

What Happened to Canadian Intellectual History?

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[See table of contents](#)

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Weight Champion, Mysterious Billy Smith, 1900 World Welter Weight Champion, Eddie Connolly, and four time winner of the Canadian Ladies Golf title, Mabel Thomson. In addition Flood details the history of a variety of sports teams from baseball to basketball to bowling. Like so many other sport historians Flood is most concerned with specific details and (male) achievements rather than with historical analysis. What makes his book more successful than most is not the penetrating insights, but the thorough research on a broad topic. While class-based sports, interprovincial rivalry, professionalism, and issues from out-migration to transportation are often peripheral to the main story, Flood has at least given a hint of both the rich sporting heritage of the area and the potential of Atlantic Canadian sport historiography.

The first step in beginning to examine the cultural and sporting traditions of the region is to admit that they exist. Most of these books fail in historical analysis, but sadly enough they still represent a step forward in learning about the Atlantic region's sporting heritage. If the work fails to qualify as viable history that is only because historians have been neglectful. At the very least, these books of popular history rather than academic history have exploded one myth about the Atlantic region. In 1970, Kevin Jones argued at the First Canadian Symposium on the History of Sport and Physical Education that there was little to say about Eastern Canadian athletes:

The Maritimes, unlike the Prairies, Ontario and Quebec were economically depressed and sport was never encouraged to the extent that it was in other parts of Canada. In comparison with Ontario, Quebec and the Prairies, the Maritimes produced comparatively few champion sportsmen or national teams.³

Through the work of non-academic historians that has been refuted. A truly synthetic history, however, is still to be written.

MICHAEL SMITH

3 Kevin Jones, "Sport in Canada, 1900-1920", *Proceedings of the First Canadian Symposium on the History of Sport and Physical Education* (Ottawa, 1970), p. 45.

What Happened to Canadian Intellectual History?

DURING THE PAST TWO DECADES CANADIAN historical writing has enjoyed its

most impressive era of expansion and diversification. In revolutionary dimensions it has been transformed into a more mature and sophisticated discipline which is more cognizant of the importance of social classes, groups and regions in Canadian society and which exhibits a greater consciousness of a variety of conceptual frameworks and methodologies. Not all types of history, however, have shared equally in this renaissance.

While a decade ago it was possible to refer to a "blossoming" of Canadian intellectual history, more recent commentary labels the discipline as being "most notable for its weaknesses" or "in eclipse".¹ There are several reasons for this state of affairs. As an area of study intellectual history has attracted few practitioners in Canada. To date graduate theses have supplied the largest body of material. After one research project some of these people have moved to other fields or interests. Perhaps, as well, a residual colonial mentality that heralds the very idea of a Canadian intellectual history with satirical disbelief bears a part of the responsibility, although this attitude is now more often found at a popular rather than a professional level. The overwhelming popularity of social history is another factor. It has attracted the brightest of the young scholars. Studies of women, the family, the working classes, education, crime and public health are seen to have both relevancy and excitement which intellectual history lacks. As a field social history has been characterized by spirited debates about methodologies and conceptual frameworks. In contrast the field of intellectual history remains placid, seemingly oblivious to any methodological deficiencies and, except in Quebec, unthreatened by the popularity of social history.²

The eclipsing of intellectual history is by no means limited to Canada. In the United States intellectual historians are just emerging from a period of being "haunted by self doubt" and "feeling dismally out of fashion".³ There it was in the early 1970s that the exciting, heroic age initiated earlier by Merle Curti, Vernon L. Parrington and Percy Miller faltered. Soon the previously admired confident, sweeping generalizations, the preoccupation with the national and regional minds, and the attention paid to the discourse of intellectuals succumbed to charges of elitism, irrelevance and insufficiently documented

- 1 J.M. Bumsted, "Canadian Intellectual History and the 'Buzzing Factuality' ", *Acadiensis*, VII, 1 (Autumn 1977), p. 116; Veronica Strong-Boag, "Review" of James Doyle, *Annie Howells and Achille Frechette in Canadian Historical Review*, LXI, 1 (March 1980), p. 24; J.D. Wilson, "Some Observations on Recent Trends in Canadian Educational History", in J. Donald Wilson, ed., *An Imperfect Past: Education and Society in Canadian History* (Vancouver, Centre for the Study of Curriculum and Instruction, 1984), p. 20.
- 2 Yvan Lamonde, "Intellectual History: French Canada", in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, vol. 2 (Edmonton, Hurtig, 1985), p. 888.
- 3 Arthur Schlesinger, "Review" of John Higham and Paul Conkin, *New Directions in American Intellectual History* in *Journal of American History*, 66 (March 1980), p. 888.

conclusions. Throughout that decade younger scholars engaged in intense self-appraisal.⁴

It would be wrong to assume that Canadian intellectual history is entirely exempt from similar deficiencies or that it is in any less need of criticism. After all, in its formative stage in the 1960s and 1970s it was also under the spell of such American giants as Percy Miller and Merle Curti. Those early works of Canadian intellectual history established the parameters of approach and content which continue to influence the sub-discipline.⁵ This paper will analyse three general attributes of our intellectual history: its preoccupation with delineating the national mind; its propensity to place everything in an atmosphere of crisis; and its narrow, elitist, biographical methodology.

