

## **From Bosom to Bony Lap**

Norman Hillmer

Volume 11, numéro 1, autumn 1981

URI : [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad11\\_1rv08](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad11_1rv08)

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

### Éditeur(s)

The Department of History of the University of New Brunswick

### ISSN

0044-5851 (imprimé)

1712-7432 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

### Citer ce document

Hillmer, N. (1981). From Bosom to Bony Lap. *Acadiensis*, 11(1), 172–179.

## From Bosom to Bony Lap

Not so long ago, in the midst of the modest celebrations of the 100th anniversary of Mackenzie King's birth, Charles Lynch lamented the rehabilitation of "a compromiser, an appeaser, a sort of fat Neville Chamberlain, with guile". King had achieved longevity through policies of caution and evasion. He had gained autonomy at the expense of independence, transferring us "from the bosom of the British mother onto the bony lap of the American uncle".<sup>1</sup> The movement from British colony to American satellite, with only the briefest spell in the happy state of nationhood, is a well-worn and persistent national theme. Studies of the Canadian-American relationship convey a sometimes lurid picture of inequality, missed opportunity, dependence, subservience: *Partner to Behemoth; The Star-Spangled Beaver; Continental Waterboy; Silent Surrender; Snow Job; The Forked Road; Dominance and Dependency*. Epithets such as "imperialist" and "continentalist" become easy substitutes for analysis.

The serious historical literature does not match the scope and importance of Canadian-American relations in the nation's life and politics. Before 1945, it is true, the field was briefly a vital and vibrant one. H.L. Keenleyside's *Canada and the United States: Some Aspects of their Historical Relations*, published in the late 1920s, was a study of bilateral diplomacy, and of other things as well. It anticipated the wide spectrum of concerns taken up by the twenty-five volume series on Canadian-American relations sponsored by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and published in the years from 1936 to 1945. With Canada's involvement in the Second World War the continental approach came under siege. Some of the Carnegie volumes themselves showed that Canadian historiography was striking out in new, more nationally-minded directions. J.B. Brebner's powerful and persuasive *North Atlantic Triangle*, published in 1945 as the capstone of the Carnegie effort, was a reassertion of the importance of the imperial dimension in national development.<sup>2</sup> Just as (and doubtless partly because) the American influence in Canada was becoming overwhelming, historians turned away from Canadian-American studies. The subject became the preserve of the political scientists, who have produced most of the best work in the field — historical and contemporary — in the years since the war. A recent example is Neil A. Swainson's monumental *Conflict Over the Columbia: The Canadian Background to an Historic Treaty* (Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979), a painstaking, if very difficult to read, case study in the diplomacy of that new triangle in Canadian foreign policy — Ottawa, a foreign capital and the provinces.

1 *The Citizen* (Ottawa), 18 December 1974.

2 Carl C. Berger, "Internationalism, Continentalism, and the Writing of History: Comments on the Carnegie Series on the Relations of Canada and the United States", in Richard A. Preston, ed., *The Influence of the United States on Canadian Development: Eleven Case Studies* (Durham, N.C., 1972), pp. 36, 50-54 and *passim*.

The problem remains. The historical literature lacks breadth, depth and variety. There are huge gaps in chronology, subject matter and approach. There has been no systematic treatment of the relationship since Gerald S. Brown's 1952 revision of Keenleyside's survey. All of the books reviewed in this article are relevant to the study of Canadian-American history; all make a contribution. But the majority are not *about* Canadian-American relations. The literature, moreover, is haunted by the imbalance and inequalities of the relationship itself. Americans scarcely notice Canada, much less write about it; Canadians often seem to notice little else. "Middle power or satellite?" is doubtless a legitimate question. It may be *the* question, but it is surely not the only one.

Comparative history offers a broader view, but it is a notoriously difficult beast, requiring a scope and sophistication that few possess. Robin Winks is one of the few. His slim volume of clever Joanne Goodman lectures, *The Relevance of Canadian History: U.S. and Imperial Perspectives* (Toronto, Macmillan, 1979), argues convincingly that national historiographies can only thrive through broad contact, that Canadian history has wide international importance. He also points to the importance of foreign affairs, broadly conceived, in the history and development of Canada. Canadians know that they have to embrace the world in order to understand themselves.

