

Canadian Uniqueness: A Historical Perspective

(カナダの特殊性 - 歴史学からの展望)

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SUMMARY IN JAPANESE: 文化とは、あるコミュニティの独特な姿勢や感情が、独特の言語や環境、伝統に加味されたものである。それならば、わずかに 400 年の歴史しかもたず、独自の言語もないカナダに、特質といえるほどのユニークな点をみとめ、カナダ人が何であるかを定義づけることは難しいと言わざるを得ない。

南に接する強大な隣国アメリカと異なり、カナダにはマニフェストデスティニーや、大陸全体が自分たちのフロンティアであるといった理念はない。アメリカ人の中にはカナダを「もう一つのアメリカ」と考える者もあるが、カナダ人は、レーガン元大統領の唱えた「強いアメリカ」のごとき力を、自国カナダでも保持しようとは考えていない。確かに多様な歴史をもつことがその特性であるにせよ、そこではアメリカ人のように「アメリカ人になること」が一つの価値をもつわけでもない。

カナダ人の共通体験とは、厳しい冬と、歴史の中での「生き残り」である。1759 年から 60 年にかけてのイギリス系による占領以降、ケベック周辺に集中するフランス系カナダ人の最大の関心事は、いかに自分たちがカナダの中で、占領者たちから自分たちの言語、文化、習慣を守り、フランス系の「生き残り」を可能たらしめるかであり、また今後いかに「生き残って」いくかが、彼らの大きな懸念である。皮肉なことに、イギリス系カナダ人にとっても「生き残り」は重要な問題点の一つである。強大な隣国やヨーロッパからの「生き残り」の問題があるし、独自の言語や文学をもたずしてなお、彼らはカナダ人としての自覚が「生き残る」という心理的問

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また連邦国であるカナダが、連邦政府と州政府という、二種の独立した機能を与えられた政府をもつゆえに生みだしている「矛盾」は、選挙や政策にくり返し影響を及ぼし、常にカナダの歴史上、重大な問題点であり続けている。

苦渋に満ちた歴史の末に、カナダでは言語的にも文化的にも、多様性を認めつつ相互理解を打ちたてるという調和がなしとげられつつある。そうした歴史を認識することこそがカナダを理解することなのである。

In newspapers, magazines, scholarly journals and books, one is constantly reminded of Japanese uniqueness in every feature of life, be it in culture, architecture, community, theater, food, even blood.¹ Frankly, the discussion and analysis evokes skepticism in my mind and some suspicion. After all, every culture is unique. In this paper, let culture be understood as that collection of attitudes, sentiments and values remarkable in one community, shaped and strengthened by the use of a specific language, the shared environment and common historical traditions. In these terms of course, Japanese culture is unique. There is only one of its kind.

In fact, Japanese uniqueness is not even debatable. The Frenchman may explain existentialism, architecture or croissants as “*particulièrement français*.” The American will suggest that popular democracy and the spirit of enterprise is the “American way.” Indeed, the authors of a recent and popular textbook of American history refer to it as “the story of magic transformation.” The questions they pose illustrate their search for American uniqueness.

What has been especially American about our ways of living and earning a living? Our ways of making war and peace? Our ways of thinking and hoping and fearing, of worshipping God and fighting the Devil? Our ways of traveling and politicking, of importing people, of building houses and cities?²

At the root of all of these questions, from the banal to the sublime, lay the question, what is unique about America? George Orwell, in a wonderful essay which he wrote during World War II, attempted to define the essence of Englishness. While he wrote beautifully, he had a terrible time explaining what was typically English. The closer he reached the unique features of being English the more trivial they appeared to be. It was in the air, in the color of the grass. It was the way people walked. It was in a good glass of beer. It was the taste of suet pudding.³

To be slightly but not totally facetious, one might say culture is like cuisine. Japanese noodles. Belgian "frites." Swiss chocolate. English suet pudding. No one makes "ragout de p te," "cipaille" or "tarte au sucre" quite like Mme. Jehane Benoit did. Any Japanese away from home for a long time will savor that first taste of "sashimi" or "sushi" at the favorite neighborhood bar. The world may try but no one can make a hamburger like an American. Perhaps this is the recipe of success of the hundreds of McDonald's franchises in Japan and of their many local imitators. These references to food may be a bit absurd but they are made to underline a point. Depending on our community of origin, we share specific attributes unique to our own culture, undefinable and inimitable in others, be it ever so humble, a noodle, a hamburger or a slice of Saskatoon pie.

So if it is not debatable perhaps some discussion of the meaning of the word would be useful, for sometimes claims of cultural uniqueness are not merely an expression of distinction or specificity. Implicit in the notion of cultural uniqueness is the sense that our way is the best way, the superior way, and that of others is not! By definition the word unique connotes a superlative sense, not a comparative one. It takes little time for foreign visitors in Japan to remark on the unique characteristics of Japanese society and of its many admirable traits. However, it takes a little longer to begin to wonder why such questions are constantly asked in the intellectual and popular spheres.

Various definitions suggest unique means one, one and only, or special. The word also carries the sense of superior or unequalled. One French dictionary defines the word as, "seul en son genre : infiniment

au dessus des autres ; incomparable." (One of a kind ; infinitely above others, incomparable).⁴ In their discussion of uniqueness Japanese do not ask why they are unequalled or superior, although they may very well believe it. Nor do Japanese wonder why they surpass all others, although recent history suggests they were prepared to try it. Does the discussion of uniqueness merely reflect the simple sense of the word, what is different or distinct about Japanese culture, or does it contain the other more powerful and menacing sense of unique, the suggestion of Japanese superiority? This is a hard question which I cannot answer. It would best be addressed by the Japanese themselves. The answer will not be easy or free of problematic implications.