At a time when much of Canadian history is focusing positively on the regional and the particular, Canadian intellectual historians continue to emphasize a whiggish, centralist search for a national identity. There are many dangers inherent in this fascination: presentism or seeing and judging the past through the eyes of the present;⁶ the implication that a national consciousness implies consensus; and the tendency to denigrate those forces, ideas and individuals which are viewed as detrimental to the fulfillment of a national consensus. There has also been a tendency to focus on headline crisis studies of the Victorian period which emphasize radical change resisted by an embedded Canadian resistance to new ideas. Often this is accomplished by concentrating on a limited period of time during which the ideas are genuinely new and controversial, and also by studying those individuals most prominent in the debate. Daniel Wilson is one example.⁷ Little time is spent on assessing how representative these individuals are of a wider Canadian public opinion.

Both of the above attributes intersect with the most persuasive characteristic of our intellectual history, the search for ideas through group biography. Ever since Carl Berger used this basic approach in his impressive study of imperialism in the early 1970s, many have adopted his methodology and some have assumed

4 See John Higham and Paul Conkin, *New Directions in American Intellectual History* (Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1979).

5 A.B. McKillop, *Contours of Canadian Thought* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1987), p. 19.

6 See Susan Mann Trofimenkoff, "Nationalism, Feminism and Canadian Intellectual History", *Canadian Literature*, 93 (Winter 1979), pp. 7ff.

7 See A.B. McKillop, *Contours* and his *A Disciplined Intelligence: Critical Inquiry and Canadian Thought in the Victorian Era* (Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979); Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1985); Carl Berger, *Science, God, and Nature in Victorian Canada* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1983); Suzanne Zeller, *Inventing Canada: Early Victorian Science and the Idea of a Transcontinental Nation* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1987)

that it represented the only legitimate approach.⁸ This methodology, in which people sometimes take precedence over ideas, however, poses a serious question as to how representative of a wider Canadian public opinion the resulting generalizations are. When one is searching for a national consensus, the temptation to apply such generalizations nationally is great.

There are, of course, intellectual historians who have avoided these pitfalls, and it is important to remember that the individual books of Canadian intellectual history are excellent studies within their self-imposed context. They include a disproportionate share of prize-winners. This paper analyses them, not as individual works, but as a part of that body of literature known as Canadian intellectual history. The beginnings of the sub-discipline of intellectual history in Canada coincided with an upsurge of aboriginal, ethnic, cultural and economic nationalism. These forces, which at times threatened the very viability of the nation state, did, in significant ways, change the images and the functioning of Canada. Internally and internationally the focus was on a bilingual and bicultural nation; internally as well, a multicultural dimension became an important consideration. It was an era in which both journalists and scholars studied imperial and continental relationships, the French-English dichotomy and the unique qualities of the Canadian experience. While francophone historians debated the long-range significance of the Conquest, their anglophone counterparts explored their own past as well as the nature of previous Quebec nationalisms searching for both an understanding of the roots of separatism and clues for a mechanism of rapprochement for the two nations seemingly found within the Canadian state.

Amongst English speaking intellectual historians Carl Berger rescued the previously outcast imperialists and transformed them into significant Canadian nationalists.⁹ As a sequel he analysed the national conceptual frameworks in which professional historians functioned and wrote.¹⁰ Joseph Levitt and Ramsay Cook deepened our understanding of Henri Bourassa and presented him as a nationalist model for a truly bicultural and bilingual Canada.¹¹ Levitt then turned his attention to the quest for an English-Canadian identity, hoping that a historical perspective would "stimulate some readers to develop fresh approaches" to the necessary but apparently hopeless quest for a national

8 Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1971).

9 *Ibid.*

10 Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English-Canadian Historical Writing: 1900-1970* (Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1976).

11 Joseph Levitt, *Henri Bourassa on Imperialism and Bi-Culturalism, 1900-1918* (Toronto, Copp Clark, 1970); Ramsay Cook, *French Canada and The Canadian Question* (Toronto, Macmillan 1966); Ramsay Cook, ed., *French Canadian Nationalism: An Anthology* (Toronto, Macmillan, 1969).

identity.¹² Using popular metaphors as the basis of his analysis, Allan Smith sought to distinguish our sense of nationality from the American one.¹³ Douglas Owrarn demonstrated how the North West shaped the hopes and images of our nation,¹⁴ while Richard Allen was determined to show that the social gospel movement was a Canadian movement with minimal external influence in which the West played the most significant creative role.¹⁵ Most recently Suzanne Zeller found both encouragement and justification for nation-building in the intellectual world of science.¹⁶

The intensity and pervasiveness of the nationalist obsession inevitably invited a negative reaction. Ironically, it was Ramsay Cook who did so much to heighten English Canada's understanding of French-Canadian nationalism who led the anti-national crusade. "Every generation of Canadian nationalist intellectuals", he wrote in 1970, "seems to play the part of Sisyphus. Their permanent task is to push the millstone of Canadian nationalism up a steep mountain, only to find that it rolls back down again to await the labour of the next generation. This means that much of Canadian intellectual history sounds like a broken record".¹⁷ Fifteen years later in *The Regenerators* he is still giving thanks that the subjects of his book "almost never alluded to the cultivation of a national sentiment".¹⁸ Similarly, S.E.D. Shortt has his six academics recoiling from "petty maple-leaf politics" to the extent that they placed themselves "outside of Canadian society".¹⁹

While it may be easy for many to agree with Cook's belittling of this recurring obsession with national identity, there are problems inherent in extremes on both sides. Carl Berger's critics accuse him of an over-Canadianization of

12 Joseph Levitt, *A Vision Beyond Reach: A Century of Images of Canadian Destiny* (Ottawa, Deneau, 1982).

13 See Allan Smith, "Metaphor and Nationality in North America", *Canadian Historical Review*, LI, 3 (September 1970), pp. 247-75.

