

## Donald Creighton and the French Fact, 1920s-1970s

Donald A. Wright

Volume 6, numéro 1, 1995

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/031095ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/031095ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0847-4478 (imprimé)

1712-6274 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Wright, D. A. (1995). Donald Creighton and the French Fact, 1920s-1970s. *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société historique du Canada*, 6(1), 243–272. <https://doi.org/10.7202/031095ar>

Résumé de l'article

Quand il s'agit des Canadiens français, la mémoire de Donald Creighton invoque une opposition bigote. Cet article considère l'ensemble de sa carrière pour proposer une histoire plus complexe que celle que suggère cette caricature. L'historien s'est appuyé sur un ensemble de clichés, à la fois négatifs et positifs, pour décrire et expliquer le Canada français. Dans les années 1960 et 1970, ses stéréotypes dépassés l'ont rendu incapable de comprendre le nationalisme québécois. Malgré son aptitude à la remarque excessive, Creighton détenait une position réfléchie, dont on trouve un exemple dans sa méfiance envers l'attribution des pouvoirs aux provinces, et dans son opposition aux écoles secondaires francophones en Ontario. De telles institutions, croyait-il, transformeraient les enfants franco-ontariens en citoyens de deuxième classe, inhabiles à la compétition dans un marché du travail dominé par l'anglais.

# Donald Creighton and the French Fact, 1920s-1970s

DONALD A. WRIGHT

## Résumé

*Donald Creighton is remembered as an anti-French bigot. Looking at his career in its entirety, this paper argues that such a caricature obscures a more complex story. As a historian, Creighton relied on a series of stereotypes - some negative, others positive - to describe and explain French Canada. In the 1960s and 1970s, his outdated stereotypes left him unable to understand Quebec nationalism. Although capable of intemperate remarks, Creighton's position was more thoughtful: for example, he distrusted devolution of powers to the provinces and he argued that French secondary schools in Ontario would render Franco-Ontarians second-class citizens, unable to compete in a labour market dominated by English.*

\* \* \* \*

*Quand il s'agit des Canadiens français, la mémoire de Donald Creighton invoque une opposition bigote. Cet article considère l'ensemble de sa carrière pour proposer une histoire plus complexe que celle que suggère cette caricature. L'historien s'est appuyé sur un ensemble de clichés, à la fois négatifs et positifs, pour décrire et expliquer le Canada français. Dans les années 1960 et 1970, ses stéréotypes dépassés l'ont rendu incapable de comprendre le nationalisme québécois. Malgré son aptitude à la remarque excessive, Creighton détenait une position réfléchie, dont on trouve un exemple dans sa méfiance envers l'attribution des pouvoirs aux provinces, et dans son opposition aux écoles secondaires francophones en Ontario. De telles institutions, croyait-il, transformeraient les enfants franco-ontariens en citoyens de deuxième classe, inhabiles à la compétition dans un marché du travail dominé par l'anglais.*

When Donald Creighton first learned in January 1972 that Eugene Forsey had given some of his personal papers to the Public Archives, he wondered if it would not be wise to include their voluminous correspondence. After all, "the Forsey-Creighton papers,

---

I would like to thank the following people who endured, and commented on, an earlier draft: Michael Behiels, Bill Eccles, David Kimmel, Ralph Güntzel, David Hartman, Christina Burr and Joanne Wright. Ken Dewar, Donald Davis and David Bedford read the final section. Of course, I am responsible for all errors of fact and interpretation. Finally, I would like to thank the Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities and the School of Graduate Studies and Research at the University of Ottawa for their financial assistance.

so to speak[,] might be worth preserving!"<sup>1</sup> Eleven months later, Creighton changed his mind. He now wanted Forsey to destroy his half of the correspondence.

There is another point – an important one to me. I have no Rousseau-like urge to reveal my soul. I don't in the least like the thought of utter strangers reading freely the confidences I have exchanged with my friends. Both Ramsay Cook and Carl Berger (the latter of the History Department at Toronto) have told me that they have seen, with rather painful feelings, graduate students poring over the intimacies of the Underhill correspondence in the Public Archives at Ottawa. I have no desire to become the subject of a doctoral thesis – or what is more likely a Master's thesis in some Canadian University. And that, of course, is exactly the kind of memorial I am most likely to get. Nobody would want to write a proper biography of me; and even if somebody mistakenly tried to, the result no doubt would be as largely unread as my little study of Harold Innis.<sup>2</sup>

Here was Creighton at his worst: intensely private, paranoid, hyper-sensitive and arrogant to the point of contempt. Still, his comments strike a sad note: by this point, he had become convinced that his country appreciated neither him nor his scholarship. Although he had won every award there was to win (including two Governor General's Awards and the Molson Prize), he now felt that he would never get the recognition he so deserved. In the final fifteen years of his life, from the mid-1960s until his death in 1979, Creighton had become a target of abuse and vilification because of his outspoken views on French Canada. Over the course, he earned an unpleasant notoriety as a vicious francophobe. This public abuse – when it combined with his arrogance and sensitivity – left him isolated and feeling very much misunderstood. Why should he give his papers to an ungrateful country? So some graduate student could pore over them? Besides, there was another issue to consider. As he had confided to Forsey, some two

---

1. Canada. National Archives (NA), MG 31 D77, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 26, Correspondence with Eugene Forsey 1965-1975, Donald Grant Creighton (DGC) to Eugene Forsey, 16 January 1972.

2. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 26, Correspondance with Eugene Forsey 1965-1975, DGC to Eugene Forsey, 12 November 1972. Forsey refused Creighton's demand. Unable to destroy the letters, he returned them. If he was so inclined, Creighton could do away with both halves of the correspondence. In the end, not even Creighton could bear to see the letters thrown out: fortunately, his instincts as a historian beat out his instincts as a man.

In his memoirs, *A Life on the Fringe*, Forsey recounted the incident: "Creighton was in some ways an intensely private man. At one stage, he declared he would never leave his papers to the Archives, and he strongly urged me to leave nothing of mine: 'Underhill did it. God knows I have no love for Underhill. But now students are burrowing through his papers to find all sorts of personal matter. They would do the same to me, or to you. Don't do it.'...I cannot believe that even his worst enemy will ever find in them so much as a hint of impropriety." Eugene Forsey, *A Life on the Fringe* (Toronto, 1990), 45.

years earlier, "I begin to feel that I will be remembered, if I am remembered at all, as a pessimist, a bigot, and a violent Tory partisan."<sup>3</sup>

Creighton has been, indeed, unkindly remembered. Although a gifted writer, an artist even, English Canada's pre-eminent historian remained at best an unsympathetic Tory anglophile and, at worst, a reactionary francophobe, an anti-French bigot. Charles Taylor, author of *Radical Tories: The Conservative Tradition in Canada*, found himself troubled at Creighton's distinctly ungenerous attitude towards French Canada.<sup>4</sup> Stephen Clarkson and Christina McCall referred to him as a "notorious francophobic curmudgeon."<sup>5</sup> And in one particularly silly piece by Ray Conlogue, Quebec Arts Correspondent for the *Globe and Mail*, Creighton is held responsible for English-Canada's unwillingness to re-imagine the Conquest as Quebec's founding trauma and its related refusal to abandon its role as conqueror.<sup>6</sup>

Historians, meanwhile, have been more kind, but only marginally so. Ralph Heintzman's 1971 article in the *Canadian Historical Review* attempted to assess Creighton's views on French Canada. Then a graduate student, and clearly an admirer of Creighton's skills as a historian, Heintzman nonetheless intimated that Creighton lacked the necessary generosity of spirit, the spirit of Confederation: unwritten but understood, the spirit of Confederation made, and continues to make it possible the extension of bicultural institutions and the realization of national unity.<sup>7</sup> For his part, Carl Berger largely concentrated on the animating themes of Creighton's scholarship and his unusual felicity as a writer. As to the question of Creighton and Quebec nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s, Berger dedicated a paragraph outlining, but not explaining, Creighton's views.<sup>8</sup> Although not on the subject of French Canada but still on the subject of Creighton, Veronica Strong-Boag imposed a rigid dichotomy on the early historical

- 
3. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 26, Correspondence with Eugene Forsey 1965-1975, DGC to Eugene Forsey, 2 May 1970.
  4. Charles Taylor, *Radical Tories: The Conservative Tradition in Canada* (Toronto, 1982), 45-46.
  5. Stephen Clarkson and Christina McCall, *Trudeau and Our Times: volume 1, The Magnificent Obsession* (Toronto, 1990), 71.
  6. Ray Conlogue, "A dialogue of the deaf between the conqueror and the conquered," *The Globe and Mail*, 21 January 1995, D3.
  7. Ralph Heintzman, "The Spirit of Confederation: Professor Creighton, Biculturalism, and the Use of History," *Canadian Historical Review*, Vol. 52, 3 (September 1971): 245-75. Heintzman has recently written that Creighton "did devote more attention to Francophone Quebec than his mentor [Harold Innis], but his attitude was suspicious from the start and, in his later years, so hostile as to contradict if not undermine the very Laurentian empire his life's work had celebrated." Ralph Heintzman, "Political Space and Economic Space: Quebec and the Empire of the St. Lawrence," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 29, 2 (Summer 1994): 20.
  8. Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English-Canadian Historical Writing since 1900* (Toronto, 1976), 235. For an excellent article on Creighton's style as a writer see Kenneth C. Dewar, "Where To Begin and How: Narrative Openings in Donald Creighton's Historiography," *Canadian Historical Review*, Vol. 72, 3 (September 1991): 348-69.

profession. Donald Creighton, she argued, harboured a “disdainful dismissal of other points of view,” an “arrogance” and a “blinkered vision.” Arthur Lower, meanwhile, “championed the benefits of multiple points of view.”<sup>9</sup>

It is not my intention to exculpate Creighton. Nor is it to defend him. By all accounts he had a prickly personality. A University of Toronto graduate student in the late 1930s, Irene Spry remembered Creighton as both a good scholar and an intimidating figure. “He never had the marvellous sense of humour that Innis had. There was no gleam in him.”<sup>10</sup> Doug Francis observed that Creighton had a reputation as being “morose at times;” what sense of humour he had “was ponderous and severe, at times vindictive.”<sup>11</sup> These tendencies intensified in the final two decades of his life. His notoriously short fuse got even shorter.<sup>12</sup> Outspoken. Passionate. Determined. And uncompromising. This is the Donald Creighton that Canadian journalists and academics remember from the 1960s and 1970s. True, he reacted viscerally to the questions of Quebec nationalism, biculturalism and bilingualism. In his own words, “Everything that hurts the things I love I react against violently – violently!”<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, his passionate determination has been confused with reactionary intolerance. As M. Brook Taylor noted, Creighton’s public pronouncements, in the highly charged atmosphere of the 1960s and 1970s, “were open to caricature and exploitation.”<sup>14</sup>

It is my intention, therefore, to argue that on the subjects of French Canada and Quebec nationalism, bilingualism and biculturalism, Creighton was a much more complicated

---

9. Veronica Strong-Boag, “Contested Space: The Politics of Canadian Memory,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, Vol. 5 (1994): 7-8. Although I agree with the overall tenor of Dr. Strong-Boag’s presidential address, I would nuance the rigidity of her dichotomization of the early profession. When in 1954 John Marshall of the Rockefeller Foundation wrote to Creighton asking for his candid and confidential opinion on Arthur Lower’s proposed social history of Canada, Creighton responded enthusiastically, recommending that Lower be awarded a research grant: “...I think there can be no doubt about the need of more effective work in Canadian social history. French-Canadian historians have given a fair amount of time to studies in social history before the British conquest; but we are deficient in studies of the various periods after 1763.” NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 2, General Correspondence 1954 no. 2, DGC to John Marshall, Division of the Humanities, Rockefeller Foundation, 17 March 1954.