In itself the question of Japanese uniqueness is interesting and intriguing. It also led me to reflections on my own country. In fact, Canadians rarely ask this question about themselves in either sense of the word, one or superior. Canadians are more inclined to ask whether they have a culture at all, a great novel, a definable cinema or a distinct diplomacy? Indeed, Canadians sometimes ask whether they have a history and to what extent it is worth knowing.

Put bluntly, Canadians have difficulty defining themselves. They have not reached the stage, if stage it be, to reflect on their uniqueness. Unlike their powerful neighbors to the south, they have no sense that their destiny is manifest or that the natural frontier of their country is the whole continent. They are not even sure just how much of the far north is theirs. Canadians know their country does not lead and preserve the forces of freedom against the darkness of evil empires as President Reagan and so many of his predecessors claimed, at least before "glasnost."

In contrast, Canadians share a kind of uncertainty or doubt about the country. As has happened to me before in Canadian libraries, I was struck by the titles of the Canadian collection at Kwansei Gakuin. Read cumulatively, they transmit a sense of tenuousness : *Canada and the Burden of Unity* ; *Silent Surrender* ; *Fragile Federation* ; *The Roots of Disunity* ; *Canada in Question* ; *Unfulfilled Union* ; *Unity in Diversity* ; and *Lament for Nation*.⁵ Though the method of these studies be economic, sociological, political, constitutional, historical or philosophical, all suggest doubt. None claim uniqueness. Absence of

national unity, the heavy burden of governing, problematic cultural diversity and weakness in relation to our neighbors, especially the American one, are the grist for the mill of Canadian intellectual reflection.

To truly understand Canada is a hard task. Wrongly, people beyond its borders often see it as another version of the United States, its inhabitants sharing similar sentiments, attitudes, values, goals, and for the most part, the same language. Within, Canadians wonder whether they really are different and can their society survive? Historians know there is no single clue or one key to explain any history. Nevertheless, in my opinion, one important and essential accomplishment of Canadian history, perhaps its most glorious, is the long, difficult and relatively successful struggle to reconcile the reality of linguistic and cultural heterogeneity. This was the achievement of the past and continues to be the condition of the present.⁶

Diverse in population, geography and political structures, so, too, is Canada's history. Understanding its diversity is essential to understanding Canada itself. Canada is not like Japan, a country unified by language and long history. Canadians are not like Japanese living in one time zone, and with the exception of the residents of Hokkaido, experiencing the same climate and cadence of the seasons. Anyone reading Louis Hemon's *Maria Chapdelaine* will recall the despair of the inhabitants of Saguenay-Lac St. Jean waiting for the end of winter well into the month of May. Visitors to Victoria may remember the promise of spring in the crocuses and daffodils of February. In the tip of southwestern Ontario, where I was born, Christmas was rarely white. Often as not it was wet. Real winter snow came in January and promised to disappear in March. Unlike the Japanese, many Canadians were not born in Canada and many more can count but two or three generations who were. It is not merely a matter of diversity; rather it is the persistence of diversity which is important. Canada is not like the United States, a big country with a big population. Canadians are not like Americans. Despite the variety of origins, being or becoming American transcends the values and cultures of the countries of origin. This is exactly the story of magic transformation to which Professors Boorstin and Kelley refer. Canadians on the other hand attempt to

celebrate their diversity, indeed, to preserve it.

In the realization of Canadian diversity, one discovers the existence of an intriguing, distinct and legitimate North American alternative. The variety of ethnic origins, political traditions, time zones and languages is so mystifying it sometimes seems that the only thing uniting Canadians is the winter. Its length and when it comes and goes may vary, but winter is our one experience. What student of Canadian history has not heard the offhanded dismissal of the French "philosophe" Voltaire? On learning of the French loss of Canada to the British, he referred to the country as "quelques arpents de neige" (A few acres of snow). Wrote Louis Hémon on the reflection of the French Canadian habitants on the subject:

Et le sujet en fut tout naturellement l'éternelle lamentation
canadienne : la plainte sans révolte contre le fardeau écrasant
du long hiver.⁷

In the 1970s, the beautiful song "Mon pays," by the "chansonnier" Gilles Vigneault, became a sort of national anthem for Quebecers. It also struck sympathetic chords in the hearts of many English speaking Canadians. For if most disagreed with Quebecers' quest for independence, who could argue with the words, "Mon pays, ce n'est pas un pays, c'est l'hiver." (My country is not a country. It is the winter.)

Since the British conquest of Canada in 1759-1760, one of the great themes of Quebec's nationalist historians has been survival.⁸ Everything after the conquest was anti-climax. The question was, could French Canadians save themselves and their language and culture from the menace of a foreign ruler? Paradoxically, English speaking Canadians also picked up on the theme of survival. If the challenge and menace were not the same, the need to survive was a common element in the lives of all Canadians. Reflecting on Canadian writing in the early 1970s, Margaret Atwood put the question, "What's Canadian about Canadian literature and why should we be bothered?"⁹ She likened literature to a map which told us much about the place we inhabit. Atwood was convinced understanding of the terrain was not a luxury but a necessity. "Without that knowledge we will not survive."¹⁰ Not

surprisingly, she entitled her book *Survival*.

Given the doubt, diversity and uncertainty of being Canadian, it is quite natural that uniqueness is not a major concern of scholars. In fact, the question of uniqueness implies an answer. The only problem is to find it. Canadians are not sure there is one. They wonder whether the country will work. Some suspect, others even hope, it will not. Yet despite the fact that there is no literature or language of Canadian uniqueness, still there are elements unique to Canadians' self-understanding. In my opinion, they are insignificance, contradiction and ambivalence.

