

## *Review Article*

### **Nailing Jelly to a Wall: Possibilities in Intellectual History**

by TERRY COOK

**A Disciplined Intelligence: Critical Inquiry and Canadian Thought in the Victorian Era.**

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**Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900.** DOUG OWRAM. Toronto, et. al.: University of Toronto Press, 1980. x,

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Writing intellectual history, its principal Canadian pioneer once claimed, is like trying to nail jelly to a wall.<sup>1</sup> The subject is amorphous and difficult to pin down, its practitioners forced to sift through an ethereal realm of ideas, myths, attitudes, assumptions, values, feelings, and beliefs, rather than through concrete, quantifiable data of events and facts familiar to most other historians. While the outcome of a clash of two armies in the field, of two politicians on the hustings, of union and management in the streets, of two corporations in the stock market is relatively clear, the result of a conflict between two thinkers, two ideas, or two general sets of values is immeasurably less so. Quite simply, the remains left by most historical figures — acts of state implemented, constituency organizations established, wages earned, profits posted, goods exported, factories started, railways built, territories explored — are more concrete and their causative historical impact far more measurable than is the legacy left by intellectuals.

The concrete remains of the intellectual — books, articles, manuscripts, reports of speeches — are of little help. Was a book read by hundreds or hundreds of thousands? Even sales figures, when available, are a relatively useless measurement. Few would argue that a dime-store novel selling in the millions would have had the same impact in the nineteenth century on national character or social development as, say, the works of Thomas Carlyle or John Stuart Mill, which sold in the thousands. Recent attempts to measure column inches devoted to certain ideas or themes are hardly helpful, for the assumption of the importance of the quantities rather than the qualities of ideas is not proven. Even the successful fruition and popular acceptance of a particular idea is no guarantee of its influence as a causative historical force. Was, as an example, the New Imperialism of the late 1890s a product of such imperialist intellectuals as Dilke, Seeley, Parkin, and Kipling or of very practical events in the worlds of defence, commerce, and diplomacy? If an amalgam of these two forces, how does one isolate the relative contribution of each? And even if one grants, as most scholars do, that the ideas of the imperialists were a significant cause of the New Imperialism, how does one separate the influence of any one imperialist from the collective impact of his colleagues or of all of

1 S.F. Wise, in opening remarks to his graduate seminar on intellectual history at Carleton University, September 1969.

them from such popular manifestations of their ideas as songs, poems, music hall pageants, yellow press journalism, jubilee celebrations, and decorated cookie tins? The sheer difficulty of getting a grasp on intellectual history, on assessing the impact of ideas in the past, begins to make nailing jelly to walls seem an attractive proposition.

And yet, getting such a grasp is essential not only for the historian, but also for the archivist. Intellectual history utilizes approaches to documents and to the past that transcend the literalist, one-dimensional perspective that too often threatens to engulf the archivist. If archivists are to rise to the ideal of Renaissance catholicity that should animate our profession, they must develop a greater sensitivity to the subtleties of intellectual history. What has been said of the historian applies equally to the archivist: "I have difficulty imagining that anyone can be a historian without realizing that history itself is part of the life of the mind; hence I have been compelled to insist that the mind of man is the basic factor in human history."<sup>2</sup>

Man is distinguished from animals by his intellect and reason, or in broader terms by his mind, soul, or spirit. This ability to think, to speculate, to dream, to articulate is, of course, a function of language. Thus, the truly distinctive aspect of human history is the essential role of verbal culture, from the highest philosophical abstractions to the unconscious social habits which can be seen as the embodiment of past thoughts and ideas. Historians ask not merely what people did but, in a special sense not applicable to the actions of dogs or horses, why they did it. In short, historians seek the clues to human motivation which language alone can reveal. In this context, ideas are not merely part of history or even "the most distinctive part but, by our usual interest, by far the most significant [part]."<sup>3</sup>

Two examples will suffice to demonstrate this significance. Through economic, social, or archaeological analysis, we may learn that a certain tribe moved up the side of a mountain each spring. But, until we unravel the ideas and value systems of the tribe, until we have some clue as to its shared goals and unconscious assumptions, we will have no understanding of why this annual wandering occurred. We may conclude that its members sought fields for their flocks or that they fled the flooding river in the valley, when in fact the summer solstice enticed them upwards to a closer communion with their sun god.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the most sophisticated pioneers of the new social history can probe, with the aid of computers, the thousands of names in census returns, parish records, tax rolls, electoral lists, and city directories to discover the number of children per family, the average age of marriage, voting patterns, number of acres farmed, permanence or fluidity of settlement, and a good deal more. But until we learn the thoughts and values of the people studied, such data remain little more than a sterile shell. For example, were the large number of children the product of economic necessity, religious belief, community or racial custom, no publicity for birth control devices, or collective psychological pressures leading to higher levels of passion?

People do not react to raw events or cold facts, but rather to their *perception* of those events and facts. The "big lies" of Adolph Hitler regarding the economic perfidy of the Jews or the "stab-in-the-back" interpretation of the German defeat in the Great War may not have been "real" or true, but clearly these ideas became a reality to millions who perceived them to be true, thus rendering such ideas a significant causative force in twentieth-century history. Or, again, it is a *fact* that in terms of 1951 incomes and prices Canadians now pay less for gasoline, as a percentage of their real wages, than they did

2 Perry, Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), p. ix.

3 Paul K. Conkin, "Intellectual History: Past, Present, and Future", in Charles F. Delzell, ed., *The Future of History: Essays in the Vanderbilt University Centennial Symposium* (Nashville, 1977), p. 112.