14 Doug Owrarn, *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1980).

15 Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada, 1914-1928* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1971).

16 Zeller, *Inventing Canada*. Although not analysing nationalism *per se*, Brian McKillop is nonetheless preoccupied with delineating a national mind.

17 Ramsay Cook, "A nationalist intellectual behind every maple tree", *Saturday Night* (April 1970), p. 19. See also his "Nationalism in Canada or Portnoy's Complaint Revisited", *South Atlantic Quarterly*, LXIV, I (Winter 1970), pp. 1-19.

18 Cook, *The Regenerators*, p. 6. Ironically, while Cook is opposed to divisive nationalism, he is a centralist and appears to be searching for a cohesive, positive form of national consensus. See his *Canada, Quebec and The Uses of Nationalism* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1986) and also Trofimenkoff "Nationalism, Feminism and Canadian History", and McKillop, *Contours*, p. 28.

19 S.E.D. Shortt, *The Search for an Ideal: Six Canadian Intellectuals and their convictions in an age of Transition* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1976).

imperialism and of ignoring a broader Anglo-Saxon perspective in what Graham Carr refers to as a “scavenger hunt for nationalism”.²⁰ Why, Carr asks, did George Parkin leave Canada for permanent residence in England in 1902 if he was such a fervent Canadian nationalist? Neglected aspects of social and cultural imperialism could explain much of the broader aspects of an imperial mentality as well as the seeming incongruity of Parkin’s relocation. Richard Allen’s critics point out that his stress on Canadianization, while redressing a previously held international focus, goes too far when it ignores the importance of external influences and the global dimension of Canadian brotherhood activity.²¹

A denial of a unique Canadian spirit can be equally serious. As much as Shortt’s intellectuals might have been disgusted with the current climate of Canadian politics, they were an integral part of the Canadian scene and even participated in fostering nationalist oriented activity. Adam Shortt, Archibald MacMechan and James Cappon may not have brooded over the national identity question but they did foster the development of a deeper understanding of what Canada was in the field of history and literature in particular and did contribute the building of important Canadian institutions such as journals, archives and universities.

The underlying assumptions for these positive and negative reactions involve a value judgement on nationalism. Either it is a positive and necessary attribute for the modern liberal state or it is a narrow and constricting force which is detrimental. One’s position governs attitudes towards the United States, regionalism and the importance of external influence on Canada. The nationalist stance incorporates sufficient anti-Americanism to make it impossible to transform continentalism into a nationalism as vibrant as imperialism.²²

20 Graham Carr, “Imperialism and Nationalism in Revisionist Historiography: A Critique of Some Recent Trends”, *Journal of Canadian Studies*, XVIII, 2 (Summer 1982), p. 91. See also Douglas L. Cole, “Settlement Colonies”, *Journal of British Studies*, X (May 1971), pp. 160-82 and his “Canada’s ‘Nationalistic’ Imperialists”, *Journal of Canadian Studies*, V, 3 (August 1970), pp. 44-9; Robert J.D. Page, “Carl Berger and The Intellectual Origins of Canadian Imperialist Thought, 1867 1914”, *Journal of Canadian Studies*, V, 3 (August 1970), pp. 39-43. Other writings on imperialism include Terry Cook, “Apostle of Empire: Sir George Parkin and Imperial Federation”, Ph.D. thesis, Queen’s University, 1977 and James G. Greenlee, “The Song of a People: Sir Robert Falconer on Empire”, *Journal of Canadian Studies*, XV, 1 (Spring 1980), pp. 80-92.

21 As an example see E.R. Forbes, “Prohibition and the Social Gospel in Nova Scotia”, *Acadiensis*, I, 1 (Autumn 1971), pp. 11-36. Ramsay Cook redresses Allen’s Western bias with an equally forceful Ontario bias in his *The Regenerators*.

22 See Ian Grant, “Erastus Wiman: A Continentalist Replies to Canadian Imperialism”, *Canadian Historical Review*, LIII, 1 (March 1972), pp. 1-20. Wayne Roberts has charged nationalist historians with misinterpreting Goldwin Smith for whom he considers the moral basis of community rather than political economy or liberalism to be the over-riding determining influence. See his “Goldwin’s Myth”, *Canadian Literature*, 83 (Winter 1979), pp. 50-71.

Current controversy over a proposed free trade agreement with the United States only underlines this fact. Similarly for the nationalists, regionalism remains a divisive attribute which detracts from the achievement of their cherished goals of unity and strength. Much of the nationalist fervour in the 20th century has been voiced by the left in pursuit of the welfare state, a viable and planned Canadian-controlled economy and a vibrant culture.²³ In the case of external influences the responses range from the extremes represented by Levitt and Shortt. In Levitt's *Vision Beyond Reach* the question of external influences is not addressed while in Shortt's *The Search for an Ideal* there are legions of insufficiently explained or digested external personalities who influenced his six individuals.

