may be imitated *is.* And not merely because it fosters a misunderstanding of postmodernism.

Hutcheon herself provides the best possible example of the potentially detrimental secondary effects of this kind of practice. In the same year as *A Poetics of Postmodernism,* she published a slimmer volume entitled *The Canadian Postmodern.* What we are given in this book, essentially, is a shorthand version of its companion piece (the same themes, the same ritual incantations of names and sources, the same familiar catch-phrases) chopped into bits and disposed as a kind of legitimising framework around and between long chunks of relatively conventional (despite the interlarding of jargon) thematic-cum-formalist analyses of selected Canadian novels. To what effect? Well it's boring, of course — regurgitation does tend to pall after a while. It's also, however, in a subtle but important sense, a betrayal of its subject matter. What Hutcheon does in this book — and the key here is the hierarchy tacitly implied by her format — is to take the "special knowledge" normalised so persuasively in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* and transform *it* in turn into an agent of normalisation. Invoked this time as a *fait accomplit,* and validated through the simple device of prioritisation, the discourse of postmodernism, no longer the subject but the arbiter of questions, now serves itself as a kind of alternative "master narrative" by which the author can legitimise not only her own work ("owning" the narrative marks one immediately as an authority) but also — and this for me is the real problem — the body of literature she has managed to bring under the fashionable umbrella. As if it has no significant pre-history of its own, no claims on our consideration except insofar as it can be shown to resemble an international model, Canadian fiction, divested of its Canadianness, is suddenly "discovered" to be interesting.

What's ironic about this is that there was really very little to discover. Despite her attempts to downplay the fact (only big-name sources get more than passing mention in Hutcheon's work), virtually every feature singled out for comment in this study, from recursiveness to an obsession with history, has already been amply documented by other critics. Where this writer departs from her predecessors is only in labelling these things as postmodern. Far from momentous, in fact, the substantive contribution made by the book is at best a trivial one. Its positive flaws, on the other hand, are far from trivial. Again Hutcheon cheats her readers. Labels aside, in failing to acknowledge that many of the supposedly unique features of the "new" literature can be traced to or derived from the practice of earlier writers, she creates the entirely misleading impression that recent developments signal a radical departure for Canadians. They don't. Canadian literature was recursive, historical, evasive, subversive, ironic, collective, parodic, poetic, and feminist long before such features became fashionable.

If it looks postmodern, therefore, it is for uniquely Canadian reasons. Had she examined these reasons, Hutcheon could have written a much more important book. In her determination to present her thesis as a monolithic and seamless construction, however, she ignores totally (that is, neither recognises *nor* rebuts) the possibility that the "explanation" for current practice might lie anywhere else than with her master narrative. In doing so — and this is my real beef — she implicitly denies that Canadians have anything more to congratulate themselves for than their cleverness at finally catching on to international trends.

What amazes me most about all this is not Hutcheon's own simplemindedness, but the willingness of her Canadian readers to accept what can only be seen as a demeaning distortion. That it has been accepted can, I think, be taken as given. Much of *The Canadian Postmodern* was published previously, and little to my knowledge has ever been seriously challenged. So the question remains: how does Hutcheon get away with it? Much is undoubtedly due — once again — to her facility for radiating authority. With respect at least to this particular book, however, I don't think that's the whole of it. Canadians have always tended to be defensive about their differentness. Judging from the concerted and recurrent attempts we have made over the years (this is only the latest version) to align ourselves with — prove ourselves indistinguishable *from* — imported models and fashions, there is clearly a feeling among Canadian artists and intellectuals that to be distinctive *qua* Canadian is necessarily to be inferior. This, to my mind, casts a rather different light on recent developments in literary criticism. More and more now in Canadian journals and conferences and colloquia we see name-studded, jargonised, Hutcheon-style "think" pieces being privileged above all other modes of critique. Incantation of the correct (imported) legitimising sources has, in fact, recently become the badge of belonging. The in-groupiness of this movement makes these new practitioners seem both arrogant and elitist. Underneath, though, things may not be exactly what they seem. Take Hutcheon herself, for example. When one notes that her atypical definition of postmodernism in fact "fits" Canadian literature much better than it does the international œuvre from which it was ostensibly derived, it seems reasonable to suspect that she picked up her sense of normativity subliminally from her own cultural environment, projecting it on the broader ambience out of an unconscious desire, born of insecurity, to make it, and herself, seem more important.