4 *Ibid.*

thirty years ago. Yet this "fact" has little reality as a causative force in 1980; the image of blue-eyed shieks gouging the nation is firmly fixed in the public mind. This perception has become reality and a powerful historical influence. It is this distinction of political, economic, or social objective reality and the subjective filter of ideas, values, and assumptions through which that reality is perceived (and often altered, embellished, warped, and misinterpreted) that lies at the core of intellectual history. Archivists might do well to better acquaint themselves with the nature and controversies of intellectual history for, as I hope to show later, they have been somewhat insensitive toward this most significant area of historical study.

What, then, is the nature of the beast? In the first place, the very difficulty of intellectual history long delayed its development. As recently as 1951, even American intellectual history — one of the first and best examples of such study — was described as "a new specialty ... not likely to submit easily to definition ... still seeking coherence, still eluding confinement."<sup>5</sup> During the preceding century, the new, professional, academic historian who followed the "scientific" methodology and supposed historical objectivity imported from Germany was for the most part actively hostile to the study of ideas; "...the 'scientific' school's devotion to pure fact-finding aroused distrust of the history of ideas as a quagmire of subjectivity." In a terrible indictment, John Higham asserted in 1951 that historians had, with but few exceptions, "shared the general inertia induced by an inclination toward tangible particulars and a lack of training in theoretical analysis. By and large, they preferred to remain on safe and accustomed ground, studying the outward facts of social activities without investigating directly the movements of thought and feeling which lay behind them."<sup>6</sup> Even now the charge is still heard in some quarters that the study of ideas is too theoretical, too subjective, too impressionistic, closer in fact to philosophy than history.

Since the 1940s in the United States and the 1960s in Canada, however, intellectual history has foiled the sceptics and flowered considerably. Studies of the ideas of the thinkers behind conservation, education, idealism, the social gospel, nativism, imperialism, loyalty, liberalism, nationalism, anti-Orientalism, health care, evangelicalism, and much else have graced our understanding of the Canadian past. This general renaissance of intellectual history has been attributed to a realization of the important role propaganda played in the Second World War in moulding popular beliefs, to the communications revolution creating a global village bound together by ideas, to fruitful interdisciplinary contacts with philosophers and political scientists, and, in Canada's case, to the powerful precedents being established in American historiography.

And yet, despite its recent acceptance, intellectual history is beset by basic problems of definition. Its practitioners are divided into two clearly delineated schools. Any reconciliation between the two remains largely illusory. The two approaches are known as the internal and external study of ideas or sometimes as, respectively, the history of ideas and intellectual history. (The latter is confusing, since intellectual history is now normally used to encompass both internalist and externalist approaches.) In essence, these two schools reflect the epistemological dichotomy evident in philosophy ever since Descartes separated the phenomenal and mental worlds, the worlds of matter and mind. The empiricism of Locke, Hume, Bentham, and Mill was as much related to one half of Descartes' dichotomy as the idealism of Berkely, Edwards, Kant, and Hegel was to the other. Empiricists viewed the mind as a functional agent moulded mechanically in response to pleasure and pain. Ideas, therefore, were caused rather than causal and followed rather than preceded objective or material reality. Conversely, idealists conceived of ideas as a higher or even the only reality, asserting that the material or natural world

5 John Higham, "The Rise of American Intellectual History", *American Historical Review*, LV1 (April 1951): 453.

6 *Ibid.*, pp. 457, 462.

would be chaos without the organizing capacity for its interpretation found in the human mind. Ideas thus have a life of their own; they are able to deny or transcend the seeming dictates of the physical forces of nature. Ideas become, therefore, causal forces in their own right that can precede actions in the material world; they are not merely rationalizations or reflections after the fact of underlying socio-economic-biological forces.<sup>7</sup>

In practical terms for the writing of intellectual history, internalists and externalists adopt approaches to the study of ideas in the past which reflect, respectively, the idealist and empiricist perspectives. The externalist examines the content of popular beliefs, usually viewing ideas in a sociological or ideological context; the internalist studies systems of pure or "higher" ideas, seeing them most often from a literary or philosophical perspective. Applying a functional criterion, the externalist tests ideas in the market place, assessing their significance in terms of concrete actions and accomplished deeds. Consequently, such persuasive propagandists or political journalists as George Brown, D'Alton McCarthy, or Henri Bourassa might loom larger in history than such philosophers, "ivory-tower" academics, or intellectuals as John Watson, William Dawson LeSueur, or Northrop Frye. Eschewing a functional orientation, internalists believe that the human mind at its best can create ideas, values, and attitudes that reach far beyond — indeed, may even deny — the practical, grubby world of material pursuits. Ideas are deemed significant according to their consistency, originality, or influence on subsequent ideas. In short, the externalist searches for the connection between thought and deed, between the ideas of a few people and the actions of many; the internalist explores the connection between thought and thought, between the ideas of one group of thinkers and others who may have preceded, paralleled, or succeeded it.<sup>8</sup>

The problems of both approaches, when taken to their logical extremes, are nearly self-evident.<sup>9</sup> The externalist at worst debases the human mind to a mechanical automaton, at best to little better than a functional auxiliary to the natural, material world. He cannot account, therefore, for the common persistence throughout history of ideas in hostile environments nor for the deep — but quite impractical — religious and artistic impulses that so often animated the human mind. Conversely, the internalist betrays an intellectualistic superiority complex, a narrowness of being attracted to the most complex, consistent, and attractive thinkers rather than to the most mundane and popular. History cannot be confined to the analysis solely of philosophers. One need not deny the historical importance, indeed even the primacy, of ideas and yet still accept that past human behaviour was also influenced by climate, soil conditions, disease, modes of production, political configurations, transportation revolutions, and so on, or that intellectuals are often motivated by social and psychological factors as well as by a disinterested search for "Truth". Internalists are often condemned as hopelessly elitist for failing to encompass such factors although, in defence of the internalist perspective, John Higham has deplored the common prejudice "that intellectual history is 'unreal' unless continuously linked to behavior, as if the movement of thought is somehow less free, or less capable of separate treatment, than the movement of other historical structures."<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, such treatment cannot by itself be considered as the definitive analysis of the intellectual spirit or climate of any given age.

