the Americans can range from disapproval to outright rejection. As Ambassador to Washington during the stormy Diefenbaker era, for example, he writes:

While I disapprove entirely of the manufactured anti-Americanism of the government, yet deep down I feel satisfaction at hearing the Canadian government finally lash out at the omniscience and unconscious arrogance of Washington, and I am not immune to that fever of irritation with the United States government which at home could become a national rage--could, but I do not think it will.<sup>29</sup>

Five years later, he makes this strong comment:

The shooting of Bobby Kennedy, with its play-back to the assassination of JFK, has given a nightmarish flavour to the last twenty-four hours. . . . It only accentuates one's feeling that Canada must not, shall not, be absorbed into that runaway American society which is like a giant plane out of control.<sup>30</sup>

Ritchie's conflicting opinions regarding England and the United States are important because they are such clear and informed illustrations of the perennial Canadian dilemma: How to maintain a friendship as equals with sister nations who are greatly superior in size and strength, but whose loyalty to their distinctive cultures is no greater than that of Canadians to their own?

As any Canadian who has thought about this matter can testify, Ritchie's conflicting feelings reflect the views of many people in this country. They are, therefore, an important source of this valid Canadian viewpoint on England and the United States. If the full text of the original diaries is ever disclosed, this peculiarly Canadian viewpoint may well be enlarged.

Though long accustomed to defining themselves in relation to England and the United States, Canadians are nevertheless maturing into consciousness of their own, free-standing, identity. As a loyal Canadian who has lived for extended periods outside his own country, Charles Ritchie is in an excellent position to observe some distinctive features of this identity. During the war, for example, he notes "idealism, energy [and] practical ability" "among the young," and "the lack of fuss and feathers, the humour and the horse-sense" with which a group of Canadian naval officers runs their ship.<sup>31</sup> On a visit home after the war, he assesses his fellow Nova Scotians:

Back in my own country among my own people--how different from the easy-going superficial Californians. The surface layer here as everywhere is Americanisation . . . babbity . . . but here it is a peculiar brand of babbity without optimism, and it is not deep. Underneath is a queer compound of philosophical pessimism, of rooted old prejudice, of practical kindness to the neighbour and the unfortunate, of unkindness towards the prosperous, something which has been ironed out in the prosperous fat land of Upper Canada but which still grows on this rocky soil.<sup>32</sup>

He makes discerning comments on Canada's role in international relations, such as:

February 9, 1960 [in New York]

We seem to have assumed the role in many of the world's troubles as an objective bystander, willing to help if it does not cost too

much, given to tut-tutting over the passionate unreasonableness of other people, and quite given to political moralizing.<sup>33</sup>

and:

January 15, 1960

Of course, Canadians are different. There is no malice in us. We are the family doctor whom no one has called in for consultation. We are the children of the midday who see all in the clear, shallow light.<sup>34</sup>

He also makes a variety of comments on the subject of Canadian national pride. In 1955, for example, he recalls that ". . . my contemporaries [at boarding school] were young Canadian nationalists without knowing it," in their resistance to English-style mores.<sup>35</sup> Writing in 1963 while Ambassador to Washington, he confesses: "[w]hat depresses me is the thick coating of self-congratulation which covers every Canadian official statement. . . . [W]hen heard abroad [it] sounds painfully embarrassing."<sup>36</sup> Six months later and still in Washington, he writes these revealing words:

Yesterday the Canadian Club had a reception of three hundred people in this house. There are quite a lot of lonely, homesick Canadians living in this town. . . . We sang "O Canada", standing about on the terrace with the written songsheets in hand. Very few people knew all the verses. Sylvia said it moved her and made her want to cry. It was moving when sung like that by a group of Canadians abroad and in the open air and without music. It sounded less like a national anthem than a Highland lament or a nostalgic French-Canadian song full of pride and yearning, not at all martial.<sup>37</sup>

As can be seen from these excerpts, Ritchie's feelings towards his own country contain a degree of conflict as well. In this he is, one ventures to state, a typical Canadian.<sup>38</sup> One of the advantages of being a native of a lesser power in the world is the ability it engenders in one to "see all in the clear, shallow light," including

the faults in oneself. Certainly, in the case of Charles Ritchie, being a Canadian has helped to make him a diarist of unflinching truthfulness regarding himself, and of rare objectivity in his view of the world. Indeed, Ritchie's Nova Scotia background, combined with his literary interests and his diplomat's training and opportunities, would have made him an interesting diarist in any case. Add to these attributes the nature of Ritchie's personality, and the result is a diarist, a serial autobiographer, who ranks with the best.

