

Toronto as Neglected Factor in International Cultural and Intellectual History

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It is entirely possible that Toronto, during the 1950s through the 1980s, has provided as much intellectual diversity, insight, and cross-disciplinary interface as any city in North America and possibly the world. We have heard much about Berkeley, Cambridge, Stanford, and Princeton, but little about Toronto. The outpourings of Frye and Davies, the Innis/McLuhan correspondence, John Leyerle's Centre for Medieval Studies, and the Values Group of the 1940s are among the highly influential constellation of independents whose collective work touches world thought.

Recognition, research, and writings surrounding the collective influence of this unconscious community is vital and overdue. Canadian influence upon the United States includes the invisible influence of ideas, cultural patterns, and programming. The essay below will focus exclusively upon Canadians in Toronto and document the influence of the case of leading characters upon U.S. thought and culture.

At the outset clarification is required regarding usage of the words "Torontonians" and "influence." Commentary regarding the *influence* of individuals and institutions housed in Toronto (hence Torontonians), does not hold as prerequisite that the individual be born and educated in Toronto, nor that the institution be founded nor even administered by native Torontonians. Rather "Torontonian influence" infers that the primary individuals and institutions discussed are or were based in Toronto for at least one decade during the height of their research, outreach, and recognition. Although many Torontonians were born and educated far from Toronto, all emerged and flowered within the Toronto intellectual and cultural milieu. Their breakthroughs, major publications, and significant meetings occurred in Toronto.

Northrop Frye is perhaps the most outstanding example of continuing influence upon United States and indeed international scholarship. The world-renowned professor, author, and literary critic graduated from the University of Toronto in 1933 and has taught there since his appointment in 1939, an impressive forty-five year tenure.

As an academic, Frye's accomplishments are prolific: he has written twenty books, edited twelve, contributed to forty, and published over 100 articles and reviews in learned journals. Noted, and quoted, his criticism is researched and revered. Not only scholars of English literature, but students of Drama language, Philosophy and Comparative Literature frequently find his books compulsory reading.

Frye's significance as a Canadian intellectual ambassador is even more impressive and germane. Frye was elected a Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1969, a Foreign Member of the American Philosophical Society in 1976, and an Honorary Member of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters in 1981. He was a Trustee of the English Institute, of which he was Chairman in 1953, and was a member of the Executive Council of the Modern Language Association of America from 1958 to 1961.

While he has lectured at over one hundred universities in countries as far ranging as Italy, Japan, and New Zealand, his significant penetration into U.S. curriculum includes full terms of semester long sessions at Harvard, Princeton, Columbia, Cornell, Berkeley, Indiana, and Washington. U.S. critical discussions of his work, including Ph.D. theses, number in the thousands. Honorary degrees, from Dartmouth to The University of Chicago, from Harvard to Iowa, are bestowed annually.

Although the number of influential words spoken by Frye at U.S. universities cannot be measured, the number of texts purchased by U.S. citizens can be concretely documented: *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Princeton University Press, 1947) sold over 27,000 volumes, at least half within the United States; *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton University Press, 1957) sold over 100,000 at the same ratio; *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982) has already sold over 22,000 copies and is increasingly demanded. Of the books Frye has edited, written, or prefaced at least half originated and were published in the United States.

Of the fifty-eight books to which he has contributed essays and introductions, thirty-four were published in the United States. Conversely, his periodical publishing has favored Canadian journals by a two to one ratio. The overall significance of such a publishing pattern is that Frye has remained loyal to Canadian publishers such as The University of Toronto Press while dominating U.S. literary criticism and publishers. Primary evidence of such domination includes Frye's invitations to speak, received from U.S. scholars asking information, critical comments, or interview time; and the several hundreds of students who have travelled from the U.S. specifically to study with Frye. The notion of the U.S. as a center with Canada and other "idea" markets as satellites is reversed by Frye who, despite visits to the U.S., maintains his base within and his allegiance to Toronto. Toronto no longer simply imports curricula and foreign perspectives but has emerged as an export Center within Ontario.