One lesson learned abroad is that Canada is insignificant and unimportant. Life in a different country often allows the luxury of reading authors and books one might not ordinarily peruse. Perverse as it may sound, while in Japan one author I delighted in reading was Anthony Trollope. (I read Evelyn Waugh in France.) *The Kellys and the O'kellys*, *The Way We Live Now* and the Palliser novels filled many an evening. Not a literary critic, still I believe Trollope's novels are masterful characterizations and glorious tableaux of society, power, sex, unrequited love and the unfulfilled ambitions of the English classes of leisure in the latter part of the 19th century.

Phineas Finn was a particularly good read. In the second volume, the major character, Phineas, has come a long way from Ireland and the humble circumstances of family and origin. In fact, he scaled the airy heights to become undersecretary at the Colonial Office. In chapter 53, entitled "How Phineas Bore the Blow," there is a wonderful conjuncture of themes and events. Sitting in his lovely undersecretarial office and completely satisfied with his worldly progress, Phineas received a letter from the woman he intended to marry, a certain Miss Violet Effingham. He is shattered by her refusal and all his interest in the colonies instantly dissipated. Describing Phineas' consternation, Trollope wrote :

As for the colonies, he did not care if they revolted tomorrow. He would have parted with every colony belonging to Great Britain to have gotten the hand of Violet Effingham for himself.¹¹

At the moment he received the letter, Phineas was examining a dossier assigned by the colonial secretary containing a project of a railway from Halifax to Vancouver. But Canada, the colonies, the harbor in Halifax, the magnificent prospect of a transcontinental railroad, the dangers of American absorption of Canada, were as nothing compared to the loss of Violet Effingham !

On reading Trollope's fictional passages, my own thoughts returned to my first undergraduate course in Canadian history at the University of Windsor. There the professor was positively lyrical in his description of the vital national project of the trans-continental railway. Like Trollope, the real story was full of passion, unbridled ambition and unseemly corruption. Yet, it was as if Sir John A. Macdonald built the railway with his own hands, creating a nation and binding it together with this wonderful ribbon of steel. But for Trollope, Canada was merely scenery, a beautiful backdrop, a literary construction for the far more important issue of his novel, rejected love. Canada really was rather insignificant !

But Trollope wrote fiction. What of those who write history ? A year at Kwansei Gakuin also offered me the luxury of leafing through *Les Annales*, one of the most prestigious journals of modern historical method. Historians speak in muted and respectful tones of the school, method, approach of *Les Annales*. It is all there, history from the bottom up, anything and everything new and intriguing. What a pleasure to flip through and stop at so many interesting points ! In the 40 volumes examined, not one article dealt with any aspect of Canadian history.¹² In later volumes there were a few reviews of Canadian books. Vainly, I sought a review of the much vaunted *Histoire Économique et Sociale du Québec, 1760-1850*, a provocative quantitative study inspired by the spirit of *Les Annales*.¹³ In this pre-eminent journal of modern historical thought, Canada does not figure. Reflections on Canadian insignificance are endless.

In personal experience the most startling expression of the unimportance of Canada occurred in a conversation with an administrator at the université de Nice. Spending the academic year 1980-1981 in the south of France I met many people and, as in Japan, the conversa-

tion turned to Canada. Having completed our business, this particular administrator asked what I did for a living. I replied that I was a Canadian historian. Startled, he looked at me for a moment and then said a phrase I will long remember. “Ça doit être intéressant, et facile !” (That should be interesting, and easy !) Naturally, according to a Frenchman’s calculation, Canada had about 400 years of history since the French arrived there. In his calculations, such a brief time frame would be fairly easy to master and teach. He pondered a moment and then exclaimed in dismay, “No Merovingiens. No Charlemagne. No Henri de Navarre. No Louis XIV. No Revolution. No Bonaparte. No glory.”

Implicit in his reflection was Canada’s unimportance and the insignificance of its history. Curiously, some of Canada’s most eminent modern historians shared the same sentiments. In fact, they really did not want to do the history of Canada. For example, l’abbé Lionel Groulx, perhaps the most widely read French Canadian historian in the first half of the 20th century, took up the task hesitatingly. Having studied and traveled in Europe for nearly three years, Groulx returned to Canada in the summer of 1909. A young priest 31 years of age, he regretted leaving the intellectually satisfying and rich culture of the Continent. He was happy to return to his homeland, yet he wrote in a bittersweet tone :

Je ne suis jamais caché la pauvreté de mon jeune pays ; mais
il est resté mon premier et mon unique pays.¹⁴

Often referring to the “Canadiens” as a “petit peuple,” he wrote their “petite histoire.” His country was young, its culture poor and its development backward, but writing its history eventually became his lifelong vocation and passion.

Another great Canadian historian of the 20th century was Donald Creighton. However highly contested his approach, few would quibble that he was quite simply one of the best writers of English in Canada. Born in Toronto in 1902, the son of a Methodist minister and a brilliant student of history, Creighton came to the study of Canada’s past almost by accident. A young lecturer at the University of Toronto, he decided

he really wanted to study France, especially the Revolution. In 1928, the 26 year old Creighton went to Paris to undertake his life's work. But it was the eve of the world economic depression. Unable to finance his studies, he returned home where he began his career as a Canadian historian.¹⁵ Canada was his second choice, but for Creighton as for Groulx the study of the Canadian past became the conviction and passion of a lifetime.

Sooner or later, every Canadian historian must confront the question of insignificance and must consciously decide whether Canadian history is a worthy field of scholarly endeavor. Each must wonder, what is the importance of our past? The question of Canadian history is much like Atwood's of Canadian literature. What is special about it and why should we bother? The response will be found by each practitioner of its past. Surely, if Canadians themselves do not do it, no one will.