Roy Pascal, writing in Design and Truth in Autobiography, puts his finger on the means by which a great autobiographer succeeds in transcending his own material:

The value of an autobiography depends ultimately on the quality of spirit of the writer. I do not mean, in a simple sense, the quality of truthfulness. . . . I mean a capacity which differs according to the nature of the personality and life, and which succeeds in creating in us the consciousness of the driving force of this life, what Montaigne calls a man's "master form." Many autobiographies fail to be significant because of triviality or lack of shape in the personality. . . . [O]ne demands from the best more than an account of personalities, events, and circumstances. These must become the framework, in some sense the embodiment, of the personality of the writer as a man pledged to life, and one must be set free from them as historical facts, and from the concern with their accuracy as historical documents, in order to savour the quality of the central personality.<sup>39</sup>

By discovering--with the help of his diary--how best to live a life, Charles Ritchie kept the "pledge to life" which he made at the age of eighteen. "I am writing because I do not want my life to slip through my fingers like sand," he wrote, on the eve of the year 1925.<sup>40</sup> The resulting "book of the self" is one of those rare works that does indeed "set [one] free," for it not only meets the criteria defined by

Robert A. Fothergill for a major diary within the English diary tradition, it is also immeasurably satisfying to read.

## Chapter Six

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Roy Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 185.

<sup>2</sup>Robert A. Fothergill, Private Chronicles: A Study of English Diaries (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974), p. 10. Subsequent references to this volume appear in parentheses following the quotation.

<sup>3</sup>Gunther Stuhlman, Pref., The Diary of Anais Nin, VI, 1955-66 (New York: Harcourt), 1976, p. xi. Nin once commented, in an address titled "The Personal Life Deeply Lived": ". . . because I suspected the accuracy of memory . . . I made . . . a careful recording day by day of everything I heard and saw." Quoted in The American Autobiography: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Albert E. Stone (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1981), p. 157.

<sup>4</sup>In this, it is only fair to point out, he has had the advantage of a long enough life in which to edit the diary into an even more highly polished state. If the complete diary is ever published, it will be interesting to compare the two texts with a view to ascertaining how far Ritchie's editorial ability contributed to the artistic success of the diary as first published. It is also interesting to compare Ritchie's solution to the problem of diary-writing in the age of psychoanalysis with this comment, by Elizabeth Bruss:

". . . [Autobiography has lasted as literature because it] . . . has so frequently anticipated or coincided with the movement of the English literary system as a whole, first toward individualism and representational realism, psychological density, and sociological particularity, and then toward expressionistic forms. Just at the point when these claims would seem to have been exhausted, the skeptical aesthetics of modernist and post-modernist art, with its radical testing of traditional techniques and its challenge to conceptions about the essential properties of literature, music, and the plastic arts, has made autobiography once again problematic and provocative." (Elizabeth Bruss, Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of the Literary Genre (Baltimore: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976), p. 163.)

<sup>5</sup>Claude Bissell, Rev. of The Siren Years, International Journal, XXX (Winter, 1974-5), 162-3.

<sup>6</sup>John Bird, Rev. of The Siren Years, Financial Post, 69 (Jan. 11, 1975), 7.

<sup>7</sup>Barbara Amiel, "A civil observer on the front lines," Maclean's, 94 (Nov. 2, 1981), 70-3. Earlier, Amiel's review of An Appetite for Life had stated: "It is traditional, when praising Canadian writers, to pull out the highest accolade by saying they are as good as so-and-so in Europe or America. As a diarist Charles Ritchie is faultless. I can think of no one, writing today, who can touch his special brilliance." (Amiel, Rev. of An Appetite for Life, Maclean's 91 (Jan. 9, 1978), 60. British critic Stephen Vaughan, reviewing The Siren Years for the Observer, took a similarly long-range view of Ritchie's ability: "All in all there have been few better private peepholes on the diplomat's world since Stendhal." (Stephen Vaughan, Rev. of The Siren Years, Observer (Jan. 26, 1975), p. 29.