The national question has been a factor in determining both the subject matter and the approach to Canadian intellectual history. It has contributed little to the achievement of a Canadian nationality and it has limited the scope and the appeal of the discipline. The problem of context, relevancy and a narrow thematic approach, however, go far beyond the national question. The publisher's depiction of Brian McKillop's *Countours of Canadian Thought* characterizes it as focussing on the "leaps of knowledge in nineteenth-century science that shook the foundations of religious and humanistic values". This statement reflects both the manner in which much of Canadian intellectual history is publicized and also an approach to its conception and writing. Such a focus on the shock value of new ideas is by no means limited to this sub-field. In analyzing cultural and literary history Maria Tippett noted that there was too much concentration on what is new and avant-garde resulting in a "distorted view, both of culture as a whole and of its component parts".²⁴

There is a considerable body of Canadian intellectual history that centres on a dialectic between science and humanism and is fixated on the controversies surrounding the advent of Darwinism, Biblical Criticism and other new thought processes appearing in the second half of the 19th century. Included in this category are McKillop's *A Disciplined Intelligence*, Berger's *Science, God and Nature*, Shortt's *The Search for an Ideal* and Ramsay Cook's *The Regenerators*. Other volumes which focus on controversy are Douglas Francis' biography of Frank Underhill and Joseph Levitt's study of Canadian nationalism.²⁵ The

23 In a recent publication Peter Brimelow sees Canadian nationalism as a fraud perpetrated by the left and the bureaucracy to serve their own interest for power and prestige. See *The Patriot Game: National Dreams and Political Realities* (Toronto, Kay Porter Books, 1986).

24 Maria Tippett, "The Writing of English-Canadian Cultural History, 1970-1985", *Canadian Historical Review*, LXVII, 4 (December 1986), p. 556.

25 R. Douglas Francis, *Frank H. Underhill: Intellectual Provocateur* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1986). Also making use of a dialectic and the 'shock' value of their individuals and ideas are Richard Allen, Joseph Levitt, and William de Villiers-Westfall "The Sacred and Secular: Studies in the Cultural History of Protestant Ontario", Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1976.

Review Essays/Notes critiques 165

general atmosphere common to these studies is one of crisis, disillusionment and a searching for absolutes. From them it would appear that the majority of the Canadian population stood shoulder to shoulder resisting change and trying to prevent the birth of the modern world. Those willing to adapt to changing times continued to search for a more perfect idealism which could provide order and meaning in an increasingly chaotic society. Shortt's academics thus sit precariously on the edge of an awesome intellectual precipice which fills them with terror.²⁶ In these studies Frank Underhill lives surrounded by controversy and crisis as he sought a more perfect world. Brian McKillop speaks of intellectual anarchy and Levitt's modern Canada is endangered. The society portrayed by Ramsay Cook experiences a crisis of faith, an experience which prompts the individuals he analyses to engage in "startling" behaviour. Richard Allen's radical social gospellers shock a conservative society with their outrageous behaviour.

Within this atmosphere of crisis are many conflicts. These encompass debates between science and religion, between traditional and modern Christianity, between systematically structured belief and modernist fragmentation, between moral authority and moral chaos, and between an agrarian lifestyle and value system and modern urban industrialism. Implicit within the structuring is the presence of a dialectic. It is present in its most extreme form in Shortt's idealist-empiricist dichotomy but it appears also in Cook's separation of reason and emotion, in McKillop's tension between "man's desire to use his intellect...and his wish to maintain certainty of conviction",²⁷ and in Berger's conflict between Darwinists and those who continued to find evidence of God in nature. With the exception of McKillop whose synthesis follows the Hegelian pattern, the others generally ignore the usual dialectic process. The anti-thesis simply cancels out the thesis. They highlight those like William Dawson, Daniel Wilson and others who resisted new ideas.²⁸ But as McKillop points out a synthesis was usually achieved.²⁹ The choice was not necessarily between reason and emotion or idealism and empiricism. Many Canadians maintained their basic idealism while adapting to a modernist empirical approach to thought.

That such controversy did exist is not in dispute. Any reader of the contemporary press has to be aware of it. The basic question is whether this emphasis on crisis, resistance and startling beliefs and behaviour properly represents the nature of Canadian attitudes and beliefs in the late-Victorian period. Two recently published volumes of intellectual history can illustrate the approach

26 Shortt, *The Search for an Ideal*, p. 3.

27 McKillop, *A Disciplined Intelligence*, p. x.

28 Berger, McKillop and Cook include these two individuals. Most of Shortt's volume deals with resistance.

29 A.B. McKillop, "Moralists and Moderns", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 14, 4 (Winter 1979-80), p. 148.

and the problems it presents for Canadian intellectual studies. These are Ramsay Cook's analysis of late Victorian criticism and R. Douglas Francis' biography of Frank Underhill.