Insignificance is apparent. Contradiction, another element unique to Canadians' self-understanding, is less obvious. The truly contradictory nature of Canadian history raises problematic questions even more prickly than those raised by insignificance. One need never leave the country to meet its contradictions. However, it was deeply impressed upon me during the academic year I spent in France. In the spring of 1981, I delivered four lectures at four French speaking universities: Grenoble; Metz; Strasbourg in France; and Mons in Belgium. At that time, my listeners expressed a keen interest in Canada. Political events of the previous year had focused their attention. In February 1980, Pierre Trudeau was elected prime minister with a healthy parliamentary majority. Moreover, the strength of his party in the province of Quebec was solid. Seventy-four of the 75 federal seats in the province were Liberal. In May 1980, the provincial government of René Lévesque conducted a referendum. In it the Parti Québécois, central constitutional plank of sovereignty-association was soundly defeated. To cap it off, in April 1981, just as I was speaking in those French speaking universities, M. Levesque and the Parti Québécois were re-elected, winning 49.2% of the popular vote and 90 of the 110 seats in the Quebec Assembly. It was the biggest parliamentary majority garnered by the Parti Québécois since its establishment in 1968.

In that particular political context and no matter what the subject of my presentation, the questions at those universities were always the same. How could one explain Pierre Trudeau's victory in Ottawa while René Lévesque did the same in Quebec? How was it that the very same electors in the province of Quebec voted massively for Trudeau at the federal level and for Lévesque at the provincial one? Now as then I had no answer. Had I been able to respond, I would have been able to resolve the fundamental contradiction of Canada.

At the time, some commentators and experts bolder than myself suggested that some inner genius of the Quebec electorate enabled it to vote for different sides to defend national and provincial rights at the same time. More recently, words used to describe the electoral behavior of Quebecers have included the terms mercurial, frivolous and unstable.¹⁶ Perhaps it is that simple. An apparently contradictory voting pattern did maintain a healthy and necessary tension between the two levels of government. While the proposition may be correct, it is equally true and vexatious that both Trudeau and Lévesque espoused radically different agendas for the same constituency. The contradiction persisted.

The pattern has continued. In February 1984, Pierre Trudeau resigned and John Turner was chosen as the new Liberal leader a few months later. For its part, the Conservative Party chose Brian Mulroney as a leader the year before. In September 1984, Mulroney led his party to one of the greatest parliamentary majorities in Canadian history, winning 211 of the 284 seats in the Federal Parliament. Quebec, often referred to as a Liberal fortress, turned to Mulroney. Fifty-eight of the 75 seats were conservative. Yet in the provincial elections of 1985, Lévesque won provincial elections for a third time with a solid but reduced majority.

Discussion of even more recent political events would also illustrate the persistent pattern of contradiction. Past history also shows it. For example, historians and students of Canadian history immediately recognize the obvious contradiction of Canada's great domestic struggle during World War II. Some suggest that what happened inside Canada was far more important than any contribution the country made to the war effort.¹⁷ A political slogan more absurd and ambiguous than

"Conscription if necessary, but not necessarily conscription" would be hard to find.

In the parliamentary resolution to declare war on September 8, 1939, the Canadian government solemnly promised never to introduce obligatory military service. The words of the prime minister were clear :

The present government believes that the conscription of men for overseas service will not be a necessary or an effective step. No such measure will be introduced by the present administration.¹⁸

The prime minister's promise was the quid pro quo for the continued support of the Liberal federal members of Parliament from the province of Quebec. They knew that conscription was totally unacceptable to French Canadians.

The provincial premier of Quebec also understood the depth of popular opposition to conscription in the province. In addition, Monsieur Maurice Duplessis did not believe the promise of the federal government. He argued that Canadian participation in the war was merely a pretext to subjugate Quebec and to allow the federal government to continue its campaign of assimilation and centralization. Duplessis warned that sooner or later conscription would be introduced. He called for elections in the province in October 1939.

In the campaign, two contradictory points of view were obvious. Quebec's federal members of Parliament and powerful Cabinet ministers, such as Ernest Lapointe, Charles "Chubby" Power and P. J. A. Cardin campaigned vigorously in the provincial elections. They promised that if Duplessis was beaten they would hold Prime Minister King true to his promise. If Duplessis won, they threatened to resign. In their absence, they warned, the prime minister would be unable to resist the English Canadian insistence to have conscription.¹⁹

It was a pretty piece of electioneering. Duplessis lost. Yet, despite their victory and the logic of their arguments, King and the federal government would break its promise. The war went badly. In June 1941, Hitler invaded Russia. Later on December 7, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. On Christmas Day they occupied Hong Kong

where two Canadian battalions fought in a futile defense. Ever more powerfully, English-speaking Canada called for a total war effort, including conscription.

The federal government responded by holding a national plebiscite. Not surprisingly, the question was not a simple one of asking whether or not Canadians favored conscription; rather, it asked if Canadians would be willing to release the government from its promise. In April 1942, the plebiscite was held. The great majority of Canadians voted to permit the government to withdraw its promise. Sixty-four percent voted yes, 36 percent no. In Ontario, 80 percent voted yes and in British Columbia 84 percent voted likewise. In Quebec, 72 percent voted no.²⁰ The country was divided. English- and French-speaking Canadians disagreed.

Considering the results, the prime minister decided to temporize. Parliamentary debates addressed the confusing results. To placate the two opposing views, to square the circle, to meet the contradiction, Mackenzie King declared there would be conscription if necessary, but not necessarily conscription.²¹ In fact, conscription was not introduced until late in 1944 when the war was nearly over.