<sup>8</sup>Victoria Glendinning, "What Charles Did," Times Literary Supplement (June 2, 1978), p. 606.

<sup>9</sup>Charles Ritchie, The Siren Years: A Canadian Diplomat Abroad, 1937-1945 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974), p. 135.

<sup>10</sup>Charles Ritchie, Storm Signals: More Undiplomatic Diaries, 1962-1971 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1983), p. 83.

<sup>11</sup>Charles Ritchie, The Siren Years, p. 44. Subsequent references to this volume appear in parentheses following the quotation.

<sup>12</sup>Ritchie, The Siren Years, pp. 91-2. In this passage Ritchie reveals both his familiarity with what Fothergill terms "the radically new languages of psychic life" and his familiarity with the experience of the nightmare.

<sup>13</sup>Charles Ritchie, Diplomatic Passport: More Undiplomatic Diaries, 1946-1962 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 9-10. Subsequent references to this volume appear in parentheses following the quotation.

<sup>14</sup>Ritchie, Storm Signals, p. 93.

<sup>15</sup>Ritchie, Storm Signals, p. 139.

<sup>16</sup>John English, Rev. of Diplomatic Passport and Storm Signals in International Journal, XXXIX, No. 1 (Winter 83-4), 229.

<sup>17</sup>Ritchie, Diplomatic Passport, pp. 37-8.

<sup>18</sup>Vaughan, p. 9.

<sup>19</sup>Calder, p. 180.

<sup>20</sup>Charles Ritchie, An Appetite for Life: The Education of a Young Diarist, 1924-1927 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1977), p. 71.

<sup>21</sup>Charles Ritchie, The Siren Years, p. 21.

<sup>22</sup>Ritchie, Diplomatic Passport, p. 149.

<sup>23</sup>Ritchie, Storm Signals, pp. 110-1.

<sup>24</sup>Ritchie, An Appetite for Life, p. 144.

<sup>25</sup>Ritchie, The Siren Years, pp. 144-5.

<sup>26</sup>Ritchie, Diplomatic Passport, p. 122.

<sup>27</sup>Ritchie, The Siren Years, p. 128.

<sup>28</sup>Ritchie, Diplomatic Passport, p. 67.

<sup>29</sup>Ritchie, Storm Signals, p. 34.

<sup>30</sup>Ritchie, Storm Signals, p. 106.

<sup>31</sup>Ritchie, The Siren Years, pp. 149, 171.

<sup>32</sup>Ritchie, The Siren Years, p. 204.

<sup>33</sup>Ritchie, Diplomatic Passport, p. 167.

<sup>34</sup>Ritchie, Diplomatic Passport, p. 164.

<sup>35</sup>Ritchie, Diplomatic Passport, p. 94.

<sup>36</sup>Ritchie, Storm Signals, p. 31.

<sup>37</sup>Ritchie, Storm Signals, pp. 51-2.

<sup>38</sup>Ritchie may well have been "no . . . [foreigner's] . . . idea of a Canadian"; to his Canadian readers, on the other hand, time and again he gives voice to their own inarticulated thoughts. Autobiography "is the translation into a pattern of words of many acts of memory, reflection and imagination," writes Albert E. Stone. "But autobiography is also and simultaneously 'history.' It recreates a past shared with others . . . [which leads to an] . . . implicit understanding between author and audience." Albert E. Stone, Autobiographical Occasions and Original Art (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), p. 5.



<sup>39</sup>Pascal, pp. 19-20.

<sup>40</sup>Ritchie, An Appetite for Life, p. 9.