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Where is here? and other travels through the Canadian psyche

DANIEL JONES

The Secret Kingdom: Interpretations of the Canadian Character
by **Dominique Clift**
Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1989, 240 pp.

Canadian Identity: Major Forces Shaping the Life of a People
by **Robin Mathews**
Ottawa: Steel Rail, 1988, 132 pp.

> All of us, at some moment, have had a vision of our existence as something unique, untransferable and very precious. This revelation almost always takes place during adolescence ....
>
> Despite the often illusory nature of essays on the psychology of a nation, it seems to me there is something revealing in the insistence with which a people will question itself during certain periods of its growth.
>
> (Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude,* 1950)

The desire to define a national identity or character is peculiar neither to Canada nor to the rhetoric which has recently informed the debate surrounding free trade with the United States. The latter, however, has generated renewed interest in the nature and survival of the Canadian nation-state, and it is to this market that these two books attempt to appeal — albeit from widely divergent ideological perspectives. *The Secret Kingdom,* based on Dominique Clift's *Le pays insoupçonné: essai* (Montréal: Libre Expression, 1987), epitomises a liberal, *laissez-faire* attitude to politics; indeed, its author acknowledges the financial support of Imasco Ltd., Alcan and Steinberg Inc. *Canadian Identity,* on the other hand, invokes a conservative Marxist approach to Canadian history and is published by Steel Rail, a press dedicated to socialism and nationalism in culture. However, while *The Secret Kingdom* is an extensively researched and extremely readable history of national character in Canada — Clift won the Governor General's Award for *Le Fait anglais au Québec* in 1978 — *Canadian Identity* is poorly documented,

riddled with archaic jargon, repetitive, and at times incoherent. This difference can in part be attributed to the rhetorical strategies of each author. Clift pretends to an objective discourse, thus conveying an image of historical accuracy, reasoned argument and political neutrality. Robin Mathews employs the rhetoric of the manifesto; in the vein of George Grant's *Lament for a Nation* (1965), Mathews's stance is at once angry and despairing, evoking the image of the evangelist rather than the scholar.

For both Mathews and Clift, national identity exists as a monolithic, essentialist concept — monolithic because it attempts to cover the aims and ideologies of all Canadians, essentialist because national identity is portrayed as something that is contained within each Canadian solely by birthright. In tracing the evolution of the way Canadians have come to see themselves, both authors assume the role of alienist with the collective population as analysand: the Canadian psyche is examined in terms of its existential development rather than its determination by the forces of class, race, gender or regional division. Indeed, multiplicity and difference, particularly the existence of defined communities, are diagnosed by Clift and Mathews as symptoms of a divided self, a nation torn apart by competing desires. For Clift, the preoccupation with national identity is merely an avoidance of reality: Canadians simply refuse to accept their nationhood.

If Clift finds Canadians merely neurotic, Mathews believes they suffer a deeper psychosis: Canada is the victim not only of internal but of external forces; the questioning of national identity "has to do with our very survival beside the most powerful imperialist nation in history."

It is Mathews's contention, indeed his sole argument throughout the book, that "Canadian identity lives in a process of tension and argument," a dialectic of opposing ideological and historical forces. The "root dialectic," for Mathews, is the "conflict between a balanced communitarianism and an unleashed competitive individualism," or, in other words, the opposition between the conservatism of the founding principles of confederation, "peace, order and good government," and the liberalism of unhindered capitalism as symbolised by the United States. A large portion of *Canadian Identity* is devoted to tracing the divergent yet overlapping histories of conservative and liberal ideologies. Conservatism is examined from the reflections of Edmund Burke through to the politics of John A. Macdonald and critical writings of W.L. Morton, Harold Innis and George Grant, whose lament for the impossibility of conservatism in Canada becomes Mathews's own rallying cry.

