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Massolin, Philip. *Canadian Intellectuals, The Tory Tradition, and The Challenge of Modernity, 1939-1970*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001. Pp. x + 357. CDN\$60.00 (cloth). ISBN: 0-8020-3509-4.

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The "Tory touch," a belief that English Canada's conservative, communitarian values derived from Britain, exerted a determining influence in distinguishing Canadian institutions and political thought from a monolithic, North American liberal individualism that characterized the United States. It held wide currency in academic circles during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Philip Massolin's work constitutes the first serious attempt, from the perspective of intellectual history, to examine the ideological and institutional contexts that underpinned the rise, assertion, and ultimate demise of a Tory intellectual tradition in mid-twentieth-century Canada. Cast within the framework of "modernity" which the author defines as "the replacement of a Victorian value system with one more attuned to a secular and materialist society" (3), this book examines the trajectories and responses of a group of cultural critics confronted by what they perceived as the destruction of the dominant strand of Christian humane values in Canadian culture and their replacement by attitudes and values characteristic of an industrial, technological, and consumer society. The principal hallmarks of modernity that Massolin traces throughout this study are the rise to dominance of scientific outlooks within both the twentieth-century university and the wider Canadian culture, and the thrust of mass culture and democracy which consistently roused the animadversions of these critics. Eight cultural critics, argues the author, constituted a reasonably coherent "anti-modernist coterie" (5): the historians Harold Innis, Donald Creighton, and Hilda Neatby; the Liberal politician Vincent Massey; the social philosopher George P. Grant and, more peripherally, the cultural philosopher Marshall McLuhan and the literary critic Northrop Frye.

In addition to a preoccupation with overcoming what they believed was a postwar crisis in cultural values, these conservative intellectuals expressed a common commitment to asserting a hierarchical view of modern society in which the impulse to mass culture and democracy must be guided and constrained by an enlightened elite of social philosophers. These Anglo-Canadians intellectuals worked within a consistent system of ideas that Massolin labels "Toryism." It differed substantially from its British counterpart, stressing, first and foremost, a Burkean notion of organic community as taking precedence over the individual.

More tellingly, however, it exalted the British connection not simply as a political link but as a set of moral virtues that exalted English Canada above the United States, and enabled Canada to develop as an autonomous community in North America. Finally, argues the author, Canadian Tories were eclectic and selective in borrowing conservative ideas.

The central strength of Massolin's treatment lies in the first three chapters, which offer a complex discussion of the institutional context in which most of these intellectuals lived and worked — the Canadian university. What emerges persuasively from this discussion is that the groundwork of Canadian Toryism was, in fact, laid during the interwar years, and flowed from the group's concern for what they perceived to be the decline of humanistic learning within the university. Indeed, both intellectually and professionally, Tory academics were confronted with the rising cultural prestige and financial endowment of the sciences. This situation compelled them to formulate a counter-ideology that asserted both the social utility of the humanities in modern culture and the need for the presence of an enlightened elite of social philosophers who could lead the masses in making rational choices.

According to the author, however, by the mid-1950s, these academics had lost the ear of university administrators who accepted scientism rather than humane values as the key to both increased government funding and the projected expansion of universities in the 1960s. This decisively reoriented the character of universities to institutions of higher learning for the masses. Paradoxically, it was exactly at the moment that Tory anti-modernists were losing the battle within the universities that they acquired their greatest influence over cultural policy through the Massey Commission. The Commission established the principle of state intervention in the cultural realm and in political debate with the displacement of the long-governing Liberal party by the Conservatives in 1957. This event seemed to augur a renewal of national purpose and an opportunity to refurbish the alliance between Canada and Britain.

Despite these strengths, this work still bears the marks of its origin as a doctoral thesis. It suffers from a disease particular to Canadian intellectual historians, a resolute unwillingness to place its subject in an international context. For example, Canada's Tory intellectuals were not the only interwar and postwar critics to hold largely negative views of mass culture. The inclusion of Liberal stalwart Vincent Massey provides a clue to the fact that these views were, in fact, widely shared among British, American, and European critics of both left and right. There is no comparison drawn between these intellectuals and, for example, the cultural Marxists of the Frankfurt School, or of the American intellectuals treated in Richard Pells' classic *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age*. Despite the author's announcement of the centrality of the Christian religion to framing the views of the anti-modernist coterie, discussion of religion remains underdeveloped, dismissively described as a "remnant of the critics' fundamentalist Christian heritage" (17). No one familiar with Harold Innis would assert, as Massolin does (14) that Innis was not an active Christian. The final chapters of Massolin's study would be, to readers familiar with Canadian cultural history, "old news," presenting information and interpretation little different from that available in Paul Litt's *The Muses, the Masses, and the Massey Commission*, and Carl Berger's *The Writing of Canadian History*.¹

More glaring is a failure to address one of the central problematic ambiguities of this study. Massolin demonstrates persuasively that the notion of humanistic learning advanced by these critics was, in effect, a good deal of special pleading and mythmaking whose central

premise was founded upon an argument from social utility to justify both the exalted conception of the role of the social philosopher in modern society and the need for training in humane cultural values in the modern university. Could it be that the central problem for Canadian Tories, and a clue to their eventual demise and futility, lay in their inability to frame their ideology in anything other than quintessential “liberal” utilitarian terms?

The epilogue, while valuable in fine-tuning the differences between the Tory critics and the “New Left” who adopted some of their rhetoric of nationalism and anti-Americanism, falls, by analogy, into the same fallacy as did Carl Berger’s study of Canadian imperialism in asserting the irrelevance and futility of his subjects. It thus fails to address the persistent influence of the Tory mind-set over the nascent sub-discipline of Canadian intellectual history. For example, is it entirely coincidental that the works of Syd Wise, Carl Berger, Brian McKillop, and William Westfall, that formed the canon of Canadian intellectual history during the 1970s and 1980s, can be read as both discovery of, and elegy for, a vein of political conservatism (with Christian roots), Anglo-Canadian imperial nationalism, and moral imagination in nineteenth-century English Canadian society? And, does the choice made by this pioneer generation of intellectual historians to identify themselves so assiduously with the ideological concerns of Tory anti-modernists account, at least in part, for the low esteem in which the sub-discipline of intellectual history is held by the English Canadian historical profession at large?

Notes

1. Richard H. Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985); Paul Litt, *The Muses, the Masses, and the Massey Commission* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992); Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English-Canadian Historical Writing since 1900*, second edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986).