7 This connection is touched upon in John Higham, "Intellectual History and Its Neighbors", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XV (June 1954): 341-3; and Conkin, "Intellectual History", *The Future of History*, pp. 114-5.

8 See Higham, "Intellectual History and Its Neighbors", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, pp. 341-2; and Rush Welter, "The History of Ideas in America: An Essay in Redefinition", *Journal of American History*, LI (March 1965): 599-600.

9 They are best stated in Higham, "Intellectual History and Its Neighbors", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, pp. 343-7.

10 John Higham, "American Intellectual History: A Critical Appraisal", in A.S. Eisenstadt, ed., *The Craft of American History* (New York, 1966), II, p. 21.

Two very fine new books — Brian McKillop's on the clash of religious conviction and scientific inquiry in Victorian Canada and Doug Owram's on the expansionists' vision of the Canadian West — display the great possibilities of intellectual history. They also illustrate graphically the controversy outlined above for, although the division is not absolute, McKillop is committed to an internalist framework whereas Owram is firmly in the externalist camp.

Ironically, McKillop addresses the original, central dichotomy that divides intellectual historians. His sensitive probing of the awesome impact of critical inquiry on faith and piety in nineteenth-century Canada, of the naturalism of Darwin on the accepted religious assumptions of most Canadian thinkers, explicitly evokes the core conflict between empiricism and idealism. For McKillop is not content merely to analyze the conflict between religion and science. That clash was just the popular manifestation of a much deeper division between critical inquiry and moral conviction, between the competing modes in the human mind and psyche of criticism and affirmation. To this deeper dichotomy McKillop turns his attention, to "the tension inherent in the relationship between, on the one hand, man's desire to use his intellect — his organizational and critical capacity — to further his knowledge and to enhance his understanding and, on the other, his concurrent wish to maintain certainty of conviction." (p. x) Faced with the rise of an inquiring frame of mind challenging all forms of orthodox thought, Anglo-Canadians sought during the nineteenth century to establish and preserve "a broad moral code that would constitute the core of a way of life reconciling belief and inquiry, tradition and innovation, [community-centred moral] concern and [democratic, individualistic] freedom." (p. ix).

That Canadians were deeply upset in the early nineteenth century by the challenges of critical inquiry, McKillop convincingly demonstrates. Analyzing the thought of Anglo-Canadian educators, clerics, philosophers, and men and women of letters, he reveals that many feared an intellectual "anarchy" borne of the unguided application of reason, criticism, pride of personal intellect, and scientific research (especially in geology) to the unquestioned orthodoxies which previously had knit together a community based on moral concern, faith, and piety. To preserve the civilized community as it had evolved, Canadians placed their faith for the "proper" training of the nation's leaders in the hands of the Anglo-Canadian, Protestant colleges and universities — McKillop curiously has little to say about Catholics and French Canadians — founded in Canada West and the Maritimes after 1840. To several generations of professors and students in such institutions, education was "something other than the simple pursuit of knowledge for its own sake; it was instead the regulated pursuit of those examples of human knowledge which were in accordance with the religious and moral truths ... deemed necessary to cultivate a pious frame of mind." (p. 16) It was a "disciplined intelligence", for the unbridled race after knowledge was extremely dangerous; it would have developed the student's intellectual faculty at the expense of his moral and spiritual sensibilities. Reason and intellect were not rejected — both after all obviously existed — but rather were channelled to create a tripartite accommodation between matter and mind based on Scottish Common Sense philosophy, Paleyite natural theology, and the Baconian scientific method. By the mid century the future purveyors of English Canadian opinion — ministers, scientists, teachers, journalists — were deeply schooled in this new orthodoxy in the hope of preventing the anarchy many felt would surely have resulted from an unrestrained conflict of reason and revelation, intellect and piety, science and religion, matter and mind.

Canadian educators aimed at nothing less than demonstrating "that a properly conducted inquiry into the world of nature, whether physical or human, would reveal the wondrous handiwork of God." (p. 23) The Scottish Common Sense philosophy as taught in Canada by James George, William Lyall, and others sought to reconcile the

rational intellect and moral conviction that existed within the human mind as the essential link between a critical study of nature and a pious vision of God. This they did by dividing the mind, both in terms of analytical functions and actual physiology, into “senses” or “faculties”: the moral nature, speculative intellect, feelings and will, and so forth. (Phrenology was a popular, albeit extreme, manifestation of these same constructs.) This dualism in the mind between reason and faith seemed satisfactory, for each could be given free rein within its own compartment. Thus, the discoveries of man and the revelation of God could exist side by side. Similarly, the natural theology developed by William Paley and taught in Canada by James Beaven and James Bovell, among others, attempted to explain such scientific discoveries as fossils and geological upheavals, which seemed outside the normal events of the Bible, as but the footprints of God, the glorious demonstration of the complexity and wonder of His handiwork. Detailed investigations of nature, of geological and biological phenomena, did not reveal the operation of natural laws, but rather by the awesome and infinite variety of such phenomena drew the investigator inexorably to the Author of it all. The study of science, properly directed, would quicken piety, not undermine it. Finally, the Baconian method based on empirical observation and inductive reasoning dovetailed nicely with these beliefs, for it denied the efficacy of deductionist theories (such as those propounded by Darwin and Einstein) and advocated the study of natural minutia to fit into a preconceived plan of Divine design.