Canadian Identity can be seen as a morality play where liberalism is incarnated as the force of evil and manifests itself in the writings of Thomas Hobbes and Adam Smith and the "monstrous inhumanities" to which his thought gave rise — it is an important coincidence for Mathews that Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* and Marx's *Capital* were published the same year as the U.S. Declaration of Independence and Canadian confederation, respectively. In Mathews's view, A.R.M. Lower is *the* "Liberal Canadian historian," and Marshall McLuhan "the illegitimate son" of Innis, who, in a symbolic patricide, depoliticised Innis's ideas and "de-natured them of their moral character."

Mathews argues that Canada could have continued to thrive on the dialectic of opposing ideologies, as a constitutional monarchy "with many Tory/Conservative institutions existing in a genuinely Liberal Capitalist economy," had the supremacy of parliament and conservative traditions not been undermined by Pierre Trudeau. The patriation of the constitution marks "the empowering of a small group of legislators (the members of the Supreme Court of Canada) ... closely tied to continental capitalist power." At the same time, however, the dialectic within each competing ideology has led to a transfer of political philosophy. A revisionist, "new Conservatism" has pushed the Progressive Conservative Party under Brian Mulroney into the liberal, continentalist camp. "Whether," Mathews writes, "the communitarian side of the dialectical argument has been damaged irreparably is a question time alone can answer." While Mathews argues for a vibrant, progressive dialectical vision, the dialectic he embraces is strangely static: the traditional conservative ideology he embraces seems not only to have been doomed from the the start but to have completely disappeared from the political sphere.

Dominique Clift sees a fracture rather than a dialectic in the Canadian character, a division between tradition and progress, authority and individuality, difference and unity, that must be overcome for Canadians to achieve independent nationhood in the postindustrial world. Taking his cues from the cultural criticism of Northrop Frye and Margaret Atwood, Clift finds two dominant strains in Canadian history and writing: "the tragedy of exile and the survival of the beleaguered garrison." To Frye's question, "Where is here?", Clift finds a people who, because of their "fear" of the harsh environment, have created isolated communities or "garrisons" defined by region, language, religion and ethnic "neotribalism." This in turn has "produced a society that displays little self-awareness in its political debates," and a people who "have long been trained by their environment to defer to authority and leadership." The image of the garrison in Canadian literature and thought becomes, for Clift, not only an escape from the responsibilities of nationhood but a fortress against a larger unity.

In difference, however, Clift finds similarity. French and English define themselves negatively, in opposition to each other, thus displaying their "interdependence." In the same way, he finds a sameness in the "alienation" of the prairie provinces and the "inwardness" of Québec. Borrowing heavily from Innis's "Laurentian thesis," Clift finds that the material conditions for unity already exist with the Canadian Pacific Railway, which provides both a symbol of collective goals and the geographical assurance of national independence. However, in the poetry of such Canadian authors as F.R. Scott, Archibald Lampman and Earle Birney (each on the left of the political spectrum, though Clift fails to mention this), he finds a bias against such progress, a "desire to perpetuate traditional bonds and lifestyles... that are at odds with a modern industrial world." The necessary conditions for national unity and survival already exist: the progenitors of Canadian culture, and thus Canadians themselves, simply lack the "collective imagination" to embrace them. It is interesting to note the way in which the present restructuring of VIA Rail, which has pitted a large portion of the population against the interests of the free market as manifested in the Mulroney government, illustrates the shortcomings of Clift's mythical reading of Canadian history, revealing class and regional divisions where Clift finds a Luddite opposition to progress.

If Clift sees a need to overthrow tradition, Mathews finds in it the strength of Canada's identity: nothing has defined national character more clearly than institutional religion. In his brief discussion of "The Left Vision of Canada," Mathews finds in the Social Gospel movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the roots of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation. Indeed, both the C.C.F. and the N.D.P. "assured the country that the criticism of capitalist power would have a vital Christian content." For Mathews, the historical role of religion in Canadian politics works as a powerful force in shaping liberal and conservative ideologies, particularly English Protestantism with its "sense of the relation between classes." That religion has not played a similar role south of the border Mathews ascribes to a greater religious tolerance in Canada and the more pernicious influence of capitalism on American churches as manifested in such phenomena as television evangelism.