How similar in its confusion was the question of the plebiscite of April 1942 and the question in the referendum in the province of Quebec in May 1980. The Quebec government did not ask its citizens to vote for or against independence; rather, it requested permission to negotiate a new relationship with the federal government based upon the formula of sovereignty-association.²² To paraphrase, "Independence if possible, but possibly not independence." In Canada, questions are rarely clear, nor are they quite what they appear to be. In Canada, there must always be room for further discussion.

This contradiction central to Canadian self-understanding is not new or recent. It extends back even to the middle of the 19th century and before. In 1841, to put it lightly, the British Imperial government was completely fed up with Canada. It had governed the place for nearly 80 years, but in 1837 and 1838 Canadians rose up in rebellion. The deepest resentment against the British was expressed by the French Canadians. The British viciously repressed the rebellions and then arbitrarily legislated the union of the two former Canadian colonies,

Upper Canada and Lower Canada. In the process, the British decided to do what had not been done after the Conquest, namely to assimilate and anglify the French Canadians.

Everything in the new union was calculated to achieve that goal. The capital was placed at Kingston, a small and unimportant town in Upper Canada. The public debt was to be shared equally even though that of Upper Canada was 10 times larger than that of Lower Canada. Though Lower Canada had a population of 650,000 and Upper Canada 450,000, each section was to have exactly the same number of members of the assembly. And for the first time in Canadian history, English became the only official language.

Needless to say, this system had to be imposed. Totally defeated, the French Canadians were obliged to enter a new political structure frankly and forthrightly designed to assimilate them. Into this morass entered the 33-year-old Louis-Hippolyte LaFontaine. No French Canadian, LaFontaine included, could accept the principles and goals of the Union. Few were willing even to participate. But LaFontaine met the challenge, agreeing to work within the system in order to transform its purpose.

In September 1842, LaFontaine delivered his first speech in the legislative assembly. He spoke in French. One opponent from Toronto noisily insisted that the times had changed and English was to be spoken now. LaFontaine continued making a memorable defense of his own language :

L'honorable député a-t-il oublié que j'appartiens à la nationalité si injustement traitée par l'Acte d'Union. Il me demande de prononcer dans une autre langue que ma langue maternelle le premier discours que j'aie à prononcer dans cette Chambre. Je me défie de mon habileté à parler la langue anglaise, mais lors même que je la parlerais aussi facilement qu'un Anglais, je n'en ferais pas moins mon premier discours dans la langue de mes compatriotes canadiens-français, ne fût-ce que pour protester solennellement contre cette cruelle injustice de cette partie de l'Acte d'Union qui tend à proscrire la langue maternelle d'une moitié de la population du Canada.

Je dois cela à mes compatriotes, je le dois à moi-même.²³

Even if he could, he would not speak English. He would speak French as a symbolic gesture of his defiance of an unjust law.

The really delicious contradiction was that LaFontaine, who would eventually become the national leader of the French Canadians, was the member for the English-speaking riding of Fourth York, north of Toronto. Unable to win a seat in the general elections of 1841, his Upper Canadian Reform friends arranged for a by-election. And so it went. With a healthy dash of courage, imagination and political invention, LaFontaine joined the English speaking Reformers. After seven years, he led his community from the political wilderness to become the first "responsible" prime minister of the Union of the Canadas.

At every point in Canadian history the contradiction manifests itself. As soon as the country became a place inhabited by two language groups, it appeared. Thirty years ago, Pierre Trudeau wrote a provocative essay entitled, "Some Obstacles to Democracy in Quebec." He wrote :

Historically, French Canadians have not really believed in democracy for themselves : and English Canadians have not really wanted it for others. Such are the foundations upon which our two ethnic groups have absurdly pretended to be building democratic forms of government. No wonder the structure has turned out to be rather flimsy.²⁴

If the opinions are debatable, the sense of contradiction in Trudeau's words is clear. A little later, he too would attempt to straddle the divide as had LaFontaine a century earlier. Time will judge the success of his achievement.

Derivative from and closely connected to the notion of contradiction is the final unique element of Canadian self-understanding, namely ambivalence. The word suggests an attitude of maybe or maybe not, either or, to be or not to be. The contradiction inherent in Canadian history results in this sense of vacillation or fluctuation. Perhaps one

of the most important episodes of Canadian ambivalence is Confederation itself, which was achieved in 1867.

Often seen as a fundamentally creative act, present day Canadian political institutions and values evolved from Confederation. Often Canadians find the political roots of what they are in 1867. To define what exactly the accomplishment was is more difficult. For many English-speaking Canadians of the time, Confederation was a project to liberate themselves from French Canadian domination, the totally unexpected result of the union designed to assimilate French Canada. George Brown, the great political chief of Canada West, leader of the Reform party, editor of *Le Globe* (Toronto) and father of Confederation, was one of the key players. Positively exuberant, he wrote to his wife Anne at the conclusion of the Quebec conference in October 1864. There Canadian political and business leaders hammered out the essential design of the new community. Completely satisfied Brown wrote :

"All right !!! Conference through at six o'clock this evening-constitution adopted a most creditable document-a complete reform of all the abuses and injustice we have complained of!! Is it not wonderful? French Canadianism entirely extinguished !"²⁵

Was a nation extinguished? With the passage of time and the development of myth, Confederation has come to be seen as the birth of a nation. When it was done, it was a political design fitted into the context of the competition of French- and English-speaking Canadians. French Canadians who favored the deal claimed it was a compromise, a pact, a treaty. They insisted that the new province of Quebec retained important powers sufficient to protect itself from the growing force of English-speaking Canada.²⁶

Their compatriots who opposed argued the contrary. For them Confederation was simply a means to overwhelm the French Canadians, just as Duplessis would argue in 1939. George Brown would have agreed. Confederation, warned the radical "Rouges," would inevitably lead to conscription and assimilation. Language and

religion would be ruined. Taxes would increase. Jobs would be lost. American hostility would grow. One of the most telling arguments of the Rouges was that it was not democratic. Let the people have a say, let the people vote, they pleaded. They never did.²⁷ French Canadians who opposed Confederation considered it a surrender, a defeat. Some who foisted it upon them, like George Brown, considered it a victory.