By the 1850s, therefore, a sense of balance existed in Canadian intellectual life. Revealed and natural theology seemed placed in a harmonious relationship. Intellect had been accommodated to a moral imperative. Evidence found in external nature (natural theology), human nature (the “faculty” psychology), and scriptural revelation all seemed part of one Divine Truth. And, yet, this accommodation was gossamer thin. Natural theology offered no proof of Divine design, only an elaborate (and artificial) analogy. The dynamic of nature — Tennyson’s “Nature, red in tooth and claw” — also seemed quite out of place with the natural theologians’ beneficent, harmonious, and static universe. The “faculty” analysis of Common Sense only made sense when reason and piety kept within their separate compartments. When they were in conflict, the stark assertion that reason must be wrong, that revelation was always paramount, was hardly intellectually acceptable once such conflicts began to occur regularly. And, in an ironic twist — one of many McKillop delights to reveal — the philosophers, theologians, and scientists in erecting this accommodation sowed the seeds that would eventually wreck it; by promoting critical inquiry, philosophical speculation, and scientific investigation in Canadian life, they legitimized modes of thought which would soon escape the narrow, subordinate, and disciplined purposes to which they had initially been set.

This fragile unity was shattered by Darwin. Truth became relative, the intellect free to pursue knowledge to wherever it might lead rather than merely to defend revelation. Darwin quite simply challenged the immutability of nature’s design. Although previous work in astronomy, geology, and paleontology had suggested a mutable nature, Darwin supplied through the laws of natural selection (“survival of the fittest”) the mechanism by which such change took place. As well, by outlining variations and transmutations of species, Darwin not only exceeded the narrow canons of Baconian science, but contradicted the Mosaic account of the Creation of inviolable and absolute species. By implication, an autonomous universe operating on its own natural laws (evolution) denied the existence — or at the very least the active, present interference — of God in man’s affairs. Here at last the intellectual “faculty” had burst forth from its narrow compartment and directly attacked the moral or spiritual faculty to which it had previously and nervously been coupled.

Despite a spirited effort by such defenders of the tripartite orthodoxy as William Dawson and Daniel Wilson — how could scientists be incredulous of a descent from

Adam and yet complacent about their descent from apes; where was the “missing link” in the evolutionary chain? — the old dualisms of the spiritual and material worlds had been rent apart, with awesome implications for both science and religion. Attempts to create a new accommodation to preserve the moral bonds of the community based on revelation while yet encompassing Darwinian evolution came from William Dawson LeSueur and John Watson, the two central figures in McKillop’s pantheon. LeSueur was Canada’s first modernist who, like Hegel, Comte, Mill, and Arnold, “sought to reconcile the basic forces of freedom and authority, progress and order, liberty and culture ... on the basis of ... a progressive view of man and society.” (p. 137) A strenuous advocate of the “critical spirit”, of the liberty of each individual to inquire critically into all dogma and all phenomena, LeSueur nevertheless distinguished between free thought and responsible thought, the latter being used to further the cohesion of the organic society, in effect “freedom” to pursue moral “concern”. His distinction was somewhat artificial, for the use of progressive, positivist means to spiritual, conservative ends reflected the unsatisfactory dichotomy of Common Sense. LeSueur remains, however, an important transitional figure. While he could not reject his subconscious debt to the earlier faculty psychology that controlled elements of his thought, neither could he take the final logical step to philosophical idealism towards which the modernist, critical side of his vision clearly drew him.

It was to that philosophical idealism, not positivism, that educated Canadians turned to reconcile evolutionary science and Christianity, rational intellect and moral conviction. Although idealism had been known since Plato and certainly since Kant and Hegel, the strength of the British empiricist tradition had precluded significant inroads by idealism in the English-speaking world until the 1860s. Thereafter, John Watson of Queen’s University became one of the world’s leading idealists and Canada’s most significant and influential philosopher. Idealism as formulated by T.H. Green at Oxford and Edward Caird at Glasgow and spread in Canada and the United States by John Watson and Josiah Royce became enormously popular, for it healed the division of the spiritual and material worlds. How? Briefly, idealism posited an epistemology that elevated mind over matter, that ended dualism by subordinating the latter in function to the former. The universe — the natural, material world — would be a meaningless and chaotic whirl without the organizing capacity of human reason. Yet the human mind had not always been static. Following Hegelian notions of progress or evolution, idealists had as their central idea the principle that throughout the historical process there had been an ascent from the inorganic and the material to the organic and the self-conscious life of the mind. History was, in short, the unfolding of the spiritual principle, of attempts by man to draw ever closer to the spiritual unity — or Supreme Consciousness or the Ideal or, in Christian terms, God — that according to idealist epistemology must of necessity unite the whole universe. The free play of reason, of critical inquiry, was the very means, therefore, by which man comprehended even more fully the spiritual unity which combined all existence into a meaningful whole. Idealism offered much to late-Victorian Canadians:

It rendered Common Sense superfluous by maintaining its own insistence on the ‘moral nature’ of man while asserting the active powers of mind. It made defences of a Paleyite natural theology in the face of materialistic, ‘anarchic’ evolutionism unnecessary because it spoke of a purposive evolution of the race, which was also the evolution of mind or spirit and within which scientific theories of organic evolution must fall. Finally, it marked a new variation of the pious disposition. Man *could* ... come to know Ultimate Reality ... for in its final formulation ... universalized thought would achieve a ‘unity with the divine nature.’ This was the ultimate expression of piety. (pp. 191-2)

Furthermore, in its social dimensions, idealism profoundly affected Canadians well into the 1920s. Its obvious emphasis on a spiritual, organic, moral, and united community animated aspects of imperialism, civil service and educational reform, church union, and especially the social gospel and social reform.