In a 1975 article, Thomas Schofield placed Creighton and Lower in the same camp: both were anti-radical establishment historians. See Jesse Lemisch, *On Active Service in War and Peace*, with an introduction by Thomas Schofield (Toronto, 1975).

10. Irene Spry, interview with author, 13 June 1995.

11. R. Douglas Francis, *Frank H. Underhill: Intellectual Provocateur* (Toronto, 1986), 160.

12. “He has a short fuse,” said John Gray, a friend and former president of Macmillan. Quote in Heather Robertson, “The man who invented Canada,” *Saturday Night* (October 1977): 20. For a description of Creighton in the classroom see H.V. Nelles, “Creighton’s Seminar,” *The Canadian Forum* (September 1972): 5-6.

13. *Ibid.*, 24.

14. M. Brook Taylor, “Creighton, Donald Grant,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (Edmonton, 1988), 534.

figure than the one found in existing popular and academic literature. To dismiss him as a francophobe, literally one who fears French people, is admittedly easier than wrestling with his complexity. Nonetheless, it is incumbent on us, as historians, to treat Creighton historically, to treat him as a particular individual living in a particular context. What follows, then, is an attempt to move beyond the caricature and exploitation in an effort to posit a new, more nuanced, understanding of Donald Creighton and the French fact, one that will analyze the entirety of his career and not simply its final two decades.

## I

Reaching intellectual maturity in the 1920s and 1930s, Creighton internalized the dominant assumptions of English-Canadian nationalism and Canadian federalism – assumptions, moreover, which would guide his interpretation of Canadian history. The 1920s were years of heightened English-Canadian national consciousness, a consciousness which stressed Canada as independent of Britain and the United States, and which stressed the concomitant need for Canadian myths and symbols. It was the decade of the Group of Seven, the Canadian Authors Association and the Canadian Historical Association. In a 1932 manuscript Creighton criticized Canadian culture as the pale imitation of Great Britain and the United States. Canada, he lamented, “has lived by borrowing and prospered on imitation.” He went on to add that, “With the exception of Quebec, the country has, to this day, no distinguishable personality, no real cultural unity, and no national consciousness.”<sup>15</sup> Although a 1920s cultural nationalist – as Carl Berger pointed out, Creighton’s *Commercial Empire of the St. Lawrence* documented historically what the Group of Seven depicted visually<sup>16</sup> – Creighton always emphasized Canada’s British tradition as a counterweight to the United States. If Creighton did not define what he meant by Quebec’s distinctive culture, neither did he interpret Quebec as an impediment to a Canadian national culture.<sup>17</sup> As for Canadian federalism, he formed his views in the 1930s when the intellectual community, confronting the economic and social dislocation of the Depression, turned to the federal government only to find it constitutionally unable to implement national relief programs. Looking for villains, these political scientists, historians and legal scholars found them in Oliver Mowat and the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council who, in the first generation of Confederation, had successfully turned on its head Sir John A. Macdonald’s vision of a centralized federalism, one with a

---

15. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 14, Manuscript, Correspondence, 1932, Donald Creighton, “The Colony of Great Britain and the United States.”

16. Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History*, 214.

17. Creighton’s position is consistent with an observation made by Mary Vipond. English-Canadian nationalists, she wrote, “knew that French Canadians had a sense of nationality. What was needed, they argued, was a similar sense among English Canadians, who were being pulled apart by the dilemma of deciding whether they were British or American. So these leaders concentrated on the task of creating a sense of Anglophone Canadian national consciousness.” “National Consciousness in English-speaking Canada in the 1920s: seven studies,” PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 1974, 20.

powerful federal government.<sup>18</sup> These two sustaining assumptions – the importance of Canada’s British heritage and the desirability of a strong central government – informed all of Creighton’s scholarship.<sup>19</sup> They would also bedevil him in the 1960s and 1970s.

Creighton’s early histories – *The Commercial Empire of the St. Lawrence* and *The Dominion of the North* – reveal a *bonne entente* nationalist who harboured very common and contradictory stereotypes of the French Other. The thesis of *The Commercial Empire of the St. Lawrence* (published in 1937) is well known. Indeed, it remains Creighton’s greatest contribution to Canadian historiography: the St. Lawrence River, together with the Great Lakes, constituted the foundation of a transcontinental, transoceanic, northern economy. At the same time, however, *The Commercial Empire* has been used very selectively by Charles Taylor and Ray Conlogue to dismiss Creighton as a francophobe.<sup>20</sup> And in her book, *The Dream of Nation: A Social and Intellectual History of Quebec*, Susan Mann found Creighton’s *Commercial Empire* lacking in sympathy towards French Canadians.<sup>21</sup> To be sure, Creighton described French Canadians in unflattering terms – “simple, docile and politically unambitious”; “Aloof, dogged and apprehensive”; and, most infamously, “Sullen, inert and unresponsive.”<sup>22</sup> But – and this is important – the stereotype of a conservative French Canadian peasantry clinging to a premodern, precommercial social order – what Creighton depicted as “the decayed remnants of a feudal hierarchy” – existed in unresolved contradiction with another, and equally common, stereotype: the romantic, heroic, gallant French Other. Radisson, La Salle, La Vérendrye: these were the “heroes of exploration.” It was the French, Creighton pointed out, who first understood the underlying logic of the St. Lawrence and built the first transcontinental, transoceanic trading system in the fur trade; and it was “the Chadots, the Chaboillez and the Blondeus” who, after the Conquest, “remained as teaching partners to pass on the rich heritage of French experience.” Moreover, Creighton displayed a moment of sympathy when he observed that the French Canadians, in holding fast to a subsistence, rather than embracing a commercial agriculture, “wished to save their patrimony for the society of the future; and they soon came to realize that

---

18. See for example, Norman McLeod Rogers, “The Compact Theory of Confederation,” *Papers and Proceedings of the Canadian Political Science Association*, Vol. 3 (May 1931): 205-30; F.R. Scott, “The Development of Canadian Federalism,” *Papers and Proceedings of the Canadian Political Science Association*, Vol. 3 (May 1931): 231-47; Eugene Forsey, “Disallowance of Provincial Acts, Reservation of Provincial Bills, and Refusal of Assent By Lieutenant-Governors Since 1867,” *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. 4, 1 (February 1938): 47-59; W.P.M. Kennedy, “The Terms of the British North America Act,” in *Essays in Canadian History*, ed. R. Flenley (Toronto, 1939).

19. See Donald Creighton, *British North America at Confederation: a study prepared for the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations* (Ottawa, 1939).

20. See footnotes 2 and 4. Robertson also selectively quoted these phrases in “The man who invented Canada,” 25.

21. Susan Mann Trofimenkoff, *The Dream of Nation: A Social and Intellectual History of Quebec* (Toronto, 1986), 20.

22. Donald Creighton, *The Commercial Empire of the St. Lawrence, 1760-1850* (Toronto, 1937), 39, 127, 154.

the laws and customs of their forefathers were the best protection against the domination of an acquisitive, speculative and alien race." And finally, it must be noted that Creighton focussed his animus not simply on the French Canadian, but rather on all those who obscured the inevitable destiny of his beloved commercial class. At one point, he castigated Great Britain for the "deplorable neglect" of its colonies' natural mercantile interests; and in chapter ten, "Commerce *versus* Agriculture," he fumed against the farmers of Upper Canada for, among other things, their parochial reluctance to invest in canals.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, *The Commercial Empire* is a long line of deliberately paired binary opposites: premodern/modern; static/active; traditional/progressive; French/British; farmers/merchants; obscurantist bureaucracy/dynamic commercial class. As Carl Berger argued, Creighton's interpretation of the clash between the French and the British should not be read as primarily a conflict between the two "races" or as a "struggle over the preservation of linguistic and religious values." For Creighton, the contest was primarily one of competing economic systems.<sup>24</sup> In his own words, "To a very large extent, therefore – and the contestants were quite conscious of the fact – it was a battle between the new commercialism and the stiffened feudalism of the St. Lawrence."<sup>25</sup>

Published in 1944, *Dominion of the North* was Creighton's first attempt at synthesis; in it we find similar animating stereotypes. The Acadians, for example, were "simple-minded" and "local."<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, it relies on crude stereotypes of Roman Catholicism. In a thoughtful review published in the Catholic journal, *The Canadian Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, Rev. John B. O'Reilly criticized *Dominion of the North* for its anti-Catholic bias. Creighton was not a historian but rather "a pamphleteer"; his book was not scholarship but rather "a tract for our times, emphasizing racial hatred, an insane Riel, the Guibord affair, and 'clerical domination' in Quebec."<sup>27</sup> To buttress his argument, O'Reilly compared passages from *Dominion of the North* to passages from A.L. Burt's *A Short History of Canada for Americans* published in 1942. For example, he compared Creighton's depiction of Bishop Laval to Burt's. Creighton's Laval "was a man of burning religious zeal" who preferred to sleep "between thin blankets well filled with fleas." The "frigid atmosphere of his unheated church in the early winter morning seemed to inspire him to interminable supplications." Predictably, Laval was physically unappealing.

His big nose, his firm pursed lips, and his cold protruding eye reveal the assertive ecclesiastic determined to preserve and increase the authority of the church. For him New France was not so much a temporal possession of His Majesty Louis XIV as it was an evangelizing outpost of the Roman Catholic faith.<sup>28</sup>

---

23. *Ibid.*, 39, 13, 33, 127, 170, 255-287.

24. Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History*, 211.