While Cook's volume adds significantly to our understanding of late-Victorian society, his dialectic between emotional, old-style Christianity and modern rationalism or other modern alternatives may not be as distinct as he suggests. By ignoring the significant Arminian nature of Methodism and the gradual alteration of the church in the second half of the 19th century, he is able to present a more dramatic story. But if one takes this gradualism into account, his regenerators appear to be less startling than first impressions would indicate. In his study of the urbanization of Methodism Neil Semple employs a more holistic approach which reveals a gradual reshaping of the church and its faith away from an emotional, but disciplined rural-based organization towards a freer, less dogmatic and emotional urban-styled religion.³⁰ He emphasizes the mainstream and a continuity which provided for the continued existence of a traditional religious emphasis on fellowship, evangelism and pastoral care in an age of social activist Christianity. In contrast Cook's emphasis is on dramatic change with an emerging secular faith based on the social sciences and materialism which replaced traditional Christianity.³¹

Douglas Francis presents what by now is a traditional Frank Underhill, the atypical Canadian "resisting the mainstream of popular thought, challenging a prevailing viewpoint, theory or interpretation, and throwing out contentious ideas for debate".³² If one looks, however, beyond the confrontational nature of Underhill's personality and places him within the context of evolving Canadian attitudes in the 20th century, what emerges is a man whose intellectual journey is far from unique. Like many Canadians of his generation Underhill was raised in small-town Canada and fulfilled his career in an urban setting. He was often torn between a nostalgic longing for the country life and the more lively atmosphere of cosmopolitan life. Flirting with socialism during the first half of the 20th century he returned to the fold of a modernized liberalism. Underhill was also one of many who turned the focus of Canadian history towards economic affairs and, like the typical Canadian in the 20th century, he embraced Canada as a North American nation.

30 Neil Semple, "The Impact of Urbanization on the Methodist Church in Central Canada, 1854-1884", Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1979.

31 Richard Allen, George Emery and Neil Semple downplay the secularism of the social gospel movement whereas Cook agrees with William Brooks and de Villiers-Westfall in seeing secularism as a primary ingredient. See William H. Brooks, "Methodism in the Canadian West in the Nineteenth Century", Ph.D. thesis, University of Manitoba, 1972; George Emery, "Methodism on the Canadian Prairies, 1896-1914: The dynamics of an institution in a new environment", Ph.D. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1970.

32 Francis, *Underhill*, p. ix.

Throughout his life Underhill remained a frustrated idealist. He sought but never found a Canadian equivalent to the great intellectuals whom he had studied as the revered Oxford Greats and whose ideas he continued to teach during his academic career. Even Edward Blake from whom he had expected so much failed to measure up to his intellectual standard. Like the conservatives of an earlier era, he found the absence of such individuals in the modern democracy a serious shortcoming. Bereft of his rhetoric and his confrontational approach to the public, both designed to provoke Canadians into thinking about issues, Frank Underhill appears to have reacted to changing circumstances and arrived at conclusions which do not differ substantially from many other Canadians of his generation. No doubt style is an important part of the essence of the man and any biographer would have to analyse it in order to find the essential Underhill. But if one looks beyond the style at the philosophic individual, he emerges as a more typical Canadian than first appearances would indicate.

The atmosphere of crisis and conflict in which much of Canadian intellectual history is placed results in an exaggeration of uniqueness, a preoccupation with negative denial and resistance, and a fixation with a limited time frame which tends to blur the long-term trends and gradual adjustment to circumstances.³³ To place the discipline more within the mainstream could make it more attractive to a wider readership and lead to a more complete understanding of the nature of Canadian thought and society. Yet the atmosphere of crisis is not the only and perhaps not the most significant limitation of the methodology of Canadian intellectual history. There is also the structural edifice of group biography to consider.

Since Carl Berger's utilization of a group of individuals to analyse imperialism, the group biographical approach has been upheld by many historians in Canada as the best method of addressing the Canadian intellectual tradition. The approach is a reflection of the strong biographic tradition in Canadian history which has been sustained in recent years by the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* project. It is also indicative of a condescending attitude towards the Canadian intellect. Lacking Underhill's 'Oxford Greats' in our development, Canadians rarely produced an individual thought to be worthy of separate treatment. The continuing popularity of the approach also suggests a conservative unwillingness to explore other methodologies and, perhaps in rare instances, a lack of awareness of external trends in intellectual history.

The group methodology has deficiencies which intrude upon a realization of

33 In "The Taming of History", Michael Gauvreau suggests that by concentrating on the orthodox apologists and excluding more liberal examples, McKillop exaggerates the degree of opposition between religion and critical thought. See *Canadian Historical Review*, LXV, 3 (September 1984), p. 325. B. Ferguson's review of *A Disciplined Intelligence*, *Canadian Historical Review*, LXI, 2 (June 1980), pp. 231-3, states that McKillop focuses on the doctrinal trees at the expense of the intellectual forest.

the Canadian intellectual past. Details of personal history clutter the script and obscure the ideas. In addition most individuals are complex beings whose thought patterns do not easily lend themselves to narrow thematic treatment. S.E.D. Shortt claims that "the choice of biographical rather than thematic organization...imposes a less artificial structure on the thought of men".³⁴ But in following his "loose amalgam of ideas and emotions" he fails to distinguish between subjective and objective idealism, a mistake unlikely to have been made with a non-biographical, more structured approach.³⁵ Because this approach to intellectual history tends to link together many diverse ideas under a single broad theme, it can also conceal the separate independent status of the individual ideas as well as their relevance to other thought patterns.

One of the potential weaknesses of the methodology is in the selection of the individuals to represent the ideas. In his introduction to *The Sense of Power* Carl Berger states that because imperialism was always in a state of flux it can "only be understood in relation to the characters who espoused it and who came to personify it".³⁶ There is a danger in this premise that thought can become whatever a single advocate chooses to believe. In any case the selection of the individuals does much to shape the thought. While Richard Allen's social gospellers are social activists, Ramsay Cook's are generally not. Through their selection of individuals each author presents a very different view of the movement. For the one it is a spur to action; for the other a retreat from dangerous and controversial intellectual disputes.