While these are valid arguments, he later undermines them by his portrayal of the divisive influence of the Catholic Church, thus showing both a lack of tolerance on his own part and a deference to non-denominational religion, the cornerstone of American politics. At the same time, the Church in Canada has not been immune from the forces of the dialectic. By placing "individual conscience" over the public good, the churches aided those Americans who resisted the war in Vietnam, thus "actively supporting the immigration to Canada of people who epitomised U.S. individualism." Mathews's anti-Americanism is surpassed only by his questionable belief in the revolutionary potential of religion. "[W]e have yet to see," he writes, "what the outcome will be if big capital and the Canadian churches meet in head-on conflict." At no point does Mathews define the material basis for this extreme dialectical opposition between organised religion and the interests of the free market.

In discussing the nature of the Catholic

Church in Québec and its relation to English Protestantism, Mathews relies heavily on the theories of Max Weber — as filtered through the writings of George Grant. Not only has Roman Catholicism been "less sympathetic than Protestantism to capitalist values," but"entrepreneurship, risk-taking, scientific initiative, and industrial development were demonstrably in the hands of the Protestant English Canadians in league with U.S. interests. Francophone Catholics remained for the most part devout, communitarian, even corporatist, simple, and un-modern." While he discusses "corporatist" politics in Québec in terms of German Nazism and fascism in general, Mathews, following Grant, sees Catholicism in Québec as preserving the traditional, "communitarian" forces of the Canadian dialectic. It is a further illustration of the peculiar flavour of Mathews's Marxism that the "reactionary Conservatism" of Québec Catholicism is necessarily preferable to the forces of the capitalist market which sought to oppose it.

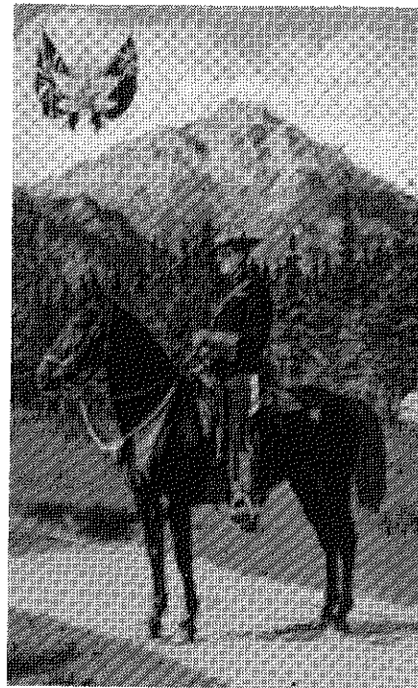
Mathews argues that English-Canadian dependence on Britain "stood for an ideological position of independence ... because it permitted Canadians to claim a distinct otherness from the U.S.A." For Québec, deference to the Church, *agriculturisme* and lack of entrepreneurial activity were similar safeguards to continentalist pressures. Strangely, Mathews fails to see in Québec's eventual struggle for independence from English Canada the forces of dialectical materialism at work. Rather, separatism appears as an aberration, an ideology thrust upon the Québecois by outside forces. "Nothing," he writes, "could have warned the Québecois of the stresses that would culminate in the Quiet Revolution, stresses that both mirrored and manifested larger forces at work in the world." The election of the Parti Québecois is, for Mathews, as destructive to the Canadian dialectic and to Canadian independence as the patriation of the constitution is to English Canada. Québec is now "the most Liberal of Liberal communities in Canada." With both English and French Canada "absorbed into the other side of the dialectic," Mathews doubts "[w]hether Canada can survive the two *defections*" (my emphasis).

Clift agrees that "religion spoke most effectively ... for the collective unconscious" of Canadians, but that it did so "with terrible impact" for Canadian identity and independence. In Québec, the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s "introduced state capitalism as a way of attaining collective goals," at the same time as separating church and state and bringing to an end the "inwardness" of Québec society, where politics was "the expression of powerlessness, or resentment, and of an unfulfilled yearning for continuity." Clift contends that Confederation confirmed Canada's conservative ideology, entrenching provincial over federal rights and those of the community over the power of the state. It was ultimately the defeat of the 1980 referendum, along with the patriation of the constitution and the entrenchment of bilingualism, that brought Québec into the modern, postindustrial world. Whereas Pierre Trudeau plays the villain in Mathews's narrative, Trudeau's political views inform the theme of Clift's story.

