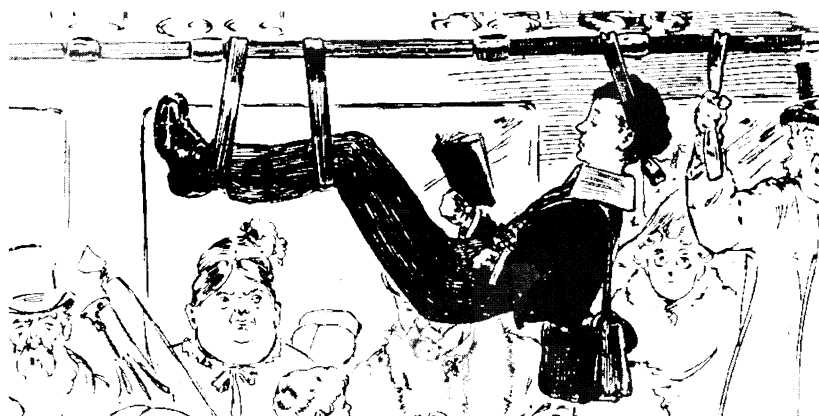


THE BEST BOOK IN 80 YEARS?

As part of the CHA's ongoing celebration of its 80th birthday, the editors of the *Bulletin* invited a handful of historians to weigh in on the mighty question of the best book written by a Canadian historian in the past 80 years. The answers are as diverse as they are fascinating. I must confess that this exercise got me thinking about the book I would choose. And I found myself coming up with various shortlists but never with a clear winner. Then it came to me. It was not a book. It was an article. Actually, it was a convocation address by Harold Innis. I can picture the UNB class of 1950 sitting in their chairs, wearing their gowns and caps, and listening to Innis. Instead of a "good

luck" talk, they were presented with a complex discussion of space, time, and empire. No doubt most tuned out. But those who listened were treated to a brilliant critique of modernity and its neglect of time. I assign it to my first-year students in Canadian Studies. They don't always get it. But those who do struggle through Innis's wooden, awkward prose find themselves at a new understanding of their culture, of MTV and CNN. Innis didn't say it, but he certainly implied it. We live in a culture of speed. And everytime I read this piece, entitled "A Plea For Time," I am struck by what a prophet Innis was. In any event, I hope you enjoy the following articles.



LE MEILLEUR LIVRE DES 80 DERNIÈRES ANNÉES ?

Toujours dans le cadre des célébrations entourant le 80^e anniversaire de la S.H.C., les rédacteurs du *Bulletin* ont demandé à quelques historiens de choisir chacun le meilleur livre écrit par un historien canadien au cours des 80 dernières années. Le choix était ardu, il faut en convenir, mais les fascinantes et diverses propositions que nous avons reçues ont été à la hauteur du défi. Je dois admettre que je me suis moi-même plié à l'exercice; s'il m'a été relativement facile de dresser de courtes listes de mes ouvrages préférés, j'ai toutefois eu beaucoup de peine à préciser laquelle de ces publications me semblait la plus déterminante. Et puis tout à coup, un texte s'est clairement imposé : il ne s'agissait pas d'un livre, mais plutôt d'un article. Plus exactement, c'était un discours prononcé par Harold Innis à l'occasion d'une cérémonie de remise de diplômes. Je m'imagine les finissants de l'University of New Brunswick en 1950, portant toge et mortier, écoutant Innis.

Mais au lieu du traditionnel discours de « bonne chance », l'orateur leur servit un exposé complexe sur l'espace, le temps et l'empire. Une grande partie de l'auditoire s'est probablement ennuyée, mais ceux qui ont prêté attention à ses propos ont eu droit à une brillante critique sur la modernité et son insouciance du temps. J'ai donné ce texte à lire à mes étudiants de 1^{ère} année en études canadiennes. Ils n'ont pas toujours bien saisi le sens de la pensée d'Innis, mais ceux qui ont persévéré et ont percé son style aride et rébarbatif ont découvert une nouvelle façon d'appréhender leur culture, celle de MTV et de CNN. Innis ne l'a bien sûr pas dit exactement en ces termes, mais son raisonnement nous y mène. Nous vivons dans une culture de la vitesse, et chaque fois que je relis « A Plea For Time », je suis frappé par les propos prophétiques d'Innis. Voilà, je vous ai fait part de mon choix; j'espère que vous aurez plaisir à lire les articles suivants.