Who are the individuals that best represent a particular intellectual activity? To what extent can one ascribe influence in thought development and popularization to a single individual? Does James Mavor epitomize modern empiricism? Is Goldwin really symbolic of the Victorian trapped in a riddle of existence or does his Baptist worshipping suggest that privately he accepted a traditional rationale? As a modern liberal Ramsay Cook portrays G.M. Grant as the epitomy of an earlier version of the political philosophy and credits him with transforming Presbyterianism in Canada. While Grant's influence was no doubt significant, to what degree must he share this adulation with others, such as Henry Drummond of Edinburgh who most certainly revolutionized the life of Clarence

34 Shortt, *The Search for an Ideal*, p. 8.

35 McKillop, "Moralists and Moderns", pp. 145-8.

36 Berger, *The Sense of Power*, p. 12. See Carr, "Imperialism and Nationalism", pp. 91ff. Other people who have used a group biographical approach include: Alan F. Bowker, "The University of Toronto in Canadian Life, 1880-1930's: A Study in the Lives, Work and Ideas of James Loudon, John C. McLehnan, Maurice Hutton, George Wrong and James Mavor", Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1975; H.J. Bridgman, "Three Scots Presbyterians in Upper Canada: A Study in Emigration, Nationalism and Religion", Ph.D. thesis, Queen's University, 1978; Robert John Taylor, "The Darwinian Revolution: The Responses of Four Canadian Scholars", Ph.D. thesis, McMaster University, 1976; Howard J. Reiner, "Darwinism in Canadian Literature", Ph.D. thesis, McMaster University, 1975.

Mackinnon, Charles Gordon and many other Presbyterians in the late 19th century.³⁷

Beyond the individual, the characteristics of the group are also significant. To date the focus of Canadian intellectual history has been on an elite group composed primarily of academics, journalists and clergymen who left a legacy of sufficient written material from which to form an assessment. The biographical approach combined with the crisis and controversy has tended to limit the selection to those engaged in that controversy in the public forum. Such an approach serves to ignore those aspects of intellectual history which lacked high profile enthusiasts and poses questions about the relevance of the generalizations as far as they apply to the majority of the Canadian population.

In spite of all the knowledge that has been accumulated and analysed on nationalism, imperialism, idealism and the social gospel, little is known about the thought of the Canadian population in general on these issues. A selective biographical approach tends to confine the validity of the generalizations to the individuals under study. Joseph Levitt consciously eliminates the questions of impact and relevance from his analysis because his sole purpose was to provide nationalists with an array of ideas from which to draw inspiration for future development. Both Shortt and Levitt compound the problems of group biography with the addition of other structural deficiencies. Within his separate chapter treatment for each individual, Shortt analyses that person's views on man, society, nature, God and history. Such an approach worked well for Franklin Baumer in his non-biographical study of the European intellectual tradition covering several centuries.³⁸ But with Shortt's group approach and a time frame of only four decades the treatment is inevitably repetitious and confusing. Levitt's utilization of a chapter for each decade accentuates the difficulty of viewing thought through the eyes of selective individuals. In addition to being repetitious it is particularly weak in the area of developmental context. Themes only appear when they have a relevance to the individuals he selects. Hence, the federal-provincial struggles, alive since the 1880s, do not appear until the 1930s as a major theme. The threat of American culture to Canadian nationalism waits until the 1960s for analysis even though it had been an issue since the 19th century. Too often in Canadian intellectual history deficiencies in context and the chronological time frame impede the formulation of definitive generalizations. Often the cause is the focus on the individual or the group.

Yves Gingras is critical of those who attempt to generalize about the nature of the development of scientific research in Canada from an analysis of a single

37 See Rev. Clarence Mackinnon, *Reminiscences* (Toronto, The Ryerson Press, 1938); Charles W. Gordon, *Postscript to Adventure: The Autobiography of Ralph Connor* (New York, Farrer and Rinehart, 1938), pp. 81ff.

38 Franklin L. Baumer, *Modern European Thought: Continuity and Change in Ideas, 1600-1950* (New York, Macmillan, 1977).

institution.³⁹ As an alternative he suggests an examination of the formation of scientific communities. In her analysis of Carl Dawson and the evolution of Canadian sociology Marlene Shore discovers a social science idealism quite different from that traced by Brian McKillop.⁴⁰ Whereas Shore's focus is on a tradition combining a Baptist background and a University of Chicago training, McKillop deals with Presbyterians and Methodists who benefitted from a British higher education. Obviously definite conclusions about a Canadian intellectual tradition must go beyond the single influence of a Chicago, Glasgow, Balliol or Leipzig, beyond the activity in a single region and beyond the focus of a small group of individuals.