In the same way that Octavio Paz sees a questioning of national character as a part of a nation's "adolescence," Clift sees the development of a strong national consciousness as part of the psychological maturity of both nation and citizen. The debate over free trade with the United States is, for Clift, the public manifestation of an individual antagonism between ethics and practicality. This antagonism "is experienced by countless persons as an inner dilemma in the face of two contradictory courses of action." To Frye's question, "Where is here?", Clift would respond that "here" is the individual psyche of each Canadian, a "garrison mentality" of the mind. There is something distinctly Freudian in the way in which he treats the struggle for national independence. Canadians, it would seem, are in search of a father, an authority figure. It is for this reason, Clift argues, that Canadians prolonged their dependence on England and France. At the same time, rather than being the victims of American imperialism, Canadians themselves have transferred authority to the United States. Whatever constraints exist to liberation, "they are mostly internal and self-imposed." At no point does Clift suggest that if authority was willingly transferred to the U.S. it was done in the interest of a particular class of Canadians over and against the interests of many more.

"It becomes possible to cast off the colonial mentality," Clift contends, "only if there is a Canadian identity to take its place." If Canadians have failed to develop a distinct identity, it is a failure of "collective vision," a failure of Canadian culture to embrace the modern age. Nonetheless, Clift believes Canada is finally approaching maturity as a nation-state. He attributes this new-found modernity to the creation of the welfare state, the practicality of the generation of the postwar baby boom and the patriation of the constitution and entrenchment of federal over provincial rights. "The national ego," Clift writes, "has become immeasurably stronger." In the end, it is largely a psychological transformation, an acceptance of the reality of the modern world, to which he attributes the emergence of a modern nation-state. Nowhere does he explicate the complex material and cultural forces that compel a nation's politics.

Where Clift states confidently that the "consolidation of national identity will induce Canadians to distance themselves from the United States," Robin Mathews is less optimistic. For Mathews, the suicide of the Québecois novelist and radical Hubert Aquin stands as a metaphor for the collective suicide of Canadians: "The election of the Parti Québecois made him realise that Québec was deepening, not solving, its problem culturally." In the meantime, Canada seems to exist in stasis, awaiting a shift in the forces that have determined the national dialectic. On the one hand, Mathews claims that "Canadian history awaits the militant Marxist formulation that is also truly attuned to Canadian history and problems as well as to the character, style, and sensibility of average Canadians." On the other hand, he largely ignores the possibilities of Marxist or social democratic intervention in Canadian political life, favouring instead the conservatism and lamentations of George Grant. While Mathews sees some hope in forms of non-institutional culture, he gives no examples. Instead, he suggests that foreign control of Canadian publishing and film industries "subverts people working in culture from militant struggle for the Canadian community, and prevents Canadians from being informed about Canada." In the final analysis, "[t]he nature of our identity requires constant vigilance and constant activity on the part of communitarians to balance the enormous power of individualistic motivation." When it comes to the form this activity should take, Mathews is uncharacteristically mute.



While Canadians as a whole might strive for national unity, identity is a social construct peculiar not only to geographical and social regions but to class, gender and ethnicity. Both Clift and Mathews find regionalism divisive of national purpose, and thus neither examines the particularities of social discourse outside of Ontario and Québec. Canada's aboriginal peoples are similarly ignored. Intent on pursuing their individual theses, neither Clift nor Mathews explore the way in which nationalism as an ideology is used by both left and right to achieve rhetorical and partisan goals.

It is the use and abuse of the ideology of nationalism which ultimately renders both *Canadian Identity* and *The Secret Kingdom* similar in their attempts to define a national identity. While Robin Mathews preaches the social gospel of a dialectical vision and Dominique Clift charts the maturation of the Canadian people, both writers end with a static concept of Canadian identity. However, the question of a people's identity must necessarily be answered in multiplicity and difference. At the same time, the construction of a collective consciousness is ultimately grounded in the material and cultural relations that inform a society, a process rather than a fixed entity, a process that is shaped by the changing international division of labour of a global economy. As we are reminded by Paz, "[i]t does not matter, then, if the answers that we give to our questions must be corrected by time." ■

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