### Conclusion

This study of the diary of Charles Ritchie has attempted to relate the works of a contemporary Canadian diarist to the English diary tradition, as it is defined in Private Chronicles by Robert A. Fothergill. This approach was necessitated by the fact that there is as yet no indigenous tradition of diary-writing in Canada, and because by both background and upbringing, Ritchie is strongly oriented towards Britain, making it reasonable to consider his works as an extension of the English diary tradition. In addition, it should be noted that Fothergill himself chose to treat the "international writer" Anais Nin as one of "six diarists to stand as milestones on three centuries of road" in the evolution of the diary as literature. (12) In doing so, Fothergill has produced what is really a study of the diary genre itself, supported by examples taken from--in all cases but that of Nin--the writings of English diarists. The present study of Charles Ritchie, therefore, fits comfortably within this rather elastic framework.

Accordingly, in the present study, the "conceptual perspectives" which Fothergill has established for English diary-writing have been applied to the diaries of Charles Ritchie. It has been shown that Ritchie valued his diary as a true "book of the self," in which he recorded what were in his judgement the important details of his outer and inner life. Widely read, well educated and gifted with unusual literary ability, he developed "new expressive

possibilities" in diary-writing by combining traditional linear writing with a more modern, expressionistic approach in whatever proportions seemed best suited to his subject. By freeing himself from the confines of one particular mode of expression, therefore, he was able to "preserve the fluctuating quality of an individual's responsiveness to life" while remaining highly selective in his subject matter.

Examination of Ritchie's motives for keeping a diary virtually throughout his life (he began it at age twelve and is still keeping it; the published version spans a period of forty-seven years), has shown that a number of considerations impelled him to write. Chief among these was his innate desire to be a writer. Frustrated as a novelist, he turned to the diary as a "useless" substitute and found his true vocation.

Of Ritchie's four published works, the first two volumes, An Appetite for Life and The Siren Years, may be described as "Becoming" diaries. In these, Ritchie discloses his plans for self-development and reveals such major self-conceptions as Ritchie as Romantic Lover, and Ritchie as Collector of Experience. In the succeeding volumes, Diplomatic Passport and Storm Signals, in which the diarist may be said to have "Become," the distinctive qualities of Ritchie's writing style and self-projection are shown to be natural modesty, freedom from ostentation, reasonableness and good will in dealing with others, and a high degree of competence in life as in the diary. Also characteristic is Ritchie's determination to write an "entirely truthful" diary, in

large part because he views it as a valuable record of his private self.

As a diarist who kept a long and largely continuous record of his life, and whose autobiographical consciousness, while never clearly overt, becomes increasingly evident as his "book of the self" progresses, Charles Ritchie can be considered a "serial autobiographer." From the story of a young man in search of "Experience," the diary becomes the record of a mature man who has determined how best to live a life, until finally it records the musings of an aging man who accepts the loss of his former control over life with a mixture of dismay and resignation, tinged with humour.

In determining whether the works of Charles Ritchie can be considered a "milestone" in the evolution of the English diary tradition, it must be acknowledged that he breaks new ground in the "history of 'sensibility'" by recognizing the increasing complexity of both his "self" and the world in the age of information in which he happens to live. To the evolution of the diary as literature, he contributes his contemporary understanding that an effective means of coping with this complexity is to divide his "self" into two complementary parts: the self which operates in life and the self which appears in the diary. By this means, Ritchie comes to know his "self" so well that he is able to determine how best to live his life. In addition, by applying the process of conscious discrimination to the details of his daily life, he may also have discovered how best to write a diary.

Finally, not only is Ritchie a writer of superior literary skill, but also, in acting as his own editor, he was able to shape his "Life" into Art. The result may well be closer to the true autobiographical genre than any diarist has yet managed to come, while at the same time it maintains the intrinsic nature and value of the diary genre through Ritchie's steadfast refusal to revise or "improve on" his younger self.

As an example of a serial autobiographer with creative "sensibility," who has found a "new form" containing "new expressive possibilities," Charles Ritchie deserves an honoured place in the English diary tradition and membership in that company of "great" diarists which includes such distinguished peers as Samuel Pepys and Anais Nin. As for the still-unacknowledged Canadian diary tradition, the diary of Charles Ritchie demonstrates that if such a tradition does not exist, it is high time it was invented. Indeed, as Ritchie himself might be inclined to point out, his Nova Scotian ancestors may already have invented it for us.