25. Creighton, *The Commercial Empire of the St. Lawrence*, 160.

26. Donald Creighton, *Dominion of the North* (Toronto, revised edition, 1957), 107.

27. John B. O'Reilly, "Canada From a College Window," *The Canadian Messenger of the Sacred Heart* (1944): 701, 702.

28. Creighton, *Dominion of the North*, 58. Frank Underhill was the first to observe Creighton's tendency to describe those actors he did not like in "physically repulsive" ways. Quote in Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History*, 225.



Burt, meanwhile, stressed the nobility of Laval's family, his "great natural ability" and his "brilliant worldly career."

When he first came out, in 1659, he found the colony in a miserable plight, and when he went home for a visit in 1662 he used all his powerful influence with the government to do something for Canada. Many think he was chiefly responsible for the vital change that began in the following year, when the king took over the colony.

Indeed, Burt's Laval "vehemently denounced" the liquor trade with Amerindians and, after giving up his episcopal charge, "he lived the life of a saint."<sup>29</sup> In a private letter to Burt, O'Reilly saluted his fair-minded treatment of Catholics. Noting that Creighton's book was written "in a rage," he added: "Whatever good the Abbé Maheux has done has been ruined by Creighton's book. The Abbé Groulx in his wildest moments never wrote from his side such an invidious blast as Creighton's."<sup>30</sup>

However, for all his insights, O'Reilly neglected to point out that, Creighton, too, had noted Laval's protestation of the liquor trade. Similarly, Creighton described the Roman Catholic Church as one of the great institutions of New France and he acknowledged that in the future "the church was to help immensely in the defence of French civilization in America."<sup>31</sup> As well, O'Reilly failed to read *Dominion of North* as a sustained investigation into the necessity of co-operation and compromise, or elite accommodation, between the two founding groups. In establishing New France and creating the fur trade, the heroic French "understood the meaning of the region they had occupied. They were prepared to accept the dictates of the river; they set themselves to realize its promises." Conquest then introduced the abiding reality, "the central spiritual dichotomy," of Canadian history – cultural dualism. When he united the Canadas in a legislative union, Lord Durham was respecting the St. Lawrence imperative, an imperative which the Constitutional Act of 1791 had mocked. "The policy of legislative union of Upper and Lower Canada was simply another variant of the idea of unity and expansion which had moved New France in the days of Frontenac and La Salle and was to inspire the Dominion of Canada in the time of Sir John Macdonald and the Canadian Pacific Railway." Creighton only mentions, he does not address Durham's policy of assimilation. The period before Confederation was a learning experience for both linguistic groups. The lesson learned: "co-operation could only be bought by a frank recognition of the cultural dualism of Canadian life." Conceived in a "broad spirit of cultural tolerance and goodwill," Confederation, in turn, was a delicate, workable balance between minority rights and national unity. Wilfrid Laurier had "about him that charming air of old fashioned courtesy which has so often been the special gift of his people to Canadian affairs"; Henri Bourassa and the anti-conscriptionists, however, gave expression to that narrow, colonial French-Canadian nationalism, typical in its

29. A.L. Burt, *A Short History of Canada for Americans* (Minneapolis, 1942), 16-17.

30. NA, MG 30 D103, The A.L. Burt Papers, Vol. 1, File 2, Rev. John B. O'Reilly to A.L. Burt, 14 November 1944.

31. Creighton, *Dominion of the North*, 122.

“conservative instincts and clerical affiliations.” And when war broke out in Europe for the second time in less than twenty-five years, Creighton observed Ernest Lapointe standing firm with Mackenzie King, just as Cartier had stood firm with Macdonald.

Once again, these two races, whose association had given Canada its distinctive character and history, were jointly committed to an enormous and dangerous task. They were well aware that latent differences of opinion lurked between them. The whole course of the War of 1914-1918 had taught them the gravity of the difficulties and possible disagreements which lay ahead. But they went forward together to meet them.<sup>32</sup>

True, *Dominion of The North* rests on the problematic notion of an essential, definable French-Canadian “race,” simultaneously conservative and elegant, neither wholly negative nor wholly positive, contradictory and ambiguous. Yet, W.L. Morton, who would later break with Creighton on the matter of bilingualism, considered the work a masterpiece precisely because Creighton had at long last challenged Parkman’s essentially American interpretation of New France as the enemy and posited a Canadian interpretation of New France as the beginning of Canada.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, as an overarching interpretation of Canadian history it is clear that Creighton saw Canada, again in the *bonne entente* tradition, as an ongoing compromise between the two principal founding cultures.

As a historian, Creighton never studied French Canada as French Canada. Rather, it was always part of another story, either the nineteenth-century merchant class or the story of Canada. French Canada remained a black box to him throughout his career. He could not very well ignore it, but nor could he understand it. As we shall see, the eventual result was tragic. Because he relied on a caricatured understanding of French Canada as either a simple, clerical, inward-looking society or as a partner in the *bonne entente* tradition, he could not make sense of the Quiet Revolution and Quebec separatist nationalism. Quebec, in the 1960s and 1970s, was not behaving according to his understanding of how it should behave. As we shall see, a frustrated Creighton lashed out.

---

32. *Ibid.*, 21, 145, 247, 283, 311-12, 383, 427, 505.

33. “Canadian history, like the Canadian nation, is dual,” W.L. Morton told his listening audience. “It is French and English. There are two points of view, the French and the English. From this fact a problem takes its rise...The problem is simply this. Before 1760, the English Canadian historian may write the history of Canada—of New France, that is—as seen through English eyes. Now the English eyes will be those of Parkman, and in fact most English historians of Canada before 1760, have more or less consciously cribbed from Parkman. That is they saw New France as the enemy. To see New France as the enemy, however, is to be, not Canadian, but American.

“It is the first great merit of Creighton’s book that its early chapters are not distorted by this mistaken point of view. The orientation is right. The history of Canada is seen from the same angle of vision before as after 1760. This is a great triumph, and a fundamental condition of true interpretation of Canadian history.” W.L. Morton, *Review of Dominion of the North*, CBC Radio, 27 October 1957. Transcript at NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 15, *Dominion of the North*, Correspondence, Reviews, 1957/1958.

## II

In Creighton's personal papers for the period before 1960 we find a scholar eager to develop professional contacts with his counterparts in Quebec, and an anglophone sensitive to the French fact. Although the bulk of his professional and personal correspondence is with English-Canadian historians, Creighton did not live his professional life in isolation and ignorance of either French-Canadian historians or French-Canadian historiography. Take, for example, the following incident from March 1938. Feeling misunderstood and misrepresented in Creighton's review of his book, *Le feu de la Rivière-du-Chêne*,<sup>34</sup> l'Abbé Emile Dubois wrote Creighton demanding a public retraction in both the *Canadian Historical Review* and the Toronto newspapers. Creighton refused. In a letter to Dubois he stated that he "did not make, or intend, any fundamental attack on your interpretation of the period. You are perfectly entitled to your own interpretation; all I tried to do was to describe it." Then, in a statement remarkable for its vision of national unity, Creighton concluded:

It is my hope that research into Canadian history, whether by French-Canadian or English-Canadian historians, may be pursued dispassionately and with some effort to do justice to all points of view and all parties. I do not think that the cause of Canadian history will be promoted by controversies carried on by scholars who are determined to take one side or the other. If works in French cannot be reviewed in the same spirit as works in English without provoking public controversy, then the intellectual co-operation of the two races of Canada, which the *Canadian Historical Review* has tried so long and so earnestly to promote, will be seriously endangered indeed.

Apparently Creighton's response satisfied Dubois because he thereafter agreed to consider the matter closed. He even invited Creighton to visit Saint-Jérôme, assuring him a warm welcome. Closing the correspondence altogether, Creighton noted that, should he visit Saint-Jérôme, he was sure to find a "very pleasant welcome." "I remember the kindnesses I have already received in the villages and towns of Quebec." Moreover, we, as historians, "should emulate the personal friendliness which is so characteristic of the people of your province."<sup>35</sup> For Creighton, there was an identifiable, definable and undifferentiated Them: the happy, kind, premodern folk who populated the villages and towns of Quebec.<sup>36</sup> Problematic, but hardly francophobic.

---

34. See Donald Creighton, *The Canadian Historical Review*, Vol. 19, 1 (March 1938): 73-74. Creighton criticized Dubois' treatise on the 1837 rebellion for its wholly uncritical approach to the *patriotes*, for its sentimentality and melodrama.

35. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 9, Study of Canadian-American Relations 1931-1940, Correspondence, L'Abbé Emile Dubois to DGC, 17 March 1938; DGC to l'Abbé Emile Dubois, 22 March 1938; l'Abbé Emile Dubois to DGC, 24 March 1938; DGC to l'Abbé Emile Dubois, 28 March 1938.

36. For a study on French Canadians as an imagined Folk see, Janet E. McNaughton, "A Study of the CPR-Sponsored Quebec Folk Song and Handicraft Festivals, 1927-1930," MA thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1982.

It was this vision, "the intellectual co-operation of the two races of Canada," that governed Creighton's career from the 1930s through the 1950s. For example, he considered J.C. Falardeau of the Faculty of Social Sciences at Laval University a friend;<sup>37</sup> he knew Maurice Lebel, also of Laval University, whose work he wanted to read and whose company he enjoyed;<sup>38</sup> and Abbé Maheux was, apparently, a "great admirer" of Creighton.<sup>39</sup> As President of the Canadian Historical Association in 1956-1957 Creighton went to considerable lengths to insure the participation of French Canadians. When Charles Stacey recommended that the CHA commission a pamphlet from Jean-Jacques Lefebvre on French Canada and the American Revolution Creighton responded enthusiastically: "Like other people, I am very anxious to have our French-Canadian contributors produce booklets on phases of history after 1763; and although this does not get very far away from that date, it is certainly a step in the right direction."<sup>40</sup> And when David Farr, the CHA English Language Secretary, informed Creighton that he was having difficulty securing the participation of the University of Ottawa historians for the Annual Meeting Creighton wrote back: "I do hope you can find a suitable French-Canadian paper. I am very distressed to see the way in which all the Ottawa University people are backing out. Could you not look further afield?" He went on to recommend Albert Faucher, head of the Department of Economics at Laval. "I think the University of Montreal has had its innings for a while."<sup>41</sup>

Only with Michel Brunet of the University of Montreal did Creighton have any discourse beyond cordial, professional pleasantries. Prompted by an April 1956 piece by Creighton in the *University of Toronto Quarterly*,<sup>42</sup> the two scholars exchanged letters: polite in tone and flattering in content these letters nonetheless expose the diverging paths of French-Canadian and English-Canadian historiography as represented by

- 
37. "I know Falardeau very well and admire his work and I think perhaps he should be given the first chance to write the article." NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 1, Correspondence *The Encyclopedia Americana*, 1956/60, DGC to Drake de Kay, Senior Editor, *Encyclopedia Americana*, 9 August 1959. Creighton served as Canadian Editor to the *Encyclopedia* and recommended Falardeau for an article on French Canada.
38. "It was very kind of you to respond so quickly to the interest I showed in this volume [*Histoire littéraire de l'Amérique française*] at our Humanities [Research] Council meeting at Ottawa...It was good to see you again at Ottawa and I shall look forward to welcoming you at our meetings at Toronto this spring." NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 3, General Correspondence 1955, No. 4, DGC to Maurice Lebel, 22 March 1955.
39. "In Quebec city, two weeks ago, I met a great admirer of yours, M. l'abbé Maheux. He asked me to send his best regards." NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 4, General Correspondence 1959, No. 3, Paul Taupin, Supervisor of Scholarships Program, Canada Council, to DGC, 26 November 1959.
40. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 8, Canadian Historical Association 1956/58, DGC to Charles Stacey, 5 October 1956.
41. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 8, Canadian Historical Association 1956/58, DGC to David Farr, 10 December 1956.
42. Donald Creighton, "Towards the Discovery of Canada," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, Vol. 25, 3 (April 1956): 269-82.

its two leading practitioners. "Vos recherches sur le développement de la vallée du Saint-Laurent," Brunet wrote, "ont démontré comment le Canada a dû compter sur sa métropole pour se bâtir et prospérer."