John E. Crowley, Dalhousie University

When my colleague/editor asked if I would write a note about the “best [history] book written in Canada in the past eighty years,” I had to confess that I had not read all of the books written in Canada in that period, so it was likely that the best book was one I had not read. I asked if I could instead say a few words about a book that has had a long and strong influence on me, C.B. MacPherson’s *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (1962), and she said “Fine.”

MacPherson’s was the first book I read in graduate school, in Jack Greene’s seminar at the University of Michigan in 1965. Besides the promised Hobbes and Locke, the book also had chapters on the Levellers and James Harrington. I had read Hobbes and Locke in politics classes in high school and college, where we studied them for their theories of human nature and natural rights, and you could hardly study history at Princeton in the early 1960s without taking a class from Lawrence Stone on the English Revolution [sic], and that meant hearing a lot about the democratic Levellers. But who was James Harrington, besides a passing illustration of political zaniness during the Commonwealth and Protectorate? According to MacPherson, Harrington’s writings contained the most sophisticated analysis of the changes taking place in English politics as a consequence of the commercialization of English social relations and their crucial resource, land. The implicit belief that political participation depended on the ownership of property gave joint coherence to the views of Hobbes, the Levellers, Harrington, and Locke.

Serendipitously, my very first issue of the *William and Mary Quarterly* arrived just then (October 1965), with an article by J. G. A. Pocock, “Machiavelli, Harrington, and English Political Ideologies in the Eighteenth Century.” In it one learned that “Harrington’s economics and his politics were alike essentially, and that all he knew about English agrarian society was at the service of a fundamentally Aristotelian theory of citizenship” (p. 595). Greene had set us down in a historiographic minefield that has still not been cleared: how important were market relations in early modern Anglo-American society, and did they matter in its politics? (At the time I neglected to note that Pocock actually conceded that MacPherson was right on a number of points that questioned Pocock’s earlier interpretations of Harrington — a unique instance, so far as I am aware, of Pocock’s accepting someone else’s criticism.)

Notice that Pocock’s title used the term “political ideologies,” while MacPherson referred to “political theory.” In the 1960s understanding “ideology” became the main reason that historians read past political writings: ideology affected action. Historians were proudly too relativistic to care about the truth of political theory. Not coincidentally, Bernard Bailyn’s extraordinarily influential *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* was also published in 1965, having initially appeared with the 60s title “The Transforming Radicalism of the American Revolution,” as the introduction to his edition of Pamphlets of the American Revolution. Bailyn had found that understanding Hobbes and Locke hardly mattered in analyzing eighteenth-century Anglo-American political culture. The less name recognition, the more crucial the ideologues. James Trenchard and Thomas Gordon became household words as the authors of *Cato’s Letters* — in graduate student households, anyway. *Possessive Individualism* began to wane from historical footnotes.

The *Canadian Encyclopedia* and the Canadian-edited *Global Encyclopedia of Historical Writing* refer to MacPherson as “Marxist,” but he was actually pluralistic in his theory. He appealed to Max Weber and Werner Sombart, as well as Karl Marx, as authorities on the relation of market relations to capitalism, but he was agnostic about the processes involved. He pointed out that his analysis “differs from theirs chiefly in that it does not require any particular theory of the origin or development of such society” (p. 48). MacPherson had a worthwhile method rather than a theory: he read very carefully. He looked for the anomalies in a political theory to see whether the crucial argument lay implicitly in its fallacies: that Hobbes the psychological materialist derived his analysis of humans’ natural competitiveness from their behavior in civilized society; that the democratic Levellers would deny the franchise to servants and alms-takers; that Harrington, the defender of gentry privilege in government, based the legitimacy of their rule on the argument the gentry had the same commercial attitudes toward property as people in non-landed families; that Locke argued for a natural right to property and then explained how the invention of money justified unlimited accumulation in excess of natural needs. In each analysis, political liberty depended, not on natural rights, but on the possession of property, a historical circumstance requiring extensive market relations.

MacPherson was deeply respectful of liberal-democratic institutions, so if they depended on a possessive market society, then he was wary of radical alternatives to it. But he was distressed by

the amoral individualism that fit so easily as an assumption for that society. With this conflict in mind, he titled his last chapter “The Twentieth-Century Dilemma.” Had he anticipated the era of the Third Way, he could have pushed his chronology further.

How does one determine “the best book written by a historian in Canada in the past 80 years?” Does one include books in all fields or only in Canadian history? How does one define “best”? Even limiting the field to books about Canada written in English, there are hundreds of contenders. Given that history is an eclectic discipline, it can be argued that works by economists such as H.A. Innis, sociologists such as John Porter, anthropologists such as Marius Barbeau, political scientists such as R.M. Dawson, geographers such as Griffith Taylor, and philosophers such as George Grant have strongly influenced and reflected Canadian historiography.

