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F. H. Underhill and the Making of "The Intellectual"

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Some may wonder at my *chutzpah* in proposing the subject of my lecture. Frank Underhill's reputation among scholars in the Maritimes is somewhat dubious, after all, perhaps particularly among my fellow historians. My former colleague and old friend, Ernie Forbes, in one of his early articles, included Underhill among a group of leading Canadian historians of the first half of the twentieth century whose primary orientation was westward, and whose regard for the Maritimes was just this side of patronizing, at best, and dismissive, at worst. He cited a passage from Underhill's Massey Lectures of 1963, *The Image of Confederation*, as representative: "As for the Maritime provinces," Underhill had written, "nothing, of course, ever happens down there."[1] That sarcastic throw-away comment has been quoted often in the years since — possibly too often — and might raise some doubts about the appropriateness of Underhill as a subject for the Pacey Memorial Lecture at the University of New Brunswick!

It is true that Frank Underhill was very much a product of Toronto in his early education, that he spent most of his academic career at the University of Toronto, and that his origins and experience helped to shape his perspective on the world. It would be foolhardy of me to venture a defence of Toronto-centredness this afternoon, even if I were disposed to do so, but a brief biographical sketch might introduce some nuances into this picture. Underhill was born in 1889 just north of Toronto, in the small town of Stouffville, where his father owned a small shoe factory. His middle-class