In selling the project, Canadian leaders spoke of the promise of industrial development. Visions of railways danced in the heads of businessmen and politicians. It seemed Canada had reached a stage of national maturity to make the great step to the union of all the British North American colonies. Few mentioned that the Imperial government insisted it be done. Britain was tired of Canada and the ceaseless problems it caused. D'arcy McGee, pre-eminent orator of Confederation, waxed eloquently on the creation of a new nation.²⁸

Still, many Canadians were ambivalent. Many were actively opposed, the French Canadians most of all, followed by the Nova Scotians and New Brunswickers. Prince Edward Island refused to enter until it got more money and railways. Newfoundland waited 80 years. Ironically, it took two province wide referenda before it came in. In fact, it seems only Canada West wanted Confederation. It is interesting to reflect on the results of the vote after the Confederation Debates in the Parliament of the Union of the Canadas in the winter of 1865.

There were 130 members in that Parliament. All voted except six who were absent. Ninety-one voted in favor, 33 against. Of the 62 members from Canada West (soon to be Ontario), 54 voted in favor, eight against. In Canada East (soon to be Quebec) sentiments were more divided. Of the 62 members, 37 voted in favor, 25 against. In that house, there were 48 French Canadian members, of whom 27 (56.5%) favored Confederation and 21 (44.5%) opposed.²⁹ It was a victory, but far from resounding, for Confederation. Professor Susan Mann Trofimenkoff reflected on Confederation in her recent fine synthesis of the history of Quebec. She concluded that it was an experiment "both viable and fearful ever since."³⁰

It was an ambivalent political achievement. Today as in the past Confederation was a risk and an experiment. The May 1980 Quebec referendum tested its feasibility once again. Was sovereignty-

association an affirmation of the Quebec nation or merely a ploy to divide and destroy Canada? Late in 1979, the Quebec government explained its position in a widely distributed white paper. It described the referendum as "un rendez-vous historique".³¹ Finally the people would have a say. The white paper referred directly to the Rouges and their leader who opposed Confederation. Referring to the absence of a popular vote in 1867, it claimed:

Quant à la population elle-même, on ne saura jamais ce qu'elle en pensait, le gouvernement ayant refusé de la consulter par référendum, comme l'avait demandé Antoine-Aimé Dorion.³²

The right denied the people of Quebec in 1867 was finally given them in 1980.

The answer they gave was ambivalent. Sixty percent voted against sovereignty-association, 40 percent in favor. Most English-speaking Quebecers voted against. French speakers were nearly perfectly divided, only a slight majority being opposed. Put simply, half liked it and half did not.³³ Talk about fearful and viable ever since! The referendum results compare to the vote after the Confederation Debates. As the French-speaking politicians were divided in 1865, so too were French speaking Quebecers who voted in May 1980. Ambivalence is a persistent and unique theme in Canadian history. It is also a way of life.

As an historian and teacher, I met this essential Canadian ambivalence much earlier and in a more immediate and personal way. Not from the examination of documents, or the reading of books and articles, or reflection on the great and important events, rather it came to me in the classroom transmitted by the students. As a master's and doctoral candidate, I met it in the classrooms of the universities of Western Ontario and Ottawa. In the first graduate tutorial I taught when we reached Lord Durham and his famous report the questions and discussion became animated.

In 1838 Durham came to Canada as governor with extraordinary and extensive powers. He was to investigate the conditions which gave rise to the rebellions and make recommendations for the future govern-

ment of Canada. Durham concluded that the essential Canadian problem was the conflict between French- and English-speaking Canadians. It was the root of all difficulties. After 80 years of British government in Canada, Durham decided the French Canadians must be assimilated and Canada must become a British colony in form and substance. Today, as in the past, his words were brutal and harsh.

There can hardly be conceived a nationality more destitute of all that can invigorate and elevate a people, than that which is exhibited by the descendants of the French in Lower Canada, owing to their peculiar language and manners. They are a people with no history and literature.³⁴

Do not these words, written in the 19th century, resonate the same insignificance found by so many visitors and observers of Canada since? Yet Durham's conviction shaped his recommendations. These were not merely opinions. They were views which would long influence the life and values of Canadians.

Durham believed there were two ways for a conqueror to act. Since the Conquest British government in Canada was wrong and misdirected.

There are two modes by which a government may deal with a conquered territory. The first course open to it is that of respecting the rights and nationality of the actual occupants. The second is that of treating the conquered territory as one open to the conquerors, of encouraging their influx, of regarding the conquered race as entirely subordinate, and of endeavoring as speedily and rapidly as possible to assimilate the character and institutions of its new subjects to those of the great body of its empire.³⁵

Durham concluded the British must complete the Conquest despite the necessary consequence, the disappearance of French Canada. The Canadian contradiction had to be erased.

The English-speaking students at the University of Western

Ontario were wise enough to admit the extremity of Durham's propositions. Yet, ingenuously they asked questions which remain in my memory. "Mr. Kenny, when it gets to the bottom line don't you think it would have been better had Durham's project succeeded? Don't you really believe, at the bottom of your heart, that things in Canada would be better and simpler had assimilation occurred?"