Winks has written less comparative history than an argument on its behalf. Richard A. Preston has edited two more thorough-going efforts to apply comparative analysis specifically to the study of Canada and the United States. The first, *The Influence of the United States on Canadian Development: Eleven Case Studies*, was published in 1972 by Duke University, an institution to which Canadian studies owes a great deal. As Winks points out, however, the study of the impact of one society upon another is not really comparative history. *Perspectives on Revolution and Evolution* (Durham, N.C., Duke University Press, 1979) is closer to the mark. In an admirable introduction and conclusion, Professor Preston does what so few editors seem able or willing to do: he sets the terms of reference of a complicated inquiry and assesses the even more complicated results. The various essays on politics, law, economics and culture are uneven. Not all are precisely to the point. The achievement lies in an unwillingness to be dogmatic. The common assumption that revolution in the United States and the absence of it to the north produced quite distinct societies is taken merely as an intellectual gambit, and a rather unsatisfactory one at that.

Despite the potential of comparative studies, the major focus of Canadian-American history comes at the point where J.B. Brebner left off: the pivotal decade after the end of the Second World War. The rapid postwar decline of the British Empire was a shock to Canadians. The American connection had always been there — always powerful, pervasive, insidious — but it never aroused the intense family passions and the sense of danger and opportunity of the empire and motherland. For those who loved the empire and those who

hated it, an important element in the emotional make-up of the nation was placed in question. The United States dominated the horizon as never before. The politics of accommodation to this new reality lie at the core of recent historiography. What emerges, not surprisingly, is a complexity of interests, motives, ambitions, impulses. The bosom to bony lap school of Canadian history may never be the same.

The concentration, more than in any other aspect of Canadian foreign policy studies, is on economic questions. R.J. Diubaldo and S.J. Scheinberg, *A Study of Canadian-American Defence Policy (1945-1975) — Northern Issues and Strategic Resources* (Ottawa, Department of National Defence, 1978; Operational Research and Analysis Establishment Extra-Mural Paper No. 6), emphasizes the importance of such factors in the making of Cold War defence policies. Strategy took a backseat to economic and political considerations. American pressures were powerful and ultimately irresistible. A more critical view is that of Robert Cuff and J.L. Granatstein, who have contributed two provocative and valuable accounts of Canadian-American relations in the twentieth century. *Ties that Bind: Canadian-American Relations in Wartime from the Great War to the Cold War* (Toronto, Samuel Stevens, Hakkert, 1977) and *American Dollars — Canadian Prosperity: Canadian-American Economic Relations 1945-1950* (Toronto, Samuel Stevens, 1978) use the language of a burgeoning American empire, but point out that there were many — too many? — willing collaborators on the Canadian side, not least in the mainstream of politicians, bureaucrats and public opinion.<sup>3</sup> Lawrence Aronsen, whose aim is directed at postwar economic relationships, finds the terminology of “continentalism”, “imperialism” and “dependency” wanting, although useful as tools of analysis. He too lays stress upon Canadian benefits, Canadian self-interest and Canadian acquiescence.<sup>4</sup>

Canada's former foreign and economic policy-makers have entered the debate in force, and they are a literate crew. L.B. Pearson studied the work of “revisionists” such as Granatstein and Cuff while a professor in the School of International Affairs at Carleton University. It angered him to be portrayed as an ambitious actor in an international charade, the dupe of an imperialist America, who in turn tricked his fellow citizens, putting the fear of Communism to work in order to achieve support for economically-based foreign policies.<sup>5</sup> Pearson's memoirs, with the appropriately (for his public image) brief and breezy title of *Mike* (3 volumes; Toronto, University of Toronto Press,

3 It is also worth noting the original — and more stinging — version of one of Granatstein and Cuff's essays in *Ties that Bind*: “Looking Back at the Cold War”, *Canadian Forum* (July-August 1972), pp. 8-11.

4 See, for example, “Imperialism and Dependency: Some Reflections on Canadian-American Economic Relations, 1945-1957”, *Bulletin of Canadian Studies*, IV, 1 (April 1980), pp. 23-37.