Grâce à vos travaux, il est maintenant possible pour les historiens canadiens-français de voir quelles ont été les conséquences désastreuses de la Conquête anglaise pour leur nationalité. Celle-ci, privée de l'appui nécessaire de sa métropole naturelle, avait perdu la liberté de se développer normalement... Voilà la tragédie que l'historien canadien-français doit décrire. La tâche n'est pas facile.<sup>43</sup>

In a word, decapitation. Creighton obviously disagreed. As he had argued some twenty years before in *The Commercial Empire of the St. Lawrence*, he now told Brunet. "I believe that the autonomy and separateness of Canada in North America, which Great Britain helped to insure, has benefited both French-Canadians and English-Canadians: but obviously British support could not be as valuable to you in the cultural field as it was in the economic and political."<sup>44</sup> In his letter of 11 August 1956 Brunet agreed that annexation to the United States would have meant sure assimilation. But he reiterated his argument: "*survivre n'est pas vivre.*"<sup>45</sup> Merely to survive as a culture is not tantamount to living as a people.

In 1958 Brunet was Gray Lecturer at the University of Toronto's Department of History. Following his return to Montreal, he wrote Creighton a note thanking him for his hospitality; he also added that his work had been greatly influenced by Creighton's thesis of metropolitanism.<sup>46</sup> It was because of his appreciation for both Brunet's French-Canadian nationalism and his right to speak French at the CHA annual meeting that Creighton declined Hilda Neatby's request to chair a session featuring Brunet: "...despite the subject [the role of metropolises and entrepreneurs in the St. Lawrence Valley], I don't think I am a good person to chair a meeting at which Brunet will speak. I cannot speak French at such a meeting and he, no doubt, would expect it. Can you not get somebody who is reasonably bilingual?"<sup>47</sup> Creighton thus believed in the importance of making

---

43. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 3, General Correspondence 1956, No. 1, Michel Brunet to DGC, 10 July 1956.

44. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 3, General Correspondence 1956, No. 1, Quote in Michel Brunet to DGC, 11 August 1956.

45. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 3, General Correspondence 1956, No. 1, Michel Brunet to DGC, 11 August 1956.

46. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 4, General Correspondence 1958, No. 2, Michel Brunet to DGC, 1 November 1956.

47. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 4, General Correspondence 1959, No. 3, DGC to Hilda Neatby, 11 February 1959. Although Creighton could not speak French he could certainly read it, as evidenced by the fact that he began his career as a historian of the French revolution. Peter Waite, one of Creighton's graduate students, informed me that Creighton had an impeccable command of French grammar. When on one occasion Waite had mis-transcribed a French quotation Creighton caught the grammatical error and sent Waite back to the original. Author's conversation with P.B. Waite, Centre of Canadian Studies, University of Edinburgh, 5-7 May 1995.

bilingualism an important characteristic of the Canadian Historical Association, the professional association of French and English-Canadian historians.

Certainly Creighton could not count Falardeau, Maheux and Brunet as intimates; there were no French-Canadian equivalents of Harold Innis or Eugene Forsey in his life. However, we should not underestimate the importance of these professional relationships. Besides indicating the emergence of a Canadian historical profession, they suggest that, for Creighton, French Canada was not entirely an abstraction but that it was a reality in need of accommodation within the CHA. However, as he argued time and again throughout the 1960s and 1970s, there were limits to the extent that the country itself could accommodate French Canada in general, and Quebec in particular.

### III

In the heated atmosphere of the Quiet Revolution, Quebec separatism, and the struggle for institutional and constitutional changes to accommodate Quebec and the French language, an outspoken Creighton found himself the target of national vilification. When he published a piece in *Saturday Night*, or when he gave a public lecture, he was criticized, castigated and condemned by a younger generation of academics and journalists. They ridiculed Creighton as being out-of-touch with new realities. Of course, in some ways they were right: his ideas about Canadian nationalism and Canadian federalism, formed in the 1920s and 1930s, had little currency in the 1960s and 1970s. Still, these "drawing-room-liberals" (to borrow a phrase from Sandra Gwyn<sup>48</sup>) were predisposed to see in Creighton the sins of the past. By condemning him, they set themselves apart as a new generation of enlightened intellectuals. No one, with the exception of Eugene Forsey, bothered to listen to his arguments much less attempt an understanding. My purpose here is not to establish Creighton's scholarship as the stronger or weaker interpretation. Rather, it is to summarize Creighton's arguments, capture the ensuing controversies and reveal the personal anguish he endured .

Although he first conceived the idea in 1958, Creighton did not begin writing what he termed "a re-study of Canadian confederation"<sup>49</sup> until the early 1960s, after the Quiet Revolution had begun and the country had entered what has become a prolonged trial in constitutional re-definition. "It seems silly," Creighton told Eugene Forsey in late 1962, "to be writing a book about Confederation when doubts are freely expressed that the nation will never reach its centenary."<sup>50</sup> (It was precisely because he wrote in this climate of personal and national doubt that Creighton captured, and transformed into an engaging narrative, the very uncertainty that haunted the Fathers of Confederation as they struggled, cajoled and compromised their way to an acceptable constitution.) With the final manuscript *en route* to the publishers in August 1964, Creighton commented

---

48. Sandra Gwyn, "The surly bonds of bigotry," *Saturday Night* (April 1977): 15.

49. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 4, General Correspondence 1958, No. 2, DGC to V.W. Bladen, 19 February 1958.

50. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 26, Correspondence with Eugene Forsey 1944-1964, DGC to Eugene Forsey, 1 December 1962.

on his forthcoming work to his old friend. "The book will be called *The Road to Confederation*," he told Forsey, "and – though this definition may sound a little pompous – it is my contribution to the centenary of Confederation and to the current debate over Canadian Federalism." He then went on to complain about the "intellectual depths to which our 'bicultural' experts have descended," men who ought to know better: "I found that [Senator Donald] Cameron and his ignorant assistant McPhee (?) held a set of fantastic notions about the 'compact' of Confederation; and became both incredulous and indignant when I pointed out these notions were completely false. I hope that my book will put a stop to some of the incredible nonsense that is being talked nowadays about 'agreements' and 'intentions'."<sup>51</sup>

Released a short time later, *The Road to Confederation. The Emergence of Canada: 1863-1867*, was indeed Creighton's statement on what actually happened at Charlotte-town, Quebec and London, and on what was actually created by the Fathers of Confederation. Confederation was not a compact between the French and English. Provincial governments were not co-ordinate with the Dominion government. The national parliament was clearly paramount.

The acceptance of the 'federal principle', against their own political traditions and wishes, was the great concession that the English-speaking delegates at Quebec were prepared to make to French Canada; but they agreed to make it only on the clear understanding that the resulting British American union was to be a strongly centralized federation, a federation radically different from that which helped to precipitate the American Civil War.<sup>52</sup>

Meanwhile, the French language guarantees, and the division of powers which listed property and civil rights as a provincial prerogative, were an expression of the fundamental equanimity of the B.N.A. Act. However, there "was no declaration of general principle that the British American federation was to be a bilingual, or a bicultural, country."<sup>53</sup>

Of course, *The Road to Confederation* did not have Creighton's desired effect – certainly not in Quebec, where Claude Ryan criticized him for minimizing the contract between English and French Canada.<sup>54</sup> His anger and frustration mounting at what he perceived to be a dangerous and misguided willingness to appease Quebec at any cost and to extend official bilingualism across the country, Creighton prepared himself to speak out – in no uncertain terms – against "the inevitable dismemberment of this country – against the will to disintegration and extinction that I encounter everywhere."<sup>55</sup> And so he entered the fray.

---

51. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 26, Correspondence with Eugene Forsey 1944-1964, DGC to Eugene Forsey, 16 August 1964.

52. Donald Creighton, *The Road to Confederation. The Emergence of Canada: 1863-1867* (Toronto, 1964), 145.

53. *Ibid.*, 178.

54. Claude Ryan, "Aux origines de la Confédération," *Le Devoir*, 9 January 1965, 4.

55. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 26, Correspondence with Eugene Forsey 1944-1964, DGC to Eugene Forsey, 31 August 1964.

Bilingualism, biculturalism, Confederation, the B.N.A. Act, his country's most basic institutions: all became focal points for Creighton's passion, anger and insight.

In late 1964 he agreed to sit on the Ontario Advisory Committee on Confederation which was to advise Premier Robarts on matters relating to Canadian federalism.<sup>56</sup> The experience proved an exercise in frustration. Surrounded by people he did not like – some of whom he considered to be mediocrities, at best “second- and third-raters” – and whose views he found ignorant and reprehensible, Creighton maintained a lonely isolation with fellow committee member Eugene Forsey.<sup>57</sup> Together they would roundly condemn the “mugs,” Forsey's word for those who sought the appeasement of Quebec through such muddled notions as two nations, associate state and radical decentralization. Later Creighton would write that it “soon became clear that [he and Forsey] would frequently be in a minority in the committee, sometimes, indeed, a minority of two.”<sup>58</sup> As Forsey recalled, “we fought together against Quebec nationalism.”<sup>59</sup> And yet even Forsey broke with Creighton on at least one occasion – leaving him completely alone – when in the spring of 1966 committee member Alex Brady, a professor in the Department of Political Economy at the University of Toronto, presented a brief calling for a statutory provision that guaranteed and extended French-language instruction in Ontario's secondary schools. While Forsey thought this a wholly reasonable proposal,<sup>60</sup> Creighton stood adamantly opposed. He was roundly condemned. In his own words, “all the other members of the Committee looked down their noses very solemnly and reproachfully.” For his part, Roger Séguin, then an Ottawa lawyer and former Chairman of the Ottawa Separate School Board, erupted in “emotional outburst,” accusing Creighton of advocating assimilation. “I could not help feel,” wrote Creighton, “that he had shown a definite personal hostility to me. And I find this very painful and upsetting.”<sup>61</sup>

---

56. Formally announced on 23 February 1965, the Ontario Advisory Committee on Confederation had eighteen members. Bill Davis disbanded the committee in 1970.

57. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 26, Correspondence with Eugene Forsey 1965-1975, DGC to Eugene Forsey, 26 April 1966.

58. Donald Creighton, “Eugene Forsey: Political Traditionalist, Social Radical,” in Creighton, *The Passionate Observer: Selected Writings*, 205-6.

59. Forsey, *A Life on the Fringe*, 44.

60. “I favour French schooling for French children, where there are enough of them and the parents want it,” Forsey told Creighton. “...I think bilingual schools, or even French schools, within the limits I have suggested, are part of the price of keeping one Canada.” NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 26, Correspondence with Eugene Forsey 1965-1975, Eugene Forsey to DGC, 28 April 1966.

61. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 26, Correspondence with Eugene Forsey 1965-1975, DGC to Eugene Forsey, 26 April 1966. Creighton even considered resignation. “As I say,” he told Forsey, “I have nearly come to the conclusion that I should resign. But we made a pact that neither of us would take this extreme step without informing the other in advance. This I have now done. Will you please let me know what you think? I am a very troubled person.” Forsey encouraged him to persevere. “I should not pay too much attention to Séguin,” he told Creighton. “One just has to budget for a good deal of hypersensitiveness in any minority.” He added, “If the mugs were only a little less muggish, they'd realize how important it is that a viewpoint as widely held as yours should be clearly and forcibly put.” NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 26, Correspondence with Eugene Forsey 1965-1975, Eugene Forsey to DGC, 28 April 1966.



It was around this time that Creighton launched a more public, more vocal campaign to save his country from what he perceived to be its deliberate destruction. On 11 January 1965, the sesquicentennial of Sir John A.'s birth, he gave an address before the Kingston Historical Society detailing Macdonald's federalist vision.<sup>62</sup> In a 12 March 1966 public lecture to the Alumnae Association of University College at the University of Toronto, he condemned the notion of a bicultural compact as an abuse of history. He also added that the best chance for the survival of the French language in North America is within a united Canada.<sup>63</sup> Then, five months later, in September of 1966, Creighton reached a national audience through an adaptation of that lecture in *Saturday Night*. Again he condemned the compact theory of Confederation as a myth and again he concluded that the "Fathers of Confederation reached a settlement which gave the French language the best chance it will ever have on this continent."<sup>64</sup> As he had done two years before, Creighton used the anniversary of Macdonald's birth to pronounce on things constitutional. Before an 11 January 1967 gathering of the Manitoba Historical Society, Creighton expanded on his *Saturday Night* piece.<sup>65</sup> He described the Manitoba Act as a "quick settlement," "an appeasement on the terms demanded by the fanatical emissaries from Red River." It was not the expression of "a solemn commitment to biculturalism." An *ad hoc* settlement, it was an expression of pragmatic expediency imposed on "a community which had not yet had time to develop its real and permanent character." In short, it was a mistake "for which the whole of Canada paid dearly." Moreover, we ought not repeat the same mistake today: "The [Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism] may possibly recommend changes designed to improve the position of the French language and of French-Canadian culture throughout the nation, including the west. These proposals should be judged critically in the light of history...."<sup>66</sup>

This pattern of determined, uncompromising argument continued throughout the 1970s. The final chapter and epilogue of his 1970 synthesis, *Canada's First Century*, read like a dirge. Pessimistic and brooding, Creighton lamented the appeasement of

- 
62. Donald Creighton, "John Alexander Macdonald, The Father of his Country," *Historic Kingston* no. 14 (January 1966): 3-11. For an account of the Kingston celebrations see, David Crane, "The man who revived Sir John A.," *Maclean's* (6 March 1965): 2-3.
63. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 4, General Correspondence 1966, No. 1, Donald Creighton, "1867 and All That," Public Lecture, Alumnae Association of University College, University of Toronto, 12 March 1966. See also Donald Creighton, "The Myth of Biculturalism," in Donald Creighton, *Towards the Discovery of Canada: Selected Essays* (Toronto, 1972).
64. Donald Creighton, "The Myth of Biculturalism or The Great French-Canadian Sales Campaign," *Saturday Night* (September 1966): 39. See also Donald Creighton, "Confederation: The Use and Abuse of History," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 1, 1 (May 1966): 3-11.
65. The *Saturday Night* piece "was, in effect, the first instalment of an historical argument which I concluded in my Winnipeg talk." NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 5, General Correspondence 1967, No. 1, DGC to J. Mackey Hitsman, 24 January 1967.
66. Donald Creighton, "John A. Macdonald, Confederation and the Canadian West," *Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba Transactions* series III, no. 23 (1966-1967): 9-12. Reprinted in Creighton, *Towards the Discovery of Canada: Selected Essays*.

Quebec nationalism on the one hand and the ever-increasing domination of the United States on the other.<sup>67</sup> Speaking before a combined audience of the Empire and Canadian Clubs in the late fall of 1970, he condemned the “savage violence” of the FLQ. He noted that an entire generation of French Canadians were taught, throughout the 1960s, “to disparage, if not to hate, the very word Confederation.” As for the FLQ, “Their crime was that they reached the logical conclusion of their teaching, and acted upon it.”<sup>68</sup> By 1971 Creighton had reached his limits: “I’ve nearly come to the conclusion,” he told Forsey, “that the best thing to do would be to *boot them out*, on our terms, not theirs, and if I had anything to do with it, they would be harsh terms too. They have succeeded in weakening *my nation*.”<sup>69</sup>

From here it is a short step to the hardline position – to what Creighton meant by “harsh terms” – outlined in *Maclean’s* magazine following the Parti Québécois’ 1976 victory. He advised English Canadians to abandon all policies of appeasement and to adopt instead “policies of self-defence and self-preservation.” After all, the very survival of English Canada was at stake. He went on to add that any policy of self-defence must include a very hard negotiating position. Quebec, he cautioned, must not be allowed to dictate the terms of separation. In the event of separation, Quebec will not be entitled to its vast northern territory which was the result of various Acts of Parliament. Not unlike the Panama Canal Zone, there must necessarily be a “protective zone, under Canadian-American management, on both sides of the [St. Lawrence] seaway,” as it is “an essential link between Ontario and the Atlantic provinces.” English Canada “should repeal the Official Languages Act, abolish the office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, and cease to promote bilingualism in the civil service.” And finally, English Canada should dismiss any and all ideas of economic association with an independent Quebec. “There is something peculiarly offensive in the calm assumption of the leaders of the Parti Québécois that Quebec should be able at one and the same time to enjoy all the political liberties of independence and all the economic advantages of union.”<sup>70</sup>

Creighton’s pronouncements propelled him to the centre of controversy. Many Canadians found him a hero, a tough-talking, no nonsense kind of guy, the kind the country needs more of when it comes to Quebec and the future of Canada. After each appearance, and after each publication, Creighton would receive several letters from English Canadians across the country applauding his courage to tell the truth and

67. Donald Creighton, *Canada’s First Century* (Toronto, 1970), 318-56.

68. Donald Creighton, “A dangerous corner into which Canada was driven,” *Globe and Mail*, 17 November 1970, 7.

69. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 26, Correspondence with Eugene Forsey 1965-1975, DGC to Eugene Forsey, 9 May 1971. Italics mine.

70. Donald Creighton, “Beyond the Referendum,” in Donald Creighton, *The Passionate Observer*, 53, 54-55. Published as “No More Concessions,” *Maclean’s* (27 June 1977): 24-27. This piece was translated and published in French as “Finies les concessions!,” *L’Actualité* (October 1977): 6.

encouraging him to speak out more often.<sup>71</sup> Not surprisingly, Creighton attracted the attention of such extremists as Jock Andrew – author of the paranoid diatribe, *Bilingual Today, French Tomorrow: Trudeau's master plan and how it can be stopped*<sup>72</sup> – who sought Creighton's support for an open letter demanding the resignation of Joe Clark, whom Andrew considered no better than Trudeau.<sup>73</sup> But for all the support Creighton received, the criticism and vilification proved infinitely greater as he became the subject of editorials, columns, opinion pieces and academic articles. Claude Ryan repeatedly challenged Creighton's arguments. In response to his article in *Saturday Night*, Ryan refuted his interpretation of Confederation, not with the arguments of Henri Bourassa, Thomas Chapais or André Laurendeau, but with the argument of Ramsay Cook as outlined in *Canada and the French-Canadian Question*, specifically his essay, "The Meaning of Confederation."<sup>74</sup> Tim Creery, a journalist with Southam News Services, maintained that Creighton's Manitoba speech was "an argument against cultural equality throughout this country. For French-speaking Quebecers, it is an argument for secession...."<sup>75</sup> The *Ottawa Citizen's* editorial was entitled, "Come off it Professor."<sup>76</sup> And in a lengthy article in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, Cornelius Jaenen, then a junior professor at United College in Winnipeg, today professor emeritus at the University of Ottawa, blasted Creighton. He stated that, as an "'imperialist-nationalist' Tory interpreter," Creighton maintained an outdated understanding of Quebec, still seeing it as "an inward-looking, supposedly spiritually-oriented, agrarian, passive, church-dominated society." He even accused the profession's most eminent member of willfully committing the profession's worst sin: the careful selection of facts "to buttress a preconceived thesis." For example, he charged Creighton, "who views history from a Toronto bastion," with willfully distorting the significance of the second Bill of Rights – drafted on 25 January 1870 – and its provisions for bilingualism in Manitoba.<sup>77</sup> Michel Brunet agreed with Jaenen. In a private letter, Brunet told Jaenen

---

71. See for example, NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 5, General Correspondence 1966, No. 4 for a series of letters from Canadians urging Creighton to carry on the fight against bilingualism and biculturalism. See also "Responding to The Creighton Solution, from 'clarion call' to 'paranoia'," *Maclean's* (25 July 1977): 10-11.

72. J.V. Andrew, *Bilingual Today, French Tomorrow: Trudeau's master plan and how it can be stopped* (Richmond Hill, 1977).

73. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 29, General Correspondence 1977, Jock Andrew to DGC, 27 August 1977. There is no record of a response.