Robertson Davies, author, critic, playwright, Shavian scholar and Master Emeritus of Massey College (in The University of Toronto), has suddenly become equally visible: U.S. copies of Davie's novels also number well into the thousands; dozens of U.S. institutions have sought to entice Davies to lecture, teach, or be writer-in-residence. He became the first Canadian offered honorary membership into the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. Moreover, Davies's influence is far more diversified; he is considered an important interpreter of the works of Karl Jung and has spoken to the Jungian Societies East (1983) and West (1982); on the other hand, he is featured in *Newsweek* as a colorful and convincing playwright and novelist. Furthermore Davies is discussed by Canadian John Kenneth Galbraith in *The New York Times Review of Books* as a significant contemporary intellectual figure and important, author: "Robertson Davies's novels have their setting in Canada but they are for the world."

There can now be no doubting of Davies's stretch beyond the Atlantic with the translation of his books into Dutch, Finnish, Chinese, German, Polish, Norwegian, Swedish, and numerous other languages. However, it is his U.S. recognition which has finally taken a quantum leap: the Quality Paperback Club, for example, is typical of the U.S. publishing houses which list him with more traditional names--Hemingway, Joyce, Kafka, Mann, Twain, and Woolf." As with Frye, the reversal is definite: while Davies travels to the United States, he is anchored in Ontario, and his writing reflects a keen insight which owes no more to his English erudition than his circle of associates and experiences in Toronto.

Canadian scholars and artists have not flourished without assistance. Among those Canadian institutions which remain unrecognized is the University of Toronto Press (founded 1901), which has sold hundreds of thousands of Canadian books to U.S. purchasers. For example, in addition to more popular works such as Atwood's prose and Karsh's portraits, scholarly volumes such as Harold Innis's *The Fur Trade in Canada* (1956, Yale Univ. Press, 1930) and *The Bias of Communication* (1951) have sold as well in the U.S. as in Canada. Marshall McLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, although later released by a non-academic publisher in U.S., has sold over 51,000 copies, at least half to U.S. buyers.

Clearly, the significance is not simply a reversal in the exportation of ideas. Innis and McLuhan were not discovered as "interesting Canadian thinkers," but rather as "interesting thinkers," which signaled a greater tribute to both Canada and its intellectuals. Ton Wolfe granted McLuhan greatness by association: "Suppose he is what he sounds like, the most important thinker since Newton, Darwin, Freud, Einstein and Pavlov?" Nor does the accomplished scholar James Carey hesitate to discuss Innis within the same tapestry of thought as Comte, Mumford, and Weber. With Innis, McLuhan, Frye, and Galbraith, Canadians became more than weak signals from the North: their dialog contributed to worldwide forum; other significant voices, many of whom were United States citizens, had to modify, redefine, or at least reconsider their own perspective. While the books sold in the U.S. can be measured, the more significant data of attitudinal shifts cannot. That McLuhan and Galbraith became "household words" in literate America, and Frye and Innis became significant reading in more specialized academic departments, indicates that intellectual history must now take into account the province of Ontario.

At least 40 % of the University of Toronto Press 's books find U.S. markets. As many of their titles are aimed specifically at Canadian audiences, one could safely infer that over half of their other publications are sold below the border. Moreover, while the University of Toronto Press is viewed locally as a "Canadian" press, it is viewed worldwide as an academic press, and one of the top ten North American academic presses.

Near the University of Toronto Press is the Centre for Medieval Studies (founded 1963) in the University of Toronto. Although the Centre is already recognized in publications such as Christopher Kleinhenz's *Medieval Studies In North America*, the Centre's most influential import/export is the graduate student. In fact the majority component of students in the Medieval Centre are U.S. citizens. It could be argued that the U of Toronto is now having as large an impact in training medieval scholars as any U.S. institution. Indeed the Centre is partly funded by the U.S. National Endowment for the Humanities and has just placed two of its graduates on the faculties of Cambridge University and Harvard University.