5 Granatstein and Cuff, “Looking Back at the Cold War”.

1972-1975), contain an attack on his revisionist tormentors and a powerful defence of Canadian foreign policy as it evolved in the postwar years. The Cold War, he argues, was a dangerous and explosive time. Great Britain was no longer able to commit Canada to involvement in a great war, as it had done in 1914 and 1939. The United States now had that power, "a hard fact which brought us anxiety as well as assurance" (II, p. 31), but the real threat to world peace came from the armed might and aggressive ideology of the Soviet Union. It is clear, moreover, that this is not merely hindsight (See vol. II, p. 181). Pearson rejected the argument, which is repeated by Diubaldo and Scheinberg, that Canadian thinking was based on American intelligence.

Three of Pearson's former bureaucratic colleagues have chosen to write careful monographs based on extensive research rather than memoirs. None, fortunately, can avoid at least a trace of autobiography. A.F.W. Plumptre's *Three Decades of Decision: Canada and the World Monetary System, 1944-1975* and Escott Reid's *Time of Fear and Hope: The Making of the North Atlantic Treaty 1947-1949* (both Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1977) tell with pride of a positive Canadian role in the postwar world, of a maturing nation whose relations with its great neighbour were close, constructive, and on the whole, cordial. A more recent account, and one of greater general interest, is John Holmes' *The Shaping of Peace: Canada and the Search for World Order 1943-1957*, volume I (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1979). This is a brilliant essay in the psychology of Canadian diplomacy — cool, subtle, balanced, powerfully written, rich in complexity. "I have tried to catch facets of a vision which flashed briefly", he writes. "We were dealing not in plans but hypotheses that were instantly put to the test". He warns of the dangers of revising the record in hindsight: "Recollections in tranquility of untranquil times tend to excessive clarification" (p. 296). The historian must take care "not to iron out the ambiguities" (p. 161).

Ambiguities there were, Holmes points out, in Canada's relationships within the North Atlantic Triangle, a configuration badly misshapen by war and an uneasy peace. A powerful British influence would hang on for at least a decade to come, a factor of continuing political and sentimental importance which is often overlooked, but "there was a growing recognition that the triangle would be hard to restore and that the economic and security relations with the United States . . . that would have to be cultivated would provide a more substantive challenge than the Commonwealth to Canada's maturity" (p. 162). Ideas were conditioned, not by Vietnam and Richard Nixon, but by the international drift and depression of the 1930s and the politics of the Canadian-American alliance during World War II. There was concern and caution about the Americans stemming from those experiences, and an insistence on the need to protect Canadian sovereignty. It seemed all the more important, given the threat to world peace, to involve "the superpower that was 'on our side' in international commitments from which it would not want to run away" (p. 161). Canadians

were self-confident enough, Holmes affirms, to think that they were up to the American challenge; having more realistic expectations of influence and independence, they were apt to get less depressed than later generations.

Holmes notes the small number of exclusively bilateral governmental structures. He underlines their relative unimportance in the relationship, which was (and now seems even more) predominantly non-institutional in character. The same argument, remarkably, is made by William R. Willoughby in *The Joint Organizations of Canada and the United States* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1979). Willoughby's modest mission is description and narration: "This study . . . does not pretend to be analytical; nor does it attempt to present any new approaches" (p. ix). Judged in the author's limited terms — and some reviewers insist that it is unfair to comment on any other basis — the book is a success, one of those worthy reference works that dot the landscape of historical research. The approach is flat, wide-eyed and uncritical, although not completely lacking in analysis. The real problem is one of balance. Fisheries and boundaries, items of less importance by the author's own definition, receive substantially more attention than NORAD and defence-production sharing. This is only partly explained by the difficulty of access to original sources, since the author does not make extensive use of them even when they are available. Willoughby, like Holmes, points out that formal bilateral institutions can be said to have certain advantages, reinforcing national sovereignty and placing limits on continental integration. The contradiction between this and the more frequent argument that such linkages promote integration is not commented upon.