Yet idealism eventually collapsed under the weight of its own logic. In attempting to infuse reason with Christian spirituality, idealists cleared the way for "the application of an essentially secular rationalism to the Christian revelation." (p. 211) Moreover, idealism ironically came to resemble the evolutionary naturalism of which it was the avowed enemy. Asserting that everything is spirit (or God) is ultimately to deny that there is a God for, as one astute observer has stated, "pantheism is a polite form of atheism...." (p. 215) Finally, the stress on the social ethics rather than the theology of Christianity by such radical social gospellers as Salem Bland and S.D. Chown transformed a transcendent God into an immanent force for social good; sociology and other social sciences replaced theology and philosophy as the cutting edge of Canadian intellectual life.

McKillop concludes, however, that the idealists were no aberration in Canadian thought. They were very much part of a tradition of searching for a moral imperative which has animated Canadian life from the early views of John Graves Simcoe, Judge Haliburton and the Upper Canadian conservatives through the thinkers McKillop has studied (most notably LeSueur and Watson) and on up to such contemporary figures as Donald Creighton, Harold Innis, Hugh MacLennan, George Parkin Grant, and Northrop Frye. This thread in the Canadian fabric "has consistently urged that it is necessary to reach a *modus vivendi* between intellectual inquiry and conventional wisdom, between individual autonomy and the social good, between the myth of freedom and the myth of concern." (p. 231) At its worst this tradition could result — and has — in "a narrow, conformist, and intolerant moralism, and it could thereby create an intellectual atmosphere that was both stifling and oppressive" against opposing forms of political and ideological dissent. But at its best, this tradition has nurtured "the largeness of vision that results from an honest acceptance of the burdens of both the past and the future, an openmindedness that could weigh tradition and change, stasis and flux, and do so with a clear sense of the social good." (p. 232)

McKillop's masterful analysis of the Victorian frame of mind in Canada has an internalist perspective. The intricate changes of ideas over time — from the fears of intellectual anarchy to the tripartite orthodoxy of Common Sense, natural theology, and Baconian science, from its collapse under the impact of Darwin to the new paradigms of LeSueur and Watson and their ultimate demise — all this change is ascribed, as seen above, to the internal and often ironic dynamic of the ideas themselves. Ideas were formulated, held sway, and finally collapsed according to their own consistency, influence, and strength to encompass other ideas. The truly astounding social and economic changes occurring in Canada from 1830 to 1920 are barely mentioned in these pages and certainly are never explicitly given a significant role in the rise or fall of an idea. Rather, such social phenomena as institutions for higher education or social gospel reforms are viewed as clearly derivative from, indeed, almost automatic corollaries to the imperatives of certain ideas. Even the thinkers themselves seem to be little more than pure vessels in which ideas were found. The psychological motivation of intellectuals — along the lines of the insights of Erik Erikson regarding identity formation, as applied to the lives of Luther, Ghandi, Henry Alline, and others — is absent. So, too, is any sense of the social pressures on these intellectuals; their "status decline" in the face of *nouveau riche* industrialists and a secularized, universal electorate may well have helped to define the nature of their ideas and the reasons for advancing them. From McKillop one gathers no other motivation for these intellectuals than a disinterested pursuit of "Truth", however each may have defined it. Finally, the influence of these ideas on



society, their concrete, practical results as opposed to their influence on other ideas and thinkers, is assumed rather than proven. McKillop studies the elite — the philosophical ideas in their purest Canadian formulation — and not the dynamic, popular (and simplified) creed of idealism that later derived from that philosophy. While often suggesting that the students and congregations of these theologians and philosophers would have spread these various ideas to thousands of others, even McKillop admits (pp. 206, 217) that the influence of idealism cannot be assessed without further study. The above limitations are perhaps inevitable in an internalist approach to intellectual history.

Doug Owram takes the opposite tack. Dealing with journalists, propagandists, and promoters rather than philosophers, he investigates ideas in the everyday world: myths, perceptions, attitudes, and stereotypes rather than the untarnished promulgations from the ivory tower. Owram states his theme (and methodology) thus:

Man reacts to his perceptions of reality as well as to reality itself. The North West — with its acres of prairie and parkland — remained constant through the history of the expansionist movement, but the perceptions men had of it grew and changed. Social values, economic opportunities, and the fears and aspirations of Canadians shaped the image of the West and their hopes for its future. Realistic or delusory, noble or selfish, these perceptions determined the evolution of the expansionist movement and of Western Canada as surely as did the harsh economic realities faced by the would-be farmer or merchant on the new frontier. (p. 6)

Owram is not an extreme externalist who would subordinate ideas entirely to their material surroundings or who would deny them a strong influence in altering behaviour, but he does place ideas firmly in the context of the social and economic realities of their times. As he traces the complex patterns of thought that transformed the image of the West during the nineteenth century from a semi-arctic wilderness to the fertile garden of Eden by which Canada could be lifted from colony to nation and eventually empire, Owram graphically demonstrates the power of ideas to influence political, economic, and social realities and, as significantly, of these practical realities themselves to create, maintain, or destroy popular attitudes and beliefs.