Pat Roy, University of Victoria

What is “best?” It is not simply a “best seller” though that is not a cause of disqualification. Does one honour a work whose ideas informed a generation of more of historians? A major candidate would have to be H.A. Innis study of *The Fur Trade* but while several generations of Canadian historians were familiar with his ideas, only the most diligent can honestly say that they read them first hand. As a counterweight, to the Laurentian thesis that evolved from Innis’s writings one could commend books that made provincial history professionally respectable such as those by W.S. MacNutt, W.L. Morton and Margaret Ormsby. In the last quarter century or so, there has been an explosion of fine work in social history — in the history of women, of gender studies, of First Nations and ethnic groups. It is, however, too early to assess their long term impact, meritorious and innovative as many of them are.

I propose to nominate as the “best history book,” one that was grounded in sound scholarship, influenced professional historians and Canadians as a whole, came close to being a national history though ignoring Newfoundland (not then a part of Canada) and the Territories (which sadly seem beyond the purview of most historians), and reflected a collaborative endeavour. Moreover, these volumes were reprinted at least once a quarter century or more after their original publication. The nominee is the first volume of the Report of the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations or Rowell-Sirois Commission published in 1940 and its supporting cast of historical studies.

The Report’s first volume is a brief but still sound economic and constitutional history of Canada from the 1850s to the 1930s. In introducing a 1963 abridgement of it, Donald Smiley called it “a landmark in the study of governmental institutions in Canada.” Despite Premiers Aberhart, Hepburn and Pattullo, and the changed circumstances brought about by war, the federal government eventually implemented many of the Commission’s suggestions in an effort to create greater equality for Canadians no matter where they lived.

Several supporting volumes are still minor classics and, like the first volume, still merit being read. Creighton’s study of *British North American at Confederation* which appeared shortly after his *Empire of the St. Lawrence* and well before his biography of John A. Macdonald clearly articulates the Laurentian thesis, a concept which long influenced the writing of Canadian history. While later scholars have explored the coming of Confederation in greater depth, looked at it from other angles, and shown that it was not universally acclaimed, *British North American at Confederation* is still a fine description of the circumstances surrounding Confederation. No one who wishes to understand how Confederation came about can ignore it. Whereas Creighton dealt only with the Confederation era, S.A. Saunders extended his *Economic History of the Maritime Provinces* well into the 1930s. As T.W. Acheson noted in an introduction to a 1984 reprint, it became a “cornerstone” of the region’s historiography. W.A. MacKintosh’s examination of *The Economic Background of Dominion-Provincial Relations* also surveys the broad sweep of Canadian economic history from the 1850s to the 1930s and pays particular attention to the regional impact of tariff, transportation and monetary policies.

Writing in 1963, J.H. Dales suggested, “the postwar generation of social scientists in Canada have so far failed to produce a portrait of their age, and the result is a pervading sense of perplexity among Canadians about where they stand, economically and politically.” Almost forty years later, that argument can still be made. The Rowell-Sirois scholars gave Canada a semblance of a national history. Surely most historians would agree that is a worthy measure of what is best.

**Mélanie Brunet, étudiante au doctorat,
département d'histoire, Université de Toronto**

Lorsqu'on m'a demandé quel était selon moi le meilleur livre écrit par un historien ou une historienne au Canada au cours des 80 dernières années, un titre me semblait s'imposer : *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880-1950* de Joy Parr (University of Toronto Press, 1990). Ce livre ne constitue peut-être pas un choix original : après tout, les membres de la profession historique au Canada semblent en être arrivés à un consensus quant à sa contribution à la recherche. Il suffit en ce sens de rappeler les nombreux prix et honneurs qui lui furent attribués, dont le Prix sir John A. Macdonald en 1991 et la Médaille François-Xavier Garneau en 1995. Cependant, d'un point de vue plus personnel, l'ouvrage de Joy Parr, par son sujet, les thèmes qu'il aborde et la méthodologie adoptée, a plus que tout autre marqué ma jeune carrière de chercheure.