John Leyerle, former director of the Centre, and now Dean of the Graduate School, is among the most underrated and understated scholars in North America. Primary evidence is the worldwide reputation of his institution: the Centre has spawned the Pocoli Ludique Societas (founded 1965), which Leyerle states has produced more medieval plays than any company in the world. In calling his Centre the number one department on the continent Leyerle points to the 125 Ph.D., candidates who graduated in the last twenty years. Many of these are now scattered throughout the English-speaking world on the faculties of prominent academic institutions.

Possibly the most significant interface in Toronto intellectual history was called the Hart House Values Group. Thomas Easterbrook, who later became chairman of the Department of Political Economy, informally assembled up to one dozen colleagues at Hart House, the architectural

centerpiece of the University of Toronto, for bi-monthly meetings in 1948. Heillener, Clark, Savan, and others casually convened to alternatively present ideas and papers in progress for group discussion. Undoubtedly the most influential participants who were to emerge from the group were Harold Adams Innis (1894-1952) and Herbert Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980).

Innis was not unknown to U.S. social scientists: he was resident of the American Economic Society, the author of numerous U.S. published documents, graduate of The University of Chicago (Ph.D.), and mentor for small numbers of U.S. students and professors. However, it was the phraseology of McLuhan which made Innis's later ideas regarding communication available to an enormous public.

For example, "The medium is the message," a phrase attributed to McLuhan, was a daring distillation of Innis's highly complex *The Bias of Communication* (U. of Toronto Press, 1951). That phrase alone has appeared over one million times in U.S. publications and essays. Innis's themes, as adopted and adapted by McLuhan, have been distributed worldwide and provide the most publicized, controversial, and occasionally confusing vision of communication distributed. McLuhan's own thoughts, phrases and publications have inspired far more debates, discussion, and publications in the United States than in any other country. Even his most revered critics borrow from McLuhan's coined language to attack him, a linguistic pattern which subconsciously acknowledges the depth of McLuhan's influence. Phrases such as "The Global Village," which have passed into every day usage, have appeared in literally millions of printed sentences and may well outlive their critics. Hence the very rhythms and patterns of language, which many linguists would argue influence thought and perception, have not only strictly fashioned Torontonians audiences: but also these unique rhythms and perceptions have emanated from Toronto worldwide.

During the 1960s and 1970s, McLuhan was quoted far more widely than Frye, or any other Canadian. Moreover, his world-wide speaking invitations, over half of which came from the United States, exceeded all other academics in North America. The combined impact of Innis's thought and McLuhan's prose style upon U.S. academic and popular culture is arguably as forceful as any "foreign" thought field (Heidegger, Sartre, Beckett, Lévi-Strauss) introduced to the United States during what McLuhan termed the "Electric Age."

When McLuhan died, so did the momentum of his perspective. Since 1963, the Centre had attracted an international smorgasbord of thinkers, seekers, avant-garde artists, and mainstream academics. More than any other Centre in Toronto, McLuhan's self-styled think tank attracted those U.S. independents-authors, scientists, producers, advertisers, and students-who were in search of something within the spectrum between truth and trend. McLuhan's impact upon these migrants from John Cage and the Happening crowd to Tom Wolfe and the New Journalists-was notable, albeit ephemeral. The ultimate acknowledgment of McLuhan's sainthood to the U.S. quasi-intellectual avant-garde came from Woody Allen who cast McLuhan as himself in a walk-on cameo role in the movie *Annie Hall*. That Allen expected a popular U.S. audience to recognize and understand McLuhan was the ultimate concession to Canadian penetration.

During private interviews in 1974, George Steiner, Malcolm Muggeridge, Hugh Kenner, and other prominent intellectuals spoke knowledgeably of the writings of McLuhan and Frye as other predecessors might have spoken of the Vienna Circle, transcendentalist poets, or the Cambridge School in previous eras. Such impact was unknown for Torontonians, or any intellectuals preceding World War II.

While McLuhan's and Innis's impact may be receding, the influence of Frye and Davies is still expanding. Although the Centre for Culture and Technology's driving spirit has vanished, Massey College, the home of Frye and Davies, has emerged as an increasingly significant focus for research, scholarship, and artistry. Like the Centre for Medieval Studies, Massey was born with "instant tradition," backward-looking values and forward-looking graduate students. Conservative and highly selective, both Centres have drawn about them a team of notable senior scholars who work with a deliberately small number of highly qualified graduate students.