The fear of being locked into, in James Eayrs phrase, "the stifling bilateral embrace" (p. 66) of the United States helps to explain the Canadian enthusiasm for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Eayrs' four (soon to be five) volumes of *In Defence of Canada* are magnificent studies in the decision-making of government, without frills, theories or models. Volume IV, subtitled *Growing Up Allied* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1980), is a straightforward account of NATO from origins until 1955: drafting, organizing, mobilizing and expanding. Eayrs is the finest academic stylist in the country, breaking all the neat rules with successful abandon. He has a weakness for quotation. Chapters are long, and the author seldom stops for introductions or conclusions.<sup>6</sup> Documentation is drawn from a relatively narrow range. He indulges in little analysis. Eayrs' strength lies in telling the tale with pace, polish and panache, and in vividly capturing the drama, intrigue, friction and the personalities behind the policies.

Eayrs has long been a critic of Canadian foreign and defence policies. He questioned, on NATO's twenty-fifth anniversary, whether the alliance had ever

6 To be fair, the first section of volume III of this series, *Peacekeeping and Deterrence* (Toronto, 1972), should also be seen as an introduction to volume IV.

been essential to its members' security, even in the dark days of the late 1940s. Canadians, he wrote in 1972, had become caught up through NATO in a search for international influence and prestige. Canada was bound to be outgunned by the United States here as elsewhere, and might be better served by withdrawal.<sup>7</sup> In *Growing Up Allied*, there is little of this point of view, and perhaps even an implicit rejection of its more extreme elements. What remains is the criticism, common enough in Eayrs' work, of the timidity, narrowmindedness and occasional bad faith of Canada's leaders. "Canada had neither helped to run the blockade nor helped to end it", he writes of the airlift of food into the western sectors of Berlin in 1948-1949. "'The better part of valour is discretion': never more than during the Berlin blockade could Falstaff more appropriately be cited as the patron saint of Canadian diplomacy" (p. 51). But these were difficult times, Eayrs seems to be saying, in which good if fallible men did not always measure up to the events which confronted them.

Eayrs establishes that there was deep concern in Ottawa about an American lap that might already be too bony, particularly in matters of defence. NATO meant not only collective security but also the possibility of safety of a different kind. A multilateral treaty would put distance between Canadians and Americans. It would heal the split in the Canadian personality, bringing the sides of the North Atlantic Triangle together again in partnership. The alliance tied the United States to the defence of Western Europe and (through the "Canadian" article of the treaty, which was included in spite of strong American objections) to economic and cultural co-operation within the Atlantic area. And Canada would have a voice — a constraining influence — at the highest levels of alliance and therefore of American decision-making.

Or so it was hoped. General Guy Simonds, the Chief of the General Staff, wished to place the Canadian brigade in Europe under British command in order to provide "a counter-balance to the disproportionate and preponderating influence of the United States". Without some balancing restraint, the United States might in the grip of sudden emotion "carry the democratic world to the very débacle it is attempting to avoid in accepting the leadership of the US under the North Atlantic Treaty — namely, to a Third World War" (pp. 212-3). The Canadian contribution would obviously not in itself be decisive, but it would be unwise to add to American power and credibility, especially when the British were so much to be preferred. Simonds had his way, although he incorrectly recalled years later that the decision had been made by NATO's European Commander, General Eisenhower, not by the Canadian Cabinet. "Old soldiers fade away:" runs the Eayrsian aphorism, "they also forget" (p. 215n).

Such are the perils of oral history, a genre much in vogue and much misunderstood. Old men *do* forget; or as Jack Granatstein has reminded us, they

7 *The Citizen* (Ottawa), 4 April 1974; "Choosing Up Sides on Nato", *Maclean's Magazine* (October 1972).

remember selectively. It is not enough to cobble together uncritically the reminiscences of the famous or near-famous, as Peter Stursberg has done in his two-volume "oral or living history study" of L.B. Pearson. Stursberg previously compiled two rather better and livelier books on John Diefenbaker's leadership gained and lost. These were published by University of Toronto Press in 1975 and 1976. Little was known about the Diefenbaker years, however, and the earlier books were much more tightly edited and conceived. *Lester Pearson and the American Dilemma* (Toronto, Doubleday, 1980) lacks focus and discipline. It is sloppy, superficial, disjointed. The book is apparently about Pearson's long and distinguished international career, with special reference to Canadian-American relations, but the editor seems to include any material he finds vaguely interesting. Thus a chapter entitled "Vietnam War: the Speech" contains an old anecdote drawn from Pearson's experience at the League of Nations in the early 1930s, observations about Howard Green and nuclear arms in the 1950s and a discussion of disarmament and the Columbia River Treaty in the 1960s. Specialists will learn little: general readers will be better served by Pearson's own more informative and entertaining memoirs.