Until the 1850s the image of the West held by Upper Canadians was unflattering: an enduring, distant wilderness with arctic characteristics and climate suitable only for the fur trade. Settlement was considered undesirable if not impossible; Selkirk's Red River colony was seen as almost treasonous as well as foolhardy, for it drew valuable settlers away from Upper Canada to a territory whose fate could only be annexation to the United States. There were many practical reasons for this negative image of the West: the demise of the North West Company in 1821 ended Canadian commercial relations with, and therefore interest in, the West; the urgent need for settlers to fill the abundant empty spaces of Upper Canada militated against a potentially rivalrous region; the commercial orientation of the Empire of the St. Lawrence through the construction of expensive canals and railways was to the frontier hinterland of Canada West and the American Middle West (Ohio, Illinois, Indiana), not the North West; and, finally, the transportation routes of the fur trade brigades of the Hudson's Bay Company in the sub-Arctic and the British fascination in the first half of the nineteenth century with locating the North West Passage (and soon the missing Franklin expedition) gave the whole region west of the Great Lakes a harsher, colder, more northerly, and less agricultural image than actually was the case. While these very practical factors created the negative image of the West, that image once formed had in itself a strong influence, for the vision of a howling wilderness was hardly inducive to prospective merchants and farmers. Owram wisely does not engage in any futile chicken-and-egg arguments here, being content simply to conclude that this negative myth precluded significant interest by central Canada in the West before the middle of the century.

Again, it was external realities that fundamentally changed this initial image of the West. First, the British drift to free trade, the reciprocity treaty of 1854, and the start of the Crimean War ushered into Canada West an era of unparalleled prosperity, the great symbol of which was the railway. For many, belief in the railway bordered on a religious faith: it could dissolve distance, promote urban and industrial development, enlarge markets, and unite nations and empires. The resultant myth of railways (and progress) which long exceeded their reality significantly expanded the horizons and ambitions of Canadian manufacturers and entrepreneurs, and their attendant journalistic and political allies. Secondly, the end of the free land frontier in Canada West in 1855 raised the spectre of confinement; the prosperity born of immigration and agricultural settlement would be threatened by a growing demographic crisis, hardly a reassuring prospect in the age of Malthus and an over-populated Ireland. Finally, the Laurentian transportation network of canals and railways was clearly not tapping the American hinterland, having been gravely undermined by the abolition of imperial protection in 1846. If the system were not to impede, new markets must be found to increase the flow of people and goods through it. Given these factors, a large and ever-increasing number of powerful voices in Canada West became committed expansionists; they saw the North West as their patrimony, the solution to ominous demographic, transportation, economic, and social problems looming on the central Canadian horizon. The expansionist campaign from the beginning also transcended such materialist considerations. Infused with missionary and nationalist zeal, expansionists also believed it was their sacred duty to bring the wild savages and future settlers of these western territories within the pale of civilization and Christianity and to join these vast lands into a strong transcontinental nation which would become the bulwark of the British Empire.

A movement driven by fear, material opportunities, and missionary fervour was difficult to resist, and expansionists soon flexed their muscles. The Hudson's Bay Company was to them clearly the enemy, for it kept the West in autocratic submission, oriented it to England rather than Canada, and blocked settlement and agricultural development to protect its own corrupt fur monopoly. Under a barrage of expansionist propaganda, the Company's mercantile preserve was soon swept away. However, expansionists still had to counter the negative image of the West. Accordingly, expeditions under Captain John Palliser and Henry Youle Hind were soon dispatched to investigate western climatic and soil conditions. Although Palliser's famous Triangle marked a "desert" area unsuitable for agriculture, vast areas of the West north of the Triangle were discovered to be prime agricultural lands. At the same time, the scientific notion of the isotherm was being propounded; previously, temperature was thought to strictly follow parallels of latitude. In a forceful demonstration of the power of an idea, O'ram shows how the isotherm principle almost instantly spread the popular perception of the warmth of the American West hundreds of miles north into the British North American prairies and thus dispelled the earlier arctic connotations.

Once the image of the west had changed in this positive manner to make feasible the earlier desires of the expansionists, the movement became irresistible leading, as O'ram shows in fascinating and subtle detail, to the Great Coalition, Confederation, the acquisition of Rupert's Land, the Red River Rebellion, the concerted drive by the federal government to attract immigrants, and the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway. The apotheosis of expansionism came with the scientific enthusiasms of John Macoun who in an 1879-80 expedition removed the arid qualifications of Palliser and Hind and declared the entire West a fertile paradise; Palliser's Triangle no longer existed. Expansionists had long wanted to dissociate the Canadian West from the American desert to the south and thus Macoun's findings were eagerly accepted. In articulating a new image of the West without qualifications or limitations, "Macoun's influence was as important in matters of policy as it was in matters of rhetoric. It is no exaggeration to conclude that he influenced decisions that shifted the whole axis of development in the

North West.” (p. 161) In the first instance, the new CPR syndicate immediately changed the railroad’s route from the northern fertile crescent to a southerly one across the drier prairies. The capital of the North West Territories was symbolically removed from Battleford to the new Regina, the Department of the Interior shifted its teams of Dominion Land surveyors to the south, and of course towns, villages, and settlers followed in the wake of the railroad and surveyors to create “nothing less than a new map of the North West.” While these decisions were obviously not the result solely of Macoun’s work, the fact nevertheless remains that had “the original assumption still existed that the southern prairie was desert ... the Canadian Pacific would not have been constructed through it.” (p. 162) And in those matters of rhetoric, Macoun’s new myth caused all restraint to vanish from the expansionist movement in the early 1880s; the West was depicted to prospective immigrants as a virtual utopia, a Garden of Eden, in which no person could fail to find material comfort. Previously, expansionists’ enthusiasm and confidence had been tempered by a healthy respect for the hard work needed to break a quarter-section farm in often adverse conditions. But the need for immigrants and, as important, the relentless, cumulative effect of decades of expansionist rhetoric soon generated a growing lack of realism in dealing with western settlement. Indeed, the very power of the rhetoric, of the images and ideas of the West, became itself very much a reality, with rather startling consequences.