Massey, however controversial as a conservative "Common-wealth" institution, has attracted, in addition to Frye and Davies, some of Canada's finest scholars and, not surprisingly, representative intellectuals from numerous foreign, particularly Commonwealth, countries. The collective publications, credentials, and artistic influence of scholars such as Frye, Davies, Vincent Bladen, Claude Bissell, Donald Creighion, Robert Finch, Douglas Lapan, Jacques Berger, Ann Saddlemyer, William Swinton, Boris Stoicheff, Abraham Rotstein, Tuzo Wilson, among others- is sufficient to warrant a reputation far beyond Ontario. This year Stoichoff was awarded the Frederick Ives Medal, the Optical Society of America's highest award; Berger, a native American, presented the annual invitational lecture to the graduating class in Honors Science at The University of Bridgeport in Connecticut; Frye served on the Visiting Committee of The Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton University; Davies received an honorary Ph.D. from the University of Rochester, read from his poetry while there, and wrote for *The Washington Post*. The cumulative impact of such seemingly insignificant events is emphatic: U.S. students who read the works of Massey scholars, or hear them lecture, compete with other students for entrance at Massey. Upon completion of their graduate degrees, Massey students have placed highly in leading academic and other professional centers. Not surprisingly, the University's Graduate Dean, Graduate Centre for The Study of Drama, and President maintain a close affiliation with the College.

Surrounding the University of Toronto, its Press, intellectual centres, and strongest transmitters (Innis, McLuhan, Frye, Davies, Leyerle) are numerous other influential figures and institutions who have made their mark upon world affairs-former President John Evans, who has held a prominent position with The World Health Organization, Emil Fackenheim, whose treatments of Hegel and Judaism are widely admired, and the Pontifical Institute, a collection of rare documents and distinguished scholars. Encompassing the University are neighboring institutions - York University, the Ontario Government complex, Ryerson College, the CBC television and radio networks, among others - which have to varying degrees supported or cross-fertilized aspects of the University's influence. Nor may one overlook celebrated novelist Josef Skvorecky, the exiled Czech scholar; Michael Snow, the influential artist/film-maker; and the supporting cast of personnel who inspired, publicized, and distributed Toronto's spokespersons, from the deeply profound to the merely provocative.

That many Torontonians have historically minimized their own influence is not surprising: Canadians have been socio-psychoanalytically perceived as "an identity typified by a search for identity." In a characteristic witticism, McLuhan labeled Canada a "borderline case," while Innis rebuked Canadians for not knowing and cultivating their indigenous resources intellectual as well as natural. In 1973 a magazine fill-in contest, "As Canadian As," attracted the celebrated winning entry "As Canadian As... is possible under the circumstances." Such a collective inferiority complex may be a crucial factor in understanding the reluctance of certain Canadians to claim an influential cultural or intellectual history.

Moreover, the widely studied dominance of ancestral (English, French) and neighboring (U.S.)

cultures has been seen as a suffocating sponge which has suppressed or seduced Canadian talents. John Kenneth Galbraith, for example, has been called "the greatest Canadian made in America." Many natives and visitors alike still refer to "French" and "English" Canada rather than to Quebec or other provinces. U.S. television, however, broadcast across the border is neither French nor English nor Canadian.

These two factors - Ontario bashfulness and U.S. (cf. French and English) rapacious assertiveness, however prominent, do not add up to the entire truth. Torontonians particularly have "broken the code" (Frye), or joined the "global village" (McLuhan), within a larger transnational culture. "South of the border" may strangely have ironic meaning when spoken in reference to U.S. citizens. In some instances, the U.S. may be seen as a market, a periphery, even a colony, from the standpoint of the spread of specific ideas. While such perspectives seem as yet somewhat premature, Toronto's migratory influence may no longer be denied. Nor can there be any lingering doubt about the *growth* of such influence.

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