## Appendix

The following consists of two pages cut by Ritchie himself from one of his original notebooks, together with the printed version of the same material as it appears in The Siren Years on page 185. Comparison of the original and edited entries demonstrates the basic integrity of Ritchie's editorial decisions. Changes are minor, for though excess verbiage has been pruned and opinions slightly softened, the diarist's "voice" and meaning remain unaffected. It is clear from this example that the original character of the diary has been respected by its editor.



I shall then last night will look back & say "I've all started at that  
 drunken party of Lis to the f.w. R." I don't think the English or Americans  
 quite understand how to have their kind of party - the Canadians or  
 Russians do. At a really successful Canadian drinking party  
 people tell each other astonishing things - the English ~~if they~~ <sup>don't</sup> get  
 as drunk as that or if they do they hold onto themselves more  
 whereas the Americans never say anything astonishing because  
 they have it all ready to say - But the Canadians who are <sup>at heart</sup>  
 a sensitive, pragmatic, voluble & amorous race are only <sup>released</sup>  
 from their reserve by whiskey

In Feb 3<sup>rd</sup> Ottawa. I suppose I can't have gone on year after year  
 representing my country abroad without knowing much about what was  
 going on at home. But I see I am in for an ~~extensive~~ intensive  
 bout of re-education. In fact I feel - in the Dept. rather like a  
 New boy at school. They all seem to know so much more than I do.

Above all <sup>Home works</sup> the man who seems to know everything. They get me down somewhat -  
 I ask myself what I can have been doing in these years when they were  
 informing themselves <sup>so</sup> fully. Living through the war must be the answer.

Every community produces its own distortion of vision - the national viewpoint  
 one only ~~realist~~ <sup>works</sup> ~~at~~ ~~is~~ ~~concerned~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~the~~ Looking at the world through  
 Canadian eyes international landscape thru Canadian eyes ~~is~~ <sup>Polished</sup> ~~not~~ ~~mean~~  
 - to London - an adjustment. Certain features of the London scene  
 loom much larger than they do in London others ~~which~~ are obscured.



vehicles and a few ancient horse-drawn cabs, or bicycle-propelled hooded affairs which have been invented to try to fill the need for taxis – otherwise the Parisians have no transportation except the Métro.

The Raes' flat belongs to a rich Canadian woman. It is a typical modern luxury flat – great expanse of window, beige carpets, white china horses on the mantelpiece, imitation leopard skin on the bed and every modern device of comfort, only none of them working owing to the complete absence of fuel. The bathroom was an elaborate mockery with its showers and appliances – no one in the house had had a bath for two months. There was a large salon full of Empire furniture covered in striped satin, but it was too cold to contemplate as a sitting-room. As for my bedroom there could be no thought of sleeping in it. I slept on the sofa in front of the wood fire with a hot-water bottle, a sweater and all the windows closed. The family spent the day sitting on the floor to be as close as possible to the one minute wood stove in the sitting-room. We ate well on United States army rations.

*12 January 1945. London.*

Lionel Massey's farewell party for me. If you take twenty or thirty fairly adult and intelligent people and pump them full of alcohol from 6.30 until two in the morning you hear some pretty astonishing things. I do not think the English and Americans quite understand this kind of party. I sometimes think that Canadians, who are at heart a sensitive, pugnacious, voluble and amorous race, are only released by whisky.

*3 February 1945. Ottawa.<sup>1</sup>*

I suppose I could have gone on year after year representing my country abroad without knowing much about what was going on at home. I am in for an intensive bout of re-education. In the Department I feel like a new boy at school. They all seem to know so much more than I do. I asked myself what I can have been doing in these years when they were informing themselves so fully. Living through the war must be the answer.

*18 February 1945.*

Pavlov, an officer of the Soviet Embassy, came to a dinner for people from our Department and some foreign diplomats. He was out to

<sup>1</sup> I had been posted back from London to the Department of External Affairs.

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