Lors d'un cours universitaire en histoire du « genre » (« gender history »), on nous avait dit qu'il s'agissait d'un « classique ». Je tentais alors de comprendre la différence entre ce type d'histoire et l'histoire des femmes. Je me souviens d'avoir été surtout impressionnée par la perspective théorique nouvelle de Parr. L'histoire semblait pouvoir s'élaborer autour de sources et de méthodes empruntées à l'anthropologie. En effet, Parr ne s'est pas contentée de fouiller les archives des compagnies Penman et Knechtel, et de faire des entrevues auprès d'employé(e)s à la retraite : elle a également déménagé ses pénates à Hanover et à Paris pour travailler aux côtés des employé(e)s des deux usines, question de se familiariser avec les processus de travail. J'avais devant moi la preuve que la recherche pouvait être à la fois rigoureuse et engagée. C'est aussi grâce à ce livre que j'ai compris le potentiel d'une analyse du « genre » non seulement appliquée à l'étude des femmes, mais également à celle des hommes, donnant à ces derniers un « genre » qu'ils ont toujours eu, mais qui était passé inaperçu. Cette constatation n'a rien d'extraordinaire maintenant, mais lorsque le livre de Joy Parr fut publié en 1990, ce type de conclusion n'allait pas de soi.

Dans *The Gender of Breadwinners*, Parr examine le quotidien et le travail de la main-d'œuvre féminine des usines de textile de la compagnie Penman à Paris et l'expérience des hommes travaillant dans l'usine de meubles de Knechtel à Hanover. Pour

chaque ville, elle analyse les processus de recrutement et de travail en tenant compte de l'appartenance ethnique des travailleurs et des travailleuses, la division sexuelle du travail au foyer et à l'usine, les valeurs familiales et communautaires, et l'organisation syndicale. Fondant son interprétation sur un modèle néo-marxiste, Parr met l'accent sur le rôle de l'économie dans la formation de communautés, mais elle s'inspire aussi de perspectives féministes pour démontrer que le « genre » est également un facteur déterminant. Elle analyse les structures de l'industrie pour savoir comment elles ont façonné la composition de la main-d'œuvre pour ensuite influencer les relations au travail, à la maison et dans la communauté. Dans le cas de Paris, elle montre comment l'industrialisation a affecté la structure du foyer au point de forcer une modification des rôles sexuels traditionnels. Pour Joy Parr, il est clair que l'appartenance à une classe et à un sexe se construit et se vit simultanément et ne constitue que deux des multiples dimensions d'une expérience partagée.

The Gender of Breadwinners constitue un bel exemple d'histoire de la classe ouvrière qui intègre bien les perspectives féministes pour en arriver à une vision du changement industriel comme étant une interaction entre le patriarcat et le capitalisme. Ce livre fournit un schéma d'analyses tenant compte du « genre », de la classe et de l'ethnie pour réinterpréter le processus d'industrialisation au Canada. Il offre également un modèle d'histoire orale : Parr porte une attention particulière au langage utilisé par les gens de la communauté ainsi qu'à leur propre interprétation de leur expérience en tant qu'hommes et femmes. Bien entendu, cet ouvrage ne répond pas à toutes les questions. J'aurais aimé en savoir davantage sur les hommes de Paris et les femmes de Hanover, sur les travailleurs et les travailleuses qui ne travaillaient pas chez Penman ou Knechtel, mais cela n'altère en rien l'importance de cet ouvrage qui sort des sentiers battus.

Ce qui rend ce livre si exceptionnel n'est pas seulement la découverte d'une communauté de femmes défiant les notions traditionnelles de féminité en étant le principal soutien familial, mais aussi son analyse du « genre » appliquée à l'expérience masculine et sa remise en question d'une séparation nette entre les sphères privée (le foyer) et publique (le lieu de travail). Cette étude nous rappelle que les notions de féminité et de masculinité sont des constructions sociales et non des vérités biologiques et qu'en ce sens, elles varient selon le lieu et la période.

Depuis ma première lecture de *The Gender of Breadwinners*, je n'ai pas pour autant délaissé l'histoire des femmes, mais je suis maintenant plus sensible à la construction des notions de masculinité et aux variations selon la classe et l'ethnie. C'est l'étude de cette complexité sociale que je désire poursuivre dans ma recherche sur la formation de l'identité professionnelle des étudiants et des étudiantes en droit au Canada, ce qui me donnera l'occasion de feuilleter ce livre plusieurs fois encore.

Michael Driedger, Brock University

Instead of singling out one book, I would like to draw attention to the annual Massey Lectures, begun in 1961. In recommending this series, I am aware that it is not meant strictly and especially for professional historians. Nonetheless, I believe there are good reasons for us professionals to pay the series close attention.