By the mid 1880s, something had clearly gone wrong. The collapse of the Winnipeg land boom, the failure of the National Policy to populate the West, the twin scourges of grasshoppers and frost, and the depressed markets for wheat had most evidently not created utopia. The image and reality of the West no longer coincided and, for the many expansionists who had gone west during the previous fifteen years, a bitter disillusionment resulted. Because of the inherent power of the evolved myth, however, Westerners retained their image of the prairies as a fertile garden; their sense of frustration and powerlessness was not directed towards the land itself — a far more severe depression fifty years later would be needed to challenge Macoun’s optimistic conclusions. If not the land, the image, or themselves, then blame for hard times must lay elsewhere: the people who had gone west as part of a great national and even imperial project had been betrayed by those who stayed at home. The East rather than enter into a true and equal national partnership with the West was bent only on hinterland exploitation for its own benefit. The change was clearly evident in relation to Louis Riel: in 1870 expansionists had scorned the Red River Rebellion as a reactionary hindrance to progress; in 1885 many white settlers in the West strongly sympathized with Métis discontent in the face of Eastern indifference and Eastern domination. Westerners focused their disillusionment by attacking the CPR’s monopoly clause (the railway now ironically having replaced the Hudson’s Bay Company as the conspirator against Western aspirations) and by promoting the idea of a Hudson’s Bay Railway (thus, as had the old fur company, establishing a transportation route that would avoid the East entirely). As well, they began in the 1890s to erect the foundations of Western historiography as an expression of their new sense of regional identity: Selkirk was rehabilitated as a great philanthropist and the Father of Western Settlement rather than the treasonous stooge of the monopoly-crazed Hudson’s Bay Company; the Nor’Westers were no longer the harbingers of expansionism, but rather murderous villains from the East bent on destroying Selkirk’s fragile colony; the Hudson’s Bay Company itself was viewed favourably for its founding role — at least as noble as Ontario’s United Empire Loyalists — in the West; and the pre-1870 Red River community was romanticized as a happy, simple, Golden Age untainted by Eastern interlopers. The result of this final twist of expansionist imagery was not merely the formation of a regional identity, but also the birth of a Western attitude of superiority over the degenerate East.

The central irony of expansionism was of course that a movement begun in Ontario to make the West an integral part of Canada ended within a generation — and often in the minds of such original, surviving expansionists as John Schultz and Charles Mair—

by becoming a firm regional identity with strong anti-Ontario overtones. Even when the promise of expansionism was largely fulfilled during the Laurier boom, the power of the cumulative image that had gone before could not be erased. The strength of the perception that the East continually conspired to subordinate the West, that the West could still be a utopian paradise given the abolition of the nefarious influences of Eastern grain traders, elevator operators, railway, banks, tariffs, and the federal government, popped up again and again in such Western movements as United Farmers, Progressives, Social Credit, and the CCF.

Owram's book is a graphic illustration of the power of ideas — of myths, images, perceptions, attitudes — to alter social and economic behaviour. Its externalist framework should be clear from the foregoing summary: ideas are analyzed for their practical influence; they are also firmly set in and usually evolve from changes in the socio-economic-political climate of the era. For those reasons as well, Owram's characters have flesh and blood; Henry Youle Hind or John Macoun seem to come to life, to have colour and motivations, in a way John Watson or William Lyall do not in McKillop's pages. And yet, there are nagging doubts. Did expansionist ideas change so neatly and completely following new events or conditions in the material world as Owram suggests? Did none of the earlier configurations of the image survive such practical changes? And if so, with what influence? Some expansionists in both the West and East — Frank Oliver and George Grant come to mind — seemed able to reach a working accommodation between the two regions. And what of the deeper motivations behind expansionism? Such practical programmes as expansionism, imperialism, nationalism, or nativism are not usually advanced in their own right, but because through them their proponents hope to establish their own view of culture and morality, of human nature, of fundamental philosophy (in the nineteenth-century sense of "right living"). These are the basic issues that McKillop addresses so eloquently; yet even though some of his intellectuals were also expansionists — Daniel Wilson and George Grant, for example — very few of his conclusions regarding such basic beliefs find their way directly onto Owram's pages. Finally, was the vision of Eden as unique in its western agricultural focus as Owram implies, was the agricultural crisis back in Ontario so blackly hopeless? It has recently been suggested that from the late 1860s leading Ontario agriculturalists, such as the founders and early staff members of the Ontario Agricultural College, optimistically saw in technology and education the real possibility of rural Ontario becoming the agrarian Eden. Indeed, such visionaries explicitly scorned the West: anyone could grow wheat, but only Ontario's trained gentlemen could master the complexity of dairy farming, mixed gardening, and so on.<sup>11</sup>