It will not be easy for Canadian intellectual history to break out of the biographical and group mould into which it has been placed. In its advertising of Doug Owrans' *The Government Generation* the University of Toronto Press emphasizes only the biographical context of the study even though Owrans has always insisted that he is analysing a "technocratic drive for planning and efficiency that transcended parties and their platforms" as well as the individual participants.⁴¹ Brian McKillop has argued that the only way to maintain a focused intellectual history integrated within a context of the relevance of experience and action is to construct a core which must, "at least in the first instance, be the thought of an individual or individuals".⁴² This approach, however, has an inherent danger of limiting the scope and the relevance of Canadian intellectual history, if not to the discourse of intellectuals, at least to the most prominent spokesmen of the age. "If we visualize intellectual events in essentially academic terms as a series of reasoned exchanges on problematic topics", writes Rush Welter, a prominent American historian, "we have no choice but to treat intellectual biography as the core of our discipline".⁴³ Because a group biographical methodology has often been combined with both a narrow thematic approach and an atmosphere of crisis, the limitations imposed on much of Canadian intellectual history have been substantial.

39 Yves Gingras, "The Institutionalization of Scientific Research in Canadian Universities: The Case of Physics", *Canadian Historical Review*, LXVII, 2 (June 1986), pp. 180-1.

40 Marlene Shore, "Carl Dawson and the Research Ideal: The Evolution of a Canadian Sociologist", Canadian Historical Association, *Historical Papers* (1985), pp. 56ff. See also her *The Science of Social Redemption — McGill, the Chicago School and the Origins of Social Research in Canada* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1987).

41 D.R. Owrans to Editor, *Canadian Historical Review*, LXVII, 2 (June 1986), pp. 208-10. See also Doug Owrans, *The Government Generation: Canadian Intellectuals and the State in Canada, 1900-1945* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1986). Owrans' work provides an important counterbalance to the exclusive jurisdiction held so long by the left in Canada over the conception and the realization of the welfare state.

42 McKillop, *Contours of Canadian Thought*, p. 25.

43 Rush Welter, "On Studying the National Mind", in Higham and Conkin, *New Directions*, p. 78.

Canadian intellectual history, in fact, appears to have strayed a considerable distance from paths suggested for it in the early 1970s. Influenced by both John Higham and Jacques Barzun, both McKillop and Karr called for an intellectual history which related to the broadest possible social context in order to recreate the spirit of an age.⁴⁴ Yet already there is evidence that premature generalizations regarding patterns of Canadian thought are being entrenched. Resistance to evolutionary ideas in Canada was more than countered by the general acceptance of an evolutionary conceptualized society and history. Such liberal and social Darwinistic attitudes were an ingredient in the shaping of both reformist and booster mentalities. Possibly the most studied aspect of Canadian thought has been idealism. Although there is no doubt that it was a pervasive characteristic, it has been narrowly defined and generally rooted in a Scottish and German philosophic background which arrived in Canada with individuals such as John Watson. Is it proper to trace a direct linear progression directly from John Watson and his era to Margaret Laurence and her era?⁴⁵ By the late 19th century idealism in Canada was so endemic throughout the society, it is doubtful that its varieties could stem from a single source. An American historian argues that, on a large scale of intellectual life, "there is no possibility of writing about individual intention or conscious will", because the ideas themselves are the "aggregate consequences of so many different perceptions and purposes expressed over such long periods of time that no individual can be said to have created them or to be in control of them".⁴⁶ It is not the biographical methodology itself or the attempt to delineate the national mind which are at fault in many instances but rather the tendency to arrive at premature generalizations from insufficient data.

Almost 40 years ago John Higham defined intellectual history as that which analysed "the relatively enduring organizations of thought and emotion, knowledge, opinion, faith and attitudes as they develop and operate within

44 McKillop, *Contours of Canadian Thought*, pp 15-17; Clarence Karr, "What is Canadian Intellectual History?" *Dalhousie Review*, 55, 3 (Autumn 1975), pp. 431-48.

45 The major books dealing directly with idealism include: McKillop, *A Disciplined Intelligence*; Shortt, *The Search for an Ideal*; Berger, *Science, God and Nature*; Cook, *The Regenerators*; James G. Greenlee, *Sir Robert Falconer: A Biography* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1988); B. Anne Wood, *Idealism Transformed: The Making of a Progressive Educator* (Kingston and Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985); and Shore, *The Science of Social Redemption*. More indirectly focused volumes include: Michiel Horn, *The League for Social Reconstruction: Intellectual Origins of the Democratic Left in Canada, 1930-1942* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1980); Owram, *The Promise of Eden*; Berger, *The Sense of Power*; Levitt, *A Vision Beyond Reach*; and Zeller, *Inventing Canada*.

46 Gordon S. Wood, "Intellectual History and the Social Sciences", in Higham and Conkin, *New Directions in American Intellectual History*, p. 36.

particular historical contexts".⁴⁷ This is still a valid definition in the late 1980s, although our concepts of organizations and the diversity of methodological approaches may be more varied and more sophisticated. We have a greater appreciation of the complexity and the interplay of ideas and should be less prone to arrive at hastily conceived generalizations and we should be more aware of the social context which both shapes ideas and is itself shaped by them. Ideas do influence behaviour and action but the impact is much more complex than a simplistic casual relationship. As Gordon Wood states, people "wrestle with ideas and symbols in order to explain, justify, lay blame for, or otherwise make sense out of what is happening, not just for themselves but for others".⁴⁸ Because of the nature and the complexity of the material intellectual history demands very careful research, organization and interpretive techniques. In this regard the field of social history can be of assistance.