But first, for those unfortunate few not yet or insufficiently exposed to the Massey Lectures, a brief pinch of background is in order. Broadcast nation-wide each year on the CBC and now usually made available in print through the House of Anansi Press in Toronto, the lecture series is an institution which has made an enormous contribution to the Canadian world of learning. Its goal is "to enable distinguished authorities to communicate the results of original study or research on subjects of contemporary interest." To provide a sense of the profile of the invited speakers, I need only highlight a small number of those who have given the lectures: Noam Chomsky, Northrop Frye, Carlos Fuentes, J.K. Galbraith, Martin Luther King, Jr., R.D. Laing, Doris Lessing, Claude Levi-Strauss. And, as the simple yet ambitious mandate suggests, the areas of learning, reflection and debate that the lectures have addressed is broad, ranging across the fields of economic and social policy, political rights, psychology, literature, and science and technology.

Because of the broad mandate, lectures are very often trans-disciplinary, refusing to be categorized easily according to institutionalized academic boundaries. The first lecture from 1961 by Barbara Ward can serve as an illustration. In her talk, Ward spoke of the consequences of four revolutions that have shaped the modern world: first and second, the rise of ideas of equality and material progress; third, rapid biological or demographic change; and, fourth, the triumph of rationally administered technology and capital in all aspects of life. She then showed how each of these world-historical developments is implicated in the divide between prosperous, powerful nations

of the northern hemisphere and the poverty-stricken, weak nations of the southern hemisphere. The text of Ward's lecture, *The Rich Nations and the Poor Nations* (1962), is clearly dated by its Cold War concerns. Yet despite the changed political circumstances, an approach similar to hers typifies many subsequent lectures.

Example 1: In the ninth Massey Lecture, *Time as History* (1969), George Grant writes about the intellectual sources of modern western society's drive to control the future through technical procedures and predictions. Arguing that Friedrich Nietzsche is perhaps the most profound philosopher of this modern orientation toward future time, Grant devotes much of his lectures to an explication of Nietzsche's significance. To conclude his thoughts, he asks his audience to remember the importance of tradition, rootedness, and stillness that too often in our modern world seem unattractive in the face of calls for innovation, freedom, and progress.

Example 2: Richard Lewontin's lectures on *Biology as Ideology: The Doctrine of DNA* (1991) aim at laying bare what the Harvard geneticist calls "the ideology of biological determinism", a system of thought and assumption with a tradition reaching back several centuries which today is buttressed by modern institutions and codified in textbooks. Although science is a powerful approach to acquiring knowledge, it is still a social enterprise, Lewontin argues. To learn from it wisely and responsibly, we have to understand how the assumptions that underpin it help channel resources, research, health care and public policy. He concludes with the message that we should not accept the idea that our actions, behaviours and the fate of our environments are predetermined by genetics. The great mystery of our genes is that they are the foundations of a complex social world that cannot be reduced to a simple function of genetic codes and imperatives.

Grant, Lewontin and Ward each handle very different subjects, yet each shows a strong awareness of the connection between the past and the present, and between multiple branches of learning and action. Put in a phrase, a project that these and many other lecturers share is to make explicit how we and our world have been and are being shaped in major ways by forces that reach back well beyond our lifetimes. Or, put yet another way without meaning to use a phrase exclusively in the sense of Michel Foucault, these and other lecturers are contributing to an archeology of modern knowledge, routines, institutions. Like any approach to knowledge, this archeological one can be done well or poorly. Its great advantage when done well is that the

significance of its broad insights are easier to communicate to educated members of the general public than are specialist studies, because the archeological approach lends itself to analyzing big subjects that affect many people.

Whether or not we agree with the specific arguments or styles of argument that Massey lecturers use, it is ultimately their concern for communicating big ideas which we professional historians should use as inspiration. The lectures are a model for scholars who want to be relevant without selling out to corporate ideals of the “utility” of learning. All Massey lecturers, no matter how complex the subjects handled, present weighty material in plain, accessible language. The lecturers are frequently experts, but they have not lost the desire and ability to move beyond the narrow territory defined by professional fields of learning, and to explain to large numbers of people why ideas matter and are worth considering seriously, even

though those ideas might not be useful or even popular in a conventional sense. To live up to this ideal our own presentations and essays don't have to reach millions of people, nor deal with life, the universe and everything. We don't have to give up publishing in specialist journals and small academic presses. But let's be inspired as frequently as possible by these lecturers to pitch our work at non-specialist audiences and to strive to connect our specialist studies with “the big picture.”

For more on the Massey Lectures, visit the following two websites: masseylectures.cbc.ca; and www.anansi.ca/listing.cfm?series=1.