74. Claude Ryan, "Notes sur un article récent (et malheureux) du professeur Donald Creighton," *Le Devoir*, 17 September 1966, 4. See also Séraphin Marion, "Péchés d'omission d'un historien canadien" (Ottawa, 1966). Marion charges Creighton with, among other things, ignoring the military contributions of Colonel de Salaberry at Chateauguay while emphasizing the role of General Brock at Queenston Heights. He also argues that Confederation was a cultural compact.

75. See Tim Creery, "Historian's choice plea for secession," *Ottawa Citizen*, 18 January 1967, p.7.

76. See "Come off it Professor," *Ottawa Citizen*, 17 January 1967, p.6.

77. Cornelius Jaenen, "Professor's Clash Over Confederation," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 14 January 1967, p.8. See also a letter in defence of Creighton from Peyton Lyon, "Unjustified Diatribe," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 2 February 1967, p.19. For Jaenen's more detailed critique of

that he thought Creighton harboured “une conception statique de l’histoire du Canada” and that his reaction was that of a “nationaliste raciste anglo-saxon.” Brunet even wondered if Creighton was not, in fact, suffering from senility.<sup>78</sup>

Creighton was livid. He called the *Citizen* editorial, and the op-ed piece by Tim Creery, examples of “vulgar and vicious journalism.”<sup>79</sup> However, he did not write to the *Citizen* in complaint: “If I ever began replying to these critics it would take more time than I am prepared to spend. And I frankly do not believe that a journalist or a newspaper editor deserves a reply from me on such a matter.”<sup>80</sup> But Cornelius Jaenen was altogether another matter. Creighton felt that Jaenen had deliberately and unfairly misrepresented him. In a letter to the editor of the *Winnipeg Free Press* he simply dismissed Jaenen’s article as “feeble and muddled.” Still, he went to great lengths to demonstrate how Jaenen had misrepresented his arguments. Not only did Creighton mention the second “List of Rights,” he did so precisely “because I wished to place all the relevant facts before my audience, whether or not they strengthened my argument.” According to Creighton it was Jaenen, not he, who practised selective history.

Professor Creighton, he writes, “does not see French Canadians as participants and in his own words he could not care less whether they participate or not.”

Participate in what? Professor Jaenen carefully leaves this vague and lets his readers infer that I am denying French Canadians their place in Canada or their part in Confederation. Without giving the context, or explaining the source, he has lifted a remark which I made in a television or radio broadcast, when I was asked what I thought of Quebec’s possible refusal to join in the celebrations, if Sir John A. Macdonald’s birthday were made a national holiday. There is a look of daring expertise about this particular piece of verbal jugglery which suggests intensive training and long practice.<sup>81</sup>

So furious was Creighton that he even threatened Jaenen with a law suit. In the end, however, he neither sent the letter nor sought legal redress. Tired of the public abuse, he did not want to “prolong controversy.”<sup>82</sup>

---

Creighton see “Creighton, Confederation & Conspiracy,” *Canadian Dimension* (May-June 1967): 22-25.

78. Michel Brunet to Cornelius Jaenen, 26 January 1967. This letter is in the possession of Cornelius Jaenen. I thank him for sharing it with me.
79. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 5, General Correspondence 1967, No. 1, DGC to Shane MacKay, Executive Editor, *Winnipeg Free Press*, 28 February 1967.
80. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 5, General Correspondence 1967, No. 1, DGC to Harold Leech, Ottawa, 31 January 1967.
81. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 30, Manitoba Historical Society, DGC to The Editor, *Winnipeg Free Press*, 19 January 1967.
82. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 5, General Correspondence 1967, No. 1, DGC to Shane MacKay, Executive Editor, *Winnipeg Free Press*, 14 February 1967. Three weeks later W.D. Smith, of the History Department at the University of Manitoba, invited Creighton to the university in the Fall. Still smarting, Creighton declined. “Frankly I was a little uncertain after the row of last January whether it would be advisable for me to return to Manitoba so early. I do not think that I am prepared to have anything to do with Jaenen. He garbled

Public controversy and criticism continued nevertheless. While ruminating on the fallout in English Canada from the October Crisis, Ryan accused Creighton of poor scholarship (for not keeping abreast of current historiography) and of wishing to keep French Canada confined (and therefore only able to survive as a folklore).<sup>83</sup> Mel Watkins felt that he "put down" Quebec and that his Toronto-centred perspective (a waspish attitude which "gave short shrift to Quebecers, hinterlanders and immigrants") was anachronistic.<sup>84</sup> Patrick Allen, a Quebec nationalist and then treasurer of La Ligue d'Action Nationale, maintained that it was Quebec, not English Canada, that for the last one hundred years had been making concessions under pressure from Ottawa.<sup>85</sup> Three years later, shortly after Creighton's death, Allen again attacked him, this time venomously: "Le Canada français apprit à le connaître comme partisan extrême, raciste et même malhonnête."<sup>86</sup>

However, there were two incidents in particular that deeply hurt Creighton. The first was a public statement made by Bill Morton. In a 1966 foreword to Solange Chaput Rolland's book, *My Country, Canada or Quebec*, Morton called for an openmindedness between French and English Canada.

Is it not also, for English Canada to deny French Canada a full and free role within Canada, to deny the very essence of Canadian national aspirations by invoking cultural continentalism, the fact that North America speaks English. This Professor D.G. Creighton has just done, and distorted by the act a lifetime of devotion to the understanding of Canada.<sup>87</sup>

Not unlike Shakespeare's Caesar, Creighton's response was one of disbelief and betrayal: Et tu, Brute. After all, he and Morton were old friends, they had worked together on many common projects, and while friends may have differences of opinion they do not

---

the remarks I made in Winnipeg so unscrupulously and misrepresented me so badly that I think I have had enough...I believe in rational discussion and if I cannot take part in my own way in the national debate now going on in Canada without stirring up a hornet's nest of vilification and abuse then I really do not think I want another such painful experience." NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 5, General Correspondence 1967, No. 1, DGC to W.D. Smith, 7 March 1967.

83. Claude Ryan, "Les retombées de la crise d'octobre au Canada anglais 1) Le retour d'un rêve qu'on croyait mort," *Le Devoir*, 23 November 1970, 4; Claude Ryan, "Les retombées de la crise d'octobre au Canada anglais 2.—Le vrai visage d'un certain nationalisme 'canadienne'," *Le Devoir*, 24 November 1970, 4.
84. Mel Watkins, "The Auto Pact, Donald Creighton, and some good late winter reads," *This Magazine* (March 1979): 40-41.
85. Patrick Allen, "Au fil de l'actualité," *L'Action Nationale* 67, 2 (October 1977): 156.
86. Patrick Allen, "Au fil de l'actualité," *L'Action Nationale* 69, 7 (March 1980): 576. See also Pierre Trépannier, "Marcel Trudel et Donald Creighton," *L'Action Nationale* 69, 9 (May 1980): 707-715.
87. Solange Chaput Rolland, *My Country, Canada or Quebec*, foreword by W.L. Morton (Toronto, 1966), xi.

take public shots at each other. Confiding to Eugene Forsey, who agreed that Morton's reference was "completely *uncalled for*,"<sup>88</sup> Creighton wrote: "Morton himself may finally realize that he has done something which, in a friendship, is almost unforgettable and unforgivable. I am not sure that our relationship will ever be quite the same again...I felt he had dealt me a wounding blow, and I haven't recovered from it yet."<sup>89</sup> And on an undated scrap of paper bearing his handwriting, Creighton condemned the "mugs" who would give away the store to appease Quebec. "There is a dreadful air of moral superiority and spiritual arrogance about these people. Bill Morton included."<sup>90</sup> With the curative power of time, their friendship eventually healed. Indeed, by 1977 Morton too had been worn down by Quebec's insistent demands and he found himself agreeing with Creighton. "May I say," he wrote his friend and colleague, "how much I rejoice at your speaking out as you did in the current Maclean's?"

It was a splendid effort, and, while you will no doubt be much abused, I hope you may harden the tone of the debate. The present public relations gabble reduces one to despair...I will support you, except where, as you know, I cannot, on the matter of language. Whatever happens, Franco-Ontarians and Acadians will remain. But all we want of an independent Quebec, reduced to its historical bounds, is free movement of persons and goods across it and no menace to our security.<sup>91</sup>

The second incident involved Ralph Heintzman and the *Canadian Historical Review*. Upon finishing *Canada's First Century*, Heintzman wrote a paper in an effort to organize his thoughts on the question of Confederation, bilingualism and biculturalism. A history graduate student at the University of Toronto, he never intended to publish his essay. But a copy made its way into the hands of Craig Brown, who was editor of the *CHR* at the time. Impressed with its argument, he recommended that Heintzman submit it for publication. Obviously nervous – he was a graduate student and Creighton was, well, Creighton – he sought his former professor's counsel.<sup>92</sup> Always one to encourage his students, Creighton responded:

It seems to me an interesting and well written piece of work, and I certainly think you should accept Craig Brown's invitation to print it in the CHR....I can't help feel that the article should stand as it is, as a considered expression of your point of view, and that you should not hedge or qualify it as a result of my suggestions....I have my own views of course, but I don't think I used my seminars to teach historical dogmas. And

---

88. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 26, Correspondence with Eugene Forsey 1965-1975, Eugene Forsey to DGC, 2 March 1967.

89. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 26, Correspondence with Eugene Forsey 1965-1975, DGC to Eugene Forsey, 17 April 1967.

90. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 26, Correspondence with Eugene Forsey 1965-1975.

91. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 29, General Correspondence 1977, W.L. Morton to DGC, 7 July 1977.

92. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 29, General Correspondence 1970, No. 2, Ralph Heintzman to DGC, 17 November 1970.

I was always pleased when a student applied a new approach or suggested a fresh interpretation or gave other evidence that he had a mind of his own.<sup>93</sup>

In September 1971 the *CHR* published "The Spirit of Confederation: Professor Creighton, Biculturalism, and the Use of History." Naturally, Creighton did not agree with the argument. His entire career was based on the exact opposite: there was never any cultural compact to Confederation; Confederation was a political union. Forsey also disagreed with "Master Heintzman."<sup>94</sup> However, it was not the argument that disturbed Creighton. History is interpretation: that he understood. What angered Creighton – what hurt him profoundly – was the idea that the *Canadian Historical Review*, the country's most important journal of history, had received, but was suppressing, a rejoinder to Heintzman. He felt that the profession had turned its collective back on him. And he let it be known – quietly – that he was upset, that he felt abandoned. When word reached Craig Brown – who felt his own professional reputation impugned by the charge of suppression – he immediately fired off a strong letter to Creighton, assuring him that he would never suppress an article. The simple fact was that he had yet to receive an *acceptable* article.<sup>95</sup> Shocked and not a little hurt by the tone of Brown's letter, Creighton attempted to clarify his position: "I thought the Heintzman article a disingenuous piece of special pleading which badly deserved an answer. I obviously could not reply myself, but I hoped and expected someone among my colleagues and students would. I could not believe that they would let such an attack by a graduate student go unanswered." When no response appeared, "I began to wonder whether my colleagues and students really believed that the Heintzman article was a true bill and that no answer was possible. This thought was hard to bear."<sup>96</sup> Eventually the article in question, the article that Creighton believed the *CHR* to have suppressed, appeared in the *Journal of*

---

93. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 29, General Correspondence 1970, No. 2, DGC to Ralph Heintzman, n.d. This quotation comes from a handwritten copy of a letter to Heintzman, not the original.