It has been a rather common phenomenon to see intellectual and social history as enemies or at least opposites. Social history reveals a society deeply divided by factors of race, religion, creed, sex and social class while intellectual history deals with that which unites. The one concentrates on the particular while the other focuses on the more commonly shared assumptions and beliefs. Hence, it is easy to see why social history can be viewed by intellectual historians as a divisive force detracting from the search for coherence in national aspirations, especially in Canada where the corpus of intellectual history has been "preoccupied with the consensual values that comprise aspects of national consciousness".⁴⁹ Perhaps the gulf between these two sub-fields is the result of the nationalist preoccupation of intellectual history rather than irreconcilable differences. If intellectual history more accurately reflected the divisions and the diversity of thought within Canadian society it would share a more common ground with social history but as long as intellectual history focuses on the unifying discourse of intellectuals the gulf will remain.

That very complexity of society must be a part of any respectable genre of intellectual history. There may be a common ground between the approach to idealism defined by Marlene Shore and that defined by Brian McKillop but these two streams will remain a part of a Canadian idealistic tradition which is also comprised of a variety of religious, utopian, liberal and socialist and other traditions which are often without links to any definable ideological source. Neither Michiel Horn nor most of the intellectuals he analyses in the League for Social Reconstruction will ever willingly share credit for the formation of the Canadian welfare state with Doug Owrans' liberal bureaucrats but each group

47 John Higham, "American Intellectual History. A Critical Appraisal", *American Quarterly*, XII (1961), p. 230.

48 Wood, "Intellectual History and the Social Sciences", p. 35.

49 See McKillop, *Contours of Canadian Thought*, p. 28.

is a legitimate part of the history of Canadian ideas in action.

Recently Yvon Lamonde posed a question asked by many Quebec historians: "Is there a satisfactory intellectual or cultural history which is not first of all a social history?"⁵⁰ This question can relate to both the unifying and the divisive aspects of social history which, as well as revealing divisions within society, also reveals common experiences, reactions and assumptions held both within groups and shared between groups in society. In addition it emphasizes the need for all intellectual history to be firmly rooted in a social context. Mary Vipond has suggested that "historians can only recapture the *zeitgeist* of another era by surveying it from every aspect",⁵¹ and she goes on to state that both what people wrote and what they read as best sellers are important indices of thought and values shared by a wide cross-section of the population. This broad anthropological approach has already been successfully accomplished by Keith Walden in his extensively researched study of Mountie symbol and myth.⁵² Like social history, intellectual history must incorporate the regional variation, women, minorities and the various social classes before it can be representative enough of Canadian society to be able to generalize competently about the contours of Canadian thought.⁵³

Social history, however, can only share some territory with intellectual history. In the final analysis there can be no single methodological approach to intellectual history. Biography will continue to have a place, not only because of the Canadian preoccupation with the individual, but also because through the study of the individual one can reveal the complexity and interplay of thought as well as the origins of the ideas. Tracing the origins and the paths of single ideas will also continue to be important. In this regard Owram's fine study of the modern Canadian welfare state is an important model. He deals with the contribution of individuals but avoids falling into a trap of group biography in which the people become more important than the thoughts they espouse. He is aware of the complexity of international ideas which contributed to its creation. In the book as well the nationalist overtones are subterfused. This volume provides a balance and comprehensiveness which must be applauded.

There are, however, other valid approaches which can help to broaden the scope of the discipline. One means of avoiding too great an emphasis on structured thought systems which probably only apply to a minority of any population, is

50 Lamonde, "Intellectual History", p. 888.

51 Mary Vipond, "Best Sellers in English Canada, 1899-1918: An Overview", *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, no. 24 (1979), p. 96. See also her "Best Sellers in English Canada, 1919-1928", *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, no. 35 (1986), pp. 96-7.

52 Keith Walden, *Visions of Order: The Canadian Mounties in Symbol and Myth* (Toronto: Butterworths and Co. (Canada) Ltd., 1982).

53 See Trofimenkoff, "Nationalism, Feminism and Canadian Intellectual History" for a plea for the inclusion of women.

to use the European mentalité approach or, as practiced in the United States, the community approach.⁵⁴ Whether or not one agrees with Allan Greer's theoretical definition of feudalism, no intellectual historian studying Quebec could ignore the evidence found in this study as a prerequisite to further investigation.⁵⁵ Greer's approach is more that of a social historian but a similar methodology employed on a community or a series of communities by an intellectual historian could result in an excellent blending of social context with the world of ideas. In this way both the traditional materials of intellectual history can be blended with both the social context and the more anthropological emphasis on such things as language, symbol, ritual and myth to achieve something which approximates the true complexity of real society. Intellectual history will always remain unquantifiable and will always require analytical subtlety but it cannot but benefit from building on the research of and sharing some of the methodologies of both social history and anthropology. It could also benefit from some of the awareness of these disciplines of international trends and methodologies, their precision of definition and their contextual triangulation with other studies in the same field. The final goal should be an intellectual history which encompasses all of Canadian society and supports its generalizations with adequate research. Perhaps, in time, it will be possible to delineate the Canadian mind, although, as the current debate over the Meech Lake Accord demonstrates, the problem may be that there may simply not be a single Canadian mentality.

CLARENCE KARR

54 Gordon Wood pioneered a group dynamics-community approach in his *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1789* (Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1969). For a more modern sample, see Thomas Bender, *New York Intellect: a history of intellectual life in New York City from 1750 to the beginning of our own time* (New York, Knopf, 1987).

55 Allan Greer, *Peasant, Lord and Merchant: Rural Society in Three Quebec Parishes, 1740-1840* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1985).