Despite these quibbles, *A Disciplined Intelligence* and *Promise of Eden* are recommended to archivists as splendid examples of intellectual history at its finest. As Walter Houghton did in *The Victorian Frame of Mind* (1957) for British intellectual history and as Perry Miller accomplished in his many books for hundreds of Puritan and New England scholars, McKillop's outstanding study of the internal workings of the Canadian mind in the nineteenth century provides the basic framework, the vital touchstone, from which the next generation of Canadian intellectual historians must begin their work. While less sweeping in its scope, Owram's analysis is also impressive, not least because so many familiar historical phenomena — Selkirk, Clear Grit expansionism, the Red River Rebellion, the CPR, western discontent — which have traditionally been viewed in social, economic, and political terms take on entirely different and more subtle meanings when studied instead through the filter of the ideas, perceptions, and images held towards such events by nineteenth-century Canadians.

11 I gratefully acknowledge the author of these ideas, Tom Nesmith of the Public Archives of Canada, whose paper "'Vision of Eden: Science, Technology and Rural Life at the Ontario Agricultural College and Experimental Farm, 1874-1900', An Overview", 8 August 1980, is a summary of his forthcoming doctoral dissertation for Carleton University.

Archivists need to be more sensitive towards intellectual history, and reading these two books is a good starting point. One searches almost in vain in finding aids for much awareness of intellectual trends among the archival records described. While such specific subjects mentioned in letters as "Pacific cable", "imperial penny postage", "tariffs", "YMCA", and "standard time" are annotated in finding aids, one finds no references to "natural theology", "Baconian science", "positivism", or "philosophical idealism". Surely the ideas held by an individual as revealed in his personal papers are as worthy of archival attention as are the various organizations to which he belonged or the specific people and programmes with which he was associated. Yet even the general inventory description of an intellectual's papers are distressingly (and uninformatively) broad: "lecturer", "traveller", "author", "man of letters", "educator", and so on. One can only assume that this relative insensitivity to ideas extends from descriptive tools to public service. While the researcher might well receive authoritative guidance in response to such questions as "What do you have on Chinese immigration or railway financiers?", such an interrogation as "Do you have any papers demonstrating Scottish Common Sense philosophy or rational positivism?" would most likely be met with blank stares. Awareness of new trends in intellectual history would happily ameliorate such situations.

These two books also raise interesting questions regarding sources. In addition to the usual records for intellectual history — manuscript letters, reports, speeches, and essays as well as printed articles, pamphlets, newspapers, and books — Owrarn is keenly sensitive to other media, especially paintings and maps. He shows repeatedly (pp. 12, 60, 105, 114-5) that some maps were less a result of disinterested, scientific cartography as they were "a product of the expansionist impulse as [much as] was any editorial in the *Globe*." As but one example, an 1874 map in a government publication showed a Canadian Pacific railroad spanning the nation, American transcontinental lines as merely "projected", and hostile Indian tribes dotting the American West. The message to prospective immigrants could hardly have been clearer. This treatment of all media sources as equal grist for the intellectual historian's mill may surprise some archivists accustomed to the administrative division of archives into separate units based on medium, with the accompanying corollary that each has its own unique clientele.<sup>12</sup> Owrarn shows that the ideas revealed in the works of a painter or cartographer were as much a part of expansionist imagery as were the ideas reflected by writers of letters, reports, and editorials. The textual/non-textual dichotomy is intellectually artificial. Some of McKillop's sources — university calendars, examination papers, obscure college newspapers and periodicals — raise a separate issue. While printed, such records are now often unique items. Should the normal dichotomy of printed/published (library) and unprinted/manuscript (archives) apply in these cases? Could not specialized university archives respond more sensitively to such records than huge university libraries? For other media — posters, films, maps, prints — published items are widely collected by archives. But for textual material, the traditional division usually persists. Does it really best serve the efficient preservation of information to have government files in an archives and related published government reports and studies (often single, surviving copies) kept separately in libraries?

When reviewing two books in tandem, it is fashionable to play one off against the other. *A Disciplined Intelligence* and *Promise of Eden* differ not simply for their externalist and internalist approaches. Although both cover the same period and both deal with Anglo-Canadian intellectuals, there is little overlap. There is no mention of expansionism in McKillop's pages, even though some of his subjects were involved in that movement. And while some of Owrarn's expansionists certainly shared the concern of McKillop's subjects to establish colleges and churches as a means of creating a moral and stable community in the West, there is nowhere found the agonizing division be-

12 Andrew Birrell, "The Tyranny of Tradition", *Archivaria*, X (Summer 1980): 251.

tween inquiry and belief that so troubled McKillop's Canadians. Why? It is possible to suggest, as McKillop has in a different context, that these two books — perhaps even the internalist and externalist approaches generally — mirror two competing nationalisms in Canada. He shrewdly observed that "whereas liberal-nationalists were forced by the dictates of their political assumptions to ignore, if not repudiate, an integral part of Canada's history [the conservative-idealist-imperialist tradition] imperial-nationalists in Canada were on the other hand never fully able or willing, given the demands of their own assumptions, to accept much of its sociology."<sup>13</sup> The reconciliation of matter and mind, of character and circumstance, of internalist and externalist intellectual history, will not be found by proponents of either side searching for it while denying the validity of their opponents' position. Rather, it will be found by exploring the tension, contradictions, and resulting dynamism produced by the existence and occasional interaction of the two traditions.

13 A.B. McKillop, "Nationalism, Identity and Canadian Intellectual History", *Queen's Quarterly*, LXXXI (Winter 1974): 540-3.