94. Forsey referred to Heintzman as Master Heintzman in a letter to DGC. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, vol. 26, Correspondence with Eugene Forsey 1965-1975, Eugene Forsey to DGC, 20 October 1971. Two weeks prior to this letter Forsey had written, "I have just got, and am reading, Heintzman's counter-attack. I suppose you will answer him; but I've great mind to have a whack myself. Even in the first few pages there are some notions which outdo any previous 'mug' statements for sheer nonsense. I am especially entertained by the idea that a contracting party's 'impression' of what's in a contract, or his 'expectation' of what he'll get out of it, form *part* of the *contract*." NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 26, Correspondence with Eugene Forsey 1965-1975, Eugene Forsey to DGC, 4 October 1971. As late as March 1974 Forsey still intended to write a response to Heintzman. He never did. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 26, Correspondence with Eugene Forsey 1965-1975, Eugene Forsey to DGC, 22 March 1974.

95. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 29, General Correspondence 1972, Craig Brown to DGC, 4 December 1972.

96. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 29, General Correspondence 1972, DGC to Craig Brown, 11 December 1972. This quotation comes from a handwritten copy of a letter to Brown, not the original.

*Canadian Studies*. In it, D.J. Hall refuted Heintzman and the bicultural compact theory of Confederation. However, and this is important, Hall also made the case for a greater generosity of spirit on the part of English Canada, something which Creighton steadfastly refused.<sup>97</sup>

The question now becomes: why was Creighton so steadfast? Recall his letter to Forsey in which he decided that perhaps the best course of action would be to boot the French out, on our terms, not theirs. After all, he added, "They have succeeded in weakening my nation."<sup>98</sup> His argument reveals a strong, personal attachment to his idea of Canada, it exposes his enormous anxieties and uncompromising stance. His Canada, the imagined community from which he derived his sense of identity and belonging, was undergoing a process of pronounced re-imagination. No longer imagined as a British nation with a French minority, Canada was in the 1960s re-imagined as a bilingual, bicultural, and later multicultural, nation.<sup>99</sup> Whereas Bill Morton had accepted the end of British Canada as an idea, Creighton could not.<sup>100</sup> The work of British political psychologist William Bloom helps understand Creighton's state of mind in the 1960s and 1970s. In his 1990 book, *Personal Identity, National Identity and International Relations*, Bloom asks the deceptively simple question, "why do individuals and mass national populations give their loyalty to the nation-state?" For Bloom the answer lies in identification theory.

In order to achieve psychological security, every individual possesses an inherent drive to internalise – to identify with – the behavior, mores and attitudes of significant figures in his/her social environment; i.e. people actively seek identity. Moreover, every human being has an inherent drive to enhance and to protect the identifications he or she has made; i.e. people actively seek to enhance and protect identity.

In other words, Creighton's determined effort to "bolster and defend" his national identity was the result of a dynamic psychological imperative inherent in all of us as we "actively seek to identify in order to achieve psychological security."<sup>101</sup>

---

97. D.J. Hall, "'The Spirit of Confederation': Ralph Heintzman, Professor Creighton, and the bicultural compact theory," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 9: 4 (November 1974): 24-42.

98. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 26, Correspondence with Eugene Forsey 1965-1975, DGC to Eugene Forsey, 9 May 1971.

99. For example, Creighton opposed Canada's new flag – "with its simple, uninspiring pattern and insipid colour combination" – because it marked a "deliberate rejection of Canada's history and its British and French legacies." In a statement notable for its cultural superiority bordering on racism, Creighton added that the new flag "bore a disturbingly close resemblance to the flag of a new 'instant' African nation, a nation without a past, and with a highly uncertain future." His comments to Charles Taylor about Black Africans are similarly offensive. Donald Creighton, *The Story of Canada* (Toronto, revised edition, 1971), 291; Creighton, *Canada's First Century*, 337; Taylor, *Radical Tories*, 23-24.

100. Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History*, 254.

101. William Bloom, *Personal Identity, National Identity and International Relations* (Cambridge, 1990), 23, 37, 53.



When this psychological imperative combined with an already sensitive, arrogant and, by the late 1960s, paranoid personality, the result was both extreme and hostile. As his world crashed down around him, as he lost his authority and position within his profession and his country, Creighton struggled to defend his identity as a British Canadian, to defend *his* nation. His daughter painted a very vivid, very human portrait of him as a frustrated, bitter old man, prone to fits of intemperate rage because he was unable to make the country – his country – bend to his will. In her short story, “My Father Took a Cake to France,” Cynthia Flood captured her father’s frustration:

Half a century later, my father will be torn with rage at the construction of the new airport in Quebec: Mirabel. Storming, bullying, rasping, erect at the end of his long shining dinner table...he will harangue friends and family into impotent seething submission as he spits out his hatred of the French-Canadians, the damned frogs with their hands in the till, spits it out over the well-done roast beef he is simultaneously and perfectly carving.<sup>102</sup>

#### IV

With the exception of Eugene Forsey, no one bothered to listen to Creighton. Rather, they heard what they wanted to hear. Jock Andrew saw in Creighton a potential ally for his deranged fantasies about Trudeau’s master plan to turn all of Canada into a French-speaking country. Roger Séguin heard the voice of Lord Durham’s reincarnation. Tim Creery heard an intolerance which he felt encouraged Quebec separation. And Michel Brunet heard the utterances of a senile racist. What, then, was Creighton saying that provoked such controversy?

First and foremost, Creighton did not believe that the British North America Act was a compact between the French and the English. There was never any commitment made to French Canada at the time of Confederation for a bilingual or bicultural country. Moreover, the original language guarantees and the original division of powers were both fair and just. So it was that, when he heard throughout the 1960s and 1970s statements about the cultural compact of Confederation, he became angry. And that anger was taken for intolerance. However, he was attacking neither French Canada nor Quebec. Rather, he was defending the truth as he understood it. He was, after all, a historian. And as a historian, he believed in the possibility of historical truth. While he could tolerate differences of interpretation, he could not abide what he saw as outright fabrication, especially when that fabrication was being used to justify radical changes to the primary document of his country, the British North America Act. Two nations, associate state, special status: these were all notions Creighton found big-hearted, soft-headed, rooted in bad history and ultimately dangerous to his country. On this point he was not alone. Other members of the historical profession, including Arthur Lower, Frank Underhill, Bill Morton and Ramsay Cook, likewise argued against the two nations thesis.<sup>103</sup>

102. Cynthia Flood, *My Father Took a Cake to France* (Vancouver, 1992), 50.

103. Joseph Levitt, *A Vision Beyond Reach: A Century of Images of Canadian Destiny* (Ottawa, 1982), 163-4.

For Creighton, these notions were dangerous because they threatened to weaken his country precisely when it needed a concerted and concentrated effort to confront the greatest challenge in its history – the threat of American domination. By the 1960s, Creighton's distrust of all things American had reached its zenith. It distorted his view of history (there was never a fork in the road, one path leading to the United States, the other to national independence<sup>104</sup>) and it made him prone to spiteful contempt ("I have an incredible dislike and hatred of the United States. I've always had it. I never met one I liked."<sup>105</sup>) Although formulaic and predictable, he even wrote a novel dealing with America's takeover of the Canadian economy.<sup>106</sup> To meet the challenge of continentalism, Creighton advocated a centralized federalism, the very federalism originally envisioned by the Fathers of Confederation and subsequently destroyed by Oliver Mowat and the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council.

At the very least, Creighton was consistent: he had been advocating a strong central government within a centralized federalism since the 1930s. In 1959 he confirmed his reputation as a Commonwealth scholar and respected expert on federalism when John Diefenbaker recommended his appointment to the Advisory Commission on the Review of the Constitution of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, better known as the Monckton Commission. In a 1960 brief to the Secretary-General of the Commission, Creighton offered a general theory of federalism. He noted that in modern societies it is inevitable that respective jurisdictions will overlap, or in his words, "meet and mingle." However, it is imperative that "any tendencies [federal and state governments] may show, as antonomous [sic] governments, of becoming rival centres of power, must be resisted and overcome. The success of their joint enterprise depends largely upon co-operation."<sup>107</sup> In the Canadian example he saw not only Quebec, but Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia as well,<sup>108</sup> becoming rival centres of power. This necessarily weakened the country as a whole in its joint enterprise of resisting the United States. In his brief to the Special Joint Committee of the Senate and of the House of Commons on the Constitution of Canada, Creighton said very honestly:

This is why I am so sorry, so sad, about the present division in the country, because I am sure that it plays into the hands of these continental forces.

I think we can save two cultures inside one nation. I am sure we cannot save two nations, and I think it very unlikely that we can save 10 quarrelling provinces.<sup>109</sup>

---

104. Donald Creighton, *The Forked Road: Canada 1939-1957* (Toronto, 1976). For a critique see J.L. Granatstein, *How Britain's Weakness Forced Canada into the Arms of the United States* (Toronto, 1989).

105. Quote in Taylor, *Radical Tories*, 23.

106. Donald Creighton, *Takeover!* (Toronto, 1978).

107. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 22, The Monckton Advisory Commission 1960, itineraries, memoranda, Donald Creighton, "Memorandum for the Secretary-General," n.d.

108. Eleanor Cook and Ramsay Cook, eds., *The Craft of History* (Toronto, 1973), 143; see also Creighton, *Canada's First Century*, 322.

109. Canada. Parliament, Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence of the Special Joint Committee of the Senate and of the House of Commons on the Constitution of Canada, 6 April 1971, 64:49.