As for the American dilemma, Stursberg comes closest to dealing with it explicitly only on the last page of the book. Pearson, he says, "tried to influence American policy, but always bowed to American leadership. At times his attitude toward the United States appeared tentative, if not ambiguous, and he had never resolved the conflict between Canadian nationalism and continentalism in terms of developing a consistent policy. Yet, in a sense, his fumbling in this regard was an expression of the dilemma that Canadians have in dealing with the United States" (p. 322). Stursberg thus conveys the impression that Canadians have two stark and unfavourable alternatives. That has never been the case, nor has it ever really been the view in official Ottawa. In 1972, it is true, Secretary of State for External Affairs Mitchell Sharp made much of three options in Canadian-American relations: *the status quo*, a deliberate move towards even closer ties, or a reduction of "the present Canadian vulnerability" through "a comprehensive long-term strategy to develop and strengthen the Canadian economy and other aspects of its national life".<sup>8</sup> Sharp chose the Third Option, which became the contemporary version of the counterweight theory of Canadian foreign policy. Given the complexity of the relationship, the realities of international politics and the state of Canadian public opinion, it seemed questionable from the beginning whether he had set out genuine and distinct choices for the future. But the exercise did provide the basis for speculation and hypothesis by — and therefore plenty of work for — Canada's political scientists.

Two books by Brian Tomlin are cases in point. *Canada's Foreign Policy:*

8 Mitchell Sharp, "Canada-U.S. Relations: Options for the Future", *International Perspectives* (Autumn 1972), p. 1.

*Analysis and Trends* (Toronto, Methuen, 1978) is a collection of technical essays by such fine scholars as Peyton Lyon, John Sigler, Harald von Riekhoff, David Leyton-Brown and John McDougall. Two of the essays are devoted to the Third Option, one to the use of Western Europe as a counterweight and another to North American energy interdependence. *Canada as an International Actor* (Toronto, Macmillan, 1979), co-authored with Peyton Lyon, is the intelligent man's guide to Canada's external behaviour, and that of its diplomats, in the postwar era. There are two useful chapters on Canadian-American relations. The book pays homage to the past and makes some limited use of historical research, as does the Tomlin collection, but the emphasis is on the present and the future — the authors have strong views about the contribution that an internationalist external policy can make to national unity — and on the images and perceptions held by Canadian and foreign policy-makers about our place in the world. Unlike so many studies in political science, Lyon and Tomlin place a premium on literacy and readability. The evidence in the two books on questions of continental integration is difficult to summarize, all the more so because it is contradictory, but it seems clear that the Third Option strategy has had limited success at best and that multilateral diversification was not a priority in Ottawa's upper echelons in the 1970s.

The world is a more complicated place than it was during the Cold War, or so we like to imagine. It is indisputably a different place. The United States, however, remains at the heart of Canadian foreign policy, despite the general decline in American power and influence. The Canadian situation and psychology requires both close relations with the United States and an occasional gesture of independence. The necessity of American markets is in constant tension with the temptations of economic nationalism; the instinct for common defence conflicts with an internationalist desire to act as a peace-keeper and mediator. Henry Kissinger comments on these ambivalences in the national character in his memoirs, and speaks of the "extraordinary skill" with which Canadian leaders have utilized their tiny margin for manoeuvre.<sup>9</sup> American Secretaries of State Acheson, Dulles and Rusk all were privately much less complimentary. Undoubtedly Kissinger is too, to the limited extent that things Canadian are allowed to cloud his horizon. Many will be gratified by his remarks, even so. Canadians, as Lyon and Tomlin remind us, like to be liked, and they are still inclined to think that foreign policy is one of the things they do best.

NORMAN HILLMER

<sup>9</sup> Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston, 1979), p. 384.