A few years later, struggling in French in my first tutorial at the University of Ottawa, the students were unanimous in their condemnation and detestation of Durham. In their opinion, never had Canada known a worse governor. The evil he accomplished in so short a time was nothing short of amazing. Hatred is the best word to describe their reaction. They harbored no suspicions that Durham's projects and recommendations were good. In fact, rejection and resistance were the only possible response.

In the classroom, in research and reading and in travel abroad, I have often met the persistent elements of Canadians' self-understanding. The unique features of the historical heritage of Canadians are insignificance, contradiction and ambivalence. Reflection upon them leads to even more questions. Certainly the previous pages have not solved any of the fundamental problems of Canadian history. Indeed, they may have added to the confusion and complications which so often accompany the process towards understanding Canada. The uncertainty causes me to think of the words of A. Burguiere which I read in *Les Annales*. He reflected on the even more fundamental process of understanding history itself:

Il faut le répéter : de même qu'un individu amnésique est un individu malade, une société ne peut vivre sans histoire. Il n'y a de sens du présent (de sens au présent) que si le passé est repris en compte, interrogé sans relache.³⁶

For their part, Canadians will not understand the present, the process towards the present, unless they consider the past well. Despite hard and complex problems, the task is worth the effort. Rooting in its past, one discovers what is truly unique about Canada. If people from beyond its borders can derive some useful lessons, so much the better.

'L'histoire doit déranger'. If these pages have solved no problems, perhaps they have sown some consternation. So much the better.

Notes

- 1 See an interesting article by Professors Harumi Befu and Kazufumi Manabe. "An Empirical Study of Nihonjinron: How Real is the Myth?" in *Kwansei Gakuin University Annual Studies* Vol. XXXVI. December, 1987 (Nishinomiya, Japan), while not specifically addressing uniqueness another article in the same journal focuses on some specific features of Japanese social and intellectual structures. See Hideichiro Nakano. "Comment Comprendre la société japonaise: une perspective socio-culturelle." in *Kwansei Gakuin University Annual Studies* Vol. XXXV. December 1986 (Nishinomiya, Japan). A recent example of a book length study is Peter N. Dale. *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness* (Croom, Helm and Nissan Institute for Japanese Studies, 1987). I was particularly interested to read a review by Professor Kimitada Miwa, Director of the Institute of American and Canadian Studies at Sophia University in Tokyo. See the review entitled "Demystifying 'Japanese Uniqueness'" in *Mainichi Daily News*, Sunday, January 31, 1988.
- 2 Daniel J. Boorstin and Brooks Mather Kelley. *A History of the United States* (Needham, Mass.: Prentice Hall, 1989). See the Prologue p. XIX.
- 3 George Orwell, *England Your England: and Other Essays* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1953).
- 4 *Petit Larousse: Dictionnaire encyclopédique pour tous*. (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1959)
- 5 Following are the complete references to the titles mentioned. Devid J. Bercuson, ed. *Canada and the Burden of Unity* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1977), Kari Levitt. *Silent Surrender: the Multinational Corporation in Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1970), Lorna Marsden and Edward B. Harney, *Fragile Federation: Social Change in Canada* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill-Ryerson, 1979), David J. Bell and Lorne Tepperman, *The Roots of Disunity: A Look at Canadian Political Culture* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979), Donald V. Smiley. *Canada in Question: Federalism in the Eighties*. 3d. ed. (Toronto: McGraw-Hill-Ryerson, 1980), Garth Stevenson *Unfulfilled Union-Canadian Federalism and National Unity* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1982), Paul Cornell, Jean Hamelin, Fernand Ouellet and Marcel Trudel, *Canada: Unity in Diversity* (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), George Grant, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart,

Canadian Uniqueness: A Historical Perspective

- 1965).
- 6 To some extent I discussed what is important to Canadian history in a recent historiographical article. See Stephen Kenny. "Histoire sans Coeur": Historiographical Reflection on the Work of Mason Wade." in *The American Review of Canadian Studies*. Vol. XVII no. 3. (Autumn, 1987) p. 278.
 - 7 Louis Hémon, *Maria Chapdelaine*. Bibliothèque Canadienne Française (Montréal: Fides, 1975/1918) pp. 36-37.
 - 8 One of the most provocative expressions of this perspective is Michel Brunet, *Les Canadiens après la Conquête, 1757/1775* (Montréal: Fides, 1980/1969).
 - 9 Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972), p. 11.
 - 10 *Ibid.*, p. 19.
 - 11 Anthony Trollope, *Phineas Finn* Vol. 11. Everyman's Library. No. 832 (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1950), p. 116.
 - 12 *Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*.
 - 13 Fernand Ouellet, *Histoire Économique et Sociale du Québec, 1760-1850* (Montréal: Fides, 1966). See the introduction by Robert Mandrou who explains the inspiration of Les Annales. "F. Ouellet, sans le dire peut-être assez explicitement, a esquisé ici une histoire totale du Québec. Telle que la souhaitent aujourd'hui, en France, tous ceux qui ont été touchés par l'enseignement et par les conceptions novatrices de Marc Bloch et Lucien Febvre." p. VIII. Bloch and Febvre were the early editors of Les Annales. I am not sure how more explicit a connection could be made since an earlier title was Annales d'histoire économique et sociale.
 - 14 Lionel Groulx, *Mes Mémoires* (T. 1. Montréal: Fides, 1970), p. 167
 - 15 See Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English Canadian Historical Writing, 1900-1970* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 21. Professor Creighton recounted this youthful episode in an earlier interview. See Eleanor and Ramsay Cook, *The Craft of History*, (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1973), pp. 131-132.
 - 16 Two very recent studies of Canadian voting patterns are: H. Penniman, ed., *Canada at the Polls, 1984: A Study of the Federal General Elections*. (Durham, N. C.: Duke University press, 1988) and J. Wearing, *Strained Relations: Canadian Voters and Parties*. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988). The two books were reviewed by Jean-Pierre Gaboury, "L'électeur canadien est le plus frivole du monde occidental." *Le Devoir*, samedi 15 octobre 1988.
 - 17 J. L. Granatstein and J. M. Hitsman, *Broken Promises: A History of Conscription in Canada*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977), Preface.
 - 18 *Ibid.*, p. 133. Quoted from the Houses of Commons Debates of September 8,

1939.