This, then, is the voice of a Canadian nationalist who saw a place in his country for both French and English Canadians but who was, at the same time, deeply worried about his country's continued existence. His proposed solution to the country's dilemma: "I would think the best thing we can possibly do is to get back as closely as we can to the original constitution." However, he also knew that this was impossible: "I know that this will not in the slightest be acceptable to any of you practically but that is my view."<sup>110</sup>

Aside from the very practical consideration of American imperialism, Creighton resisted radical changes to the Constitution for philosophical reasons. He was very much a Burkean conservative. And like Edmund Burke, he instinctively distrusted anything revolutionary. Revolution had only the capacity to destroy, not to create. Thus Creighton always referred to the Quiet Revolution as the 'so-called Quiet Revolution' precisely because there was nothing particularly quiet about it. These Quiet Revolutionaries and their allies in English Canada sought to alter radically his country, with a complete disregard for its history. Moreover, the present generation had no right to repudiate the past. It was merely steward to the legacy that past generations had bequeathed to future generations. Creighton similarly believed that a country's institutions (constitutional monarchy, parliamentary government and common law) were the sum of its collective experience, the repositories of its traditions and values, its very essence. To start redesigning Canada's constitution within a revolutionary spirit, as if it were merely "a piece of antiquated mid-Victorian plumbing," would be disastrous.<sup>111</sup> Creighton did not believe the constitution to be "a relic of the past" or "a petrified inheritance."<sup>112</sup> Rather,

[a] constitution is a living creation which develops slowly according to the changing circumstances of its history, but the experience which the Canadian constitution is undergoing can no longer be regarded it seems to me as development or growth, for it has ended in almost total change, and in increasing disintegration.<sup>113</sup>

He therefore found astounding (and terrifying) the extent to which some "prominent Canadians" were prepared to alter the constitution: the abolition of the monarchy and the adoption of various American constitutional and political devices "including the congressional committee system, the Presidential Executive, the Bill of Rights or the Senate with special powers." He could not believe the ignorance of those who "described the terms 'Queen', 'Queen's', 'Crown' and 'Royal' as mere tags and labels."<sup>114</sup> A country, he warned, that neglects or repudiates its past is a country with a very doubtful future indeed.<sup>115</sup>

After his appearance before the Special Joint Committee on the Constitution in his view a grand waste of his time and energy), he wrote Forsey a long letter. Among other

---

110. *Ibid.*, 64:45.

111. *Ibid.*, 64:33.

112. *Ibid.*, 64:53.

113. *Ibid.*, 64:40.

114. *Ibid.*, 64:39.

115. *Ibid.*, 64:35.

complaints, he thought the questions from MPs Pierre De Bané and Marcel Prud'homme "simply incredible." "I barely prevented myself from saying at one point: 'What, in God's name, has this got to do with the Constitution of Canada.' Their maniacal obsession with language – to the exclusion of everything else under the sun – has virtually made me a separatist."<sup>116</sup> A member of the majority, he could not understand the profound significance of language, the equation of language with culture and, ultimately, with survival. He thought American imperialism and the forces of continentalism to be far more urgent. Furthermore, he truly believed that the best chance for the survival of the French language lay within a strong, united Canada. The survival of Canada would guarantee the survival of French Canada. Accordingly, Canada ought to be the focus of attention.

Nevertheless, Eugene Forsey, Bill Morton and Cornelius Jaenen were correct on at least one point. Canadians should not reject bilingualism as public policy simply because the B.N.A. Act did not constitute either official bilingualism or bilingualism in Ontario. Creighton disagreed, not because he was a reactionary who hated the idea of French on his cereal boxes, but because he was in this respect a classic liberal. A Burkean conservative on the question of the constitution, he took a classically liberal position on the question of bilingualism in Ontario's secondary schools. To Roger Séguin, Alex Brady and the other members of the Ontario Advisory Committee on Confederation he presented an interesting – if unconvincing – argument.

Secondary schools are an important stage further away from home, and closer to society, in which a livelihood must be won. A French taught secondary school education might therefore prejudice him in the activities of a province which is overwhelmingly English-speaking. He might very possibly become a second class citizen.<sup>117</sup>

In a handwritten manuscript he elaborated. If bilingualism in Ontario is extended it will impair Franco-Ontarians in their speaking of "fluent and idiomatic" English and therefore prejudice their opportunities in the Ontario labour market.<sup>118</sup> In other words, encouraging particularist loyalties will prevent some Ontario citizens from taking advantage of the liberal ideal of universal equal opportunity. The very people bilingualism sought to protect would, in the long run, be its ironic victims. Franco-Ontarians would be a state-created, low-income ghetto. Confusing equality of treatment with sameness of treatment, this liberalism is not unlike the liberalism that informed the Trudeau Government's 1969 *White Paper on Indian Policy*. In it, the Government recommended that the British North America Act be amended to erase the legal and constitutional distinction between Native peoples and other Canadians, that the Indian Act be repealed

---

116. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 26, Correspondence with Eugene Forsey 1965-1975, DGC to Eugene Forsey, 9 May 1971.

117. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 26, Correspondence with Eugene Forsey 1965-1975, DGC to Eugene Forsey, 26 April 1966. Emphasis mine.

118. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 15, MSS 1960s, Donald Creighton, "The Dominance of English in Ontario," manuscript, n.d.

and that the Indian Affairs Branch be dismantled.<sup>119</sup> According to the *White Paper*, by ending special status for Native peoples, and by treating Native peoples like all other Canadians, Native peoples would come to enjoy equality of opportunity. Because ending special status in the legal context promised assimilation in the living context, Native peoples successfully resisted the *White Paper's* implementation. It was this aspect of classical liberalism – its assimilationist thrust – that Creighton failed to comprehend. Indeed, in the Franco-Ontarian case, he noted that over one third of the community had, over the decades, ceased to speak French because they “found it to [their] advantage to speak English.”<sup>120</sup> In his mind, it was not a question of assimilation; rather, it was a question of rational, self-conscious choice. Creighton also had reservations about the extension of bilingualism into the federal civil service, again because it threatened the ideal of equality of opportunity. On the one hand, he agreed that every effort should be made to increase the percentage of Francophone civil servants. On the other hand, he questioned the wisdom of teaching French to Anglophone civil servants, of rewarding those who are successful and penalizing those who are not.<sup>121</sup>

At the heart of Creighton's argument lay the commitment to the clear separation of public and private that is central to liberalism.<sup>122</sup> In the public realm, the state should be neutral, it should be tolerant of diversity,<sup>123</sup> and it should create the conditions in which all citizens regardless of race, colour or creed can enjoy equal rights and opportunities. Bilingualism in Ontario's secondary schools prejudiced Franco-Ontarians in the long run, while bilingualism in the federal civil service discriminated against Anglophones. However, in the private realm citizens could speak whatever language, practise whatever religion and celebrate whatever culture they wanted. Hence, he also resisted appeals to culture and ethnicity which he thought dominated the national unity debate. In *Canada's First Century*, he worried aloud about the false assumption “that ethnic and cultural values ought to be considered basic in Canadian Confederation,”

---

119. Sally M. Weaver, *Making Canadian Indian Policy: The Hidden Agenda 1968-1970* (Toronto, 1981), 55.

120. NA, The Donald Creighton Papers, Vol. 15, MSS 1960s, Donald Creighton, “The Dominance of English in Ontario,” manuscript, n.d.

121. Canada. Parliament, Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence of the Special Joint Committee of the Senate and of the House of Commons on the Constitution of Canada, 6 April 1971, 64:56-64:57.

122. Unlike George Grant, Creighton supported a liberalized abortion law. The most common defence of abortion is a liberal defence; i.e., the autonomy of the individual to decide on matters concerning her private welfare. See Robertson, “The man who invented Canada,” 23.

123. The ideal of toleration espoused by John Locke in the seventeenth century, although originally designed to protect religious and political dissidence, has given rise to, and is necessary for, the maintenance of individual rights and liberties. Toleration on the part of the state is necessary to its remaining neutral on questions of religion, ethnicity and culture, and on questions of what constitutes “the good.” For a discussion of toleration and its contemporary importance see James Tully's introduction to John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (Indianapolis, 1983).

and about “the new dominance of ethnic values in Canadian domestic politics.”<sup>124</sup> As a historian, he knew that “the central spiritual dichotomy” of Canadian history was cultural dualism; but he also knew that appeals to ethnic identities had only ever worked to tear Canada apart. And as a classic liberal, he instinctively knew that the public realm ought to be tolerant and impartial. As he told the Special Joint Committee on the Constitution: “...this country has always been extremely tolerant of varieties of religious, cultural, social beliefs and customs, and I think we come by this very honestly. We get it from the U.K., one among many things we get from there.”<sup>125</sup> Only in this spirit, he believed, the spirit of tolerance (read neutrality) and civic (not ethnic) attachment to the state, would Canada survive.

## V

After visiting Creighton at his home in June 1979, Bill Morton dropped Forsey a note. The news was not good. Donald was dying.

While [at Trent University] we went over to Brooklyn [sic, Brooklin] to see Luella and Donald. She is well and firmly in charge, but hs [sic, he] is in a bad way. He showed good spirits and brightened considerably during our visit, but he told me privately of his condition. We must, I judge, be prepared for the worst before long. Certainly he is miserable with the treatment he has to undergo, and needs cheering up. I am sure that your letter brightened his day.<sup>126</sup>

Donald Creighton died six months later. Though largely remembered, in his own words, “as a pessimist, a bigot, and a violent Tory partisan,” he was infinitely more complex. When his career is studied in its entirety we find a historian who relied on a host of stereotypes – some negative, others positive – to describe and to explain French Canada. We also see a *bonne entente* nationalist who believed in the importance of mutual understanding and elite accommodation between French and English Canadians, and who, as President of the CHA, worked to include French Canadian scholars within the country’s professional association of historians. However, the Quiet Revolution and separatist nationalism confused him: modern Quebec did not conform to his outdated assumptions. Unable to make sense of Quebec, and feeling his nation to be under attack, he lashed out. The result was really very sad. However, his pronouncements, both public and private, were not simple rants. As a Canadian nationalist, Creighton interpreted the devolution of power to the provinces as playing into the

---

124 Creighton, *Canada's First Century*, 331, 356.

125 Canada. Parliament, Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence of the Special Joint Committee of the Senate and of the House of Commons on the Constitution of Canada, 6 April 1971, 64:51. J.M.S. Careless shared this sentiment. In 1975 he argued that tolerance and acceptance of diversity was one of the defining elements of the British-Canadian heritage. See “‘Waspishness’ and Multiculture in Canada,” in *Careless at Work*, ed. J.M.S. Careless (Toronto, 1990).

126. NA, The Eugene Forsey Papers, MG 30 A25, Vol. 25, No. 17, William Morton to Eugene Forsey, 8 June 1979.

hands of American imperialism. A Burkean conservative, he did not think that the constitution could simply be torn apart and rewritten afresh. And finally, when he argued that bilingualism threatened the equal opportunity of Franco-Ontarians he embraced a liberalism similar to that informing the 1969 *White Paper on Indian Policy* .

In the end, Creighton must be understood as he himself tried to understand past actors: as the unique product of character and circumstance.