- 19 Herbert F. Quinn, *The Union Nationale : A Study in Quebec Nationalism*, (Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1963), pp. 104-106.
- 20 Granatstein and Hitsman. *op. cit.*, p. 171.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 177.
- 22 The exact question which appeared on the ballot was : "Le gouvernement du Québec a fait connaitre sa proposition d'en arriver, avec le reste du Canada, à une nouvelle entente fondée sur le principe de l'égalité des peuples. Cette entente permettrait au Québec d'acquérir le pouvoir exclusif de faire ses lois, de percevoir ses impôts et d'établir ses relations extérieures, ce qui est la souveraineté...et en même temps, de maintenir avec le Canada une association économique comportant l'utilisation de la même monnaie ; aucun changement de statut politique résultant de ces négociations ne sera réalisé sans l'accord de la population lors d'un référendum ; en conséquence, accordez-vous au Gouvernement du Québec le mandat de négocier l'entente proposée entre le Québec et le Canada ? Oui ou Non ?
- 23 Jacques Monet sj., *The Last Cannon Shot : A Study of French Canadian Nationalism, 1837-1850* (Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1969), p. 197.
- 24 "Some Obstacles to Democracy in Quebec," in Pierre Trudeau, *Federalism and the French Canadians* (Toronto : Macmillan of Canada, 1968) p. 103.
- 25 J. M. S. Careless, *Brown of the Globe*. Vol. 12. *Statesman of Confederation, 1860-1880*. (Toronto : Macmillan of Canada, 1959), p. 171.
- 26 see Richard Ares S. J., *Dossier sur le pacte fédératif de 1867 : La Confédération : Pacte ou loi ?* nouvelle édition, (Montréal : Editions Bellarmin, 1967), See also Jean-Charles Bonenfant, "Le Canada et les hommes politiques de 1867" in *Revue d'histoire de l'Amerique française*. Numéro spéciale. Vol. XXI. no. 3. 1967. A recent and provocative study of one of the pre-eminent French Canadian fathers of Confederation is Brian Young. *George-Etienne Cartier : Montréal Bourgeois* (Kingston and Montreal : McGill-Queen's University Prens, 1981)
- 27 For an extensive analysis of the 'Rouges' see Jean-Paul Bernard, *Les Rouges, Libéralisme, Nationalisme et Anti-cléricalisme au milieu du XIXeme siècle* (Montréal : les Presses de l'université du Québec, 1971.. Particularly useful is Chapter 5 "Un Double Echec, 1863-1867." See also Jean-Charles Bonenfant, "Les Canadiens français et la naissance de la Confédération," in *Canadian Historical Association Annual Report*, 1952.
- 28 *The Confederation Debates in the Province of Canada 1865*. P. B. Waite ed., The Carleton Library no. 2. (Toronto : McClelland and Stewart, 1968), p. 80.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. XVIII.

- 30 Susan Mann Trofimenkoff, *The Dream of Nation: A Social and Intellectual History of Quebec* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1982), p. 101.
- 31 *La Nouvelle Entente Québec Canada. Proposition du Gouvernement du Québec pour une entente d'égal à égal: la souveraineté-association.* Québec: Editeur Officiel, 1979. p. vii.
- 32 *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.
- 33 Historians consider the referendum results as very new and remain cautious in their assessments. Most suggest that the French speakers were about evenly divided, with just a slight majority voting against sovereignty-association. See J. L. Granatstein, Irving Abella, David J. Bercuson, R. Craig Brown and H. Blair Neatby, *Twentieth Century Canada*, Second edition, (Toronto: McGraw-Hill-Ryerson, 1986), p. 436. Also Paul-André Linteau, René Durocher, Jean-Claude Robert et François Ricard. *Histoire du Québec Contemporain: Le Québec depuis 1930* (Montréal: Boréal, 1986), p. 656. See also Kenneth McRoberts and Dale Posgate, *Quebec: Social Change and Political Crisis*, Revised edition Canada in Transition Series (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1980), Epilogue pp. 277-286. A particularly interesting and recent article which delves some of the implications is by Harold M. Angell. "Duverger, Epstein and the Problem of the Mass Party: the Case of the Parti Québécois," in Canadian Journal of Political Science. Vol. XX no. 2. June 1987

Newspapers throughout the country commented on the results. The very close split of French speakers gave rise to extensive debate of the part of political scientists and statisticians. See especially the articles and responses of André Blais and Pierre Drouilly both in *Le Devoir* and *La Presse*, mai-juin 1980. Premier Levesque, remarking on the results concluded that for French speakers it was 'un match nul' (a tie game). *Le Devoir* mercredi 21 mai 1980. As for me, I was in a PBS television station on the night of the referendum. Invited to comment on the results throughout the evening, when informed that the CBC had declared a victory for the NON and that French speakers had voted so evenly the difference was negligible, my thoughts immediately turned to the equally close split in 1865.

- 34 Gerald M. Craig, ed. *Lord Durham's Report*. Carleton Library. no. 1 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1963), p. 150.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 47.
- 36 A. Burguière. "Histoire d'une histoire: La Naissance des Annales, 1929-1979," in *Annales: Economies, Sociétés et Civilisations* 34^e année no. 6. (novembre-décembre, 1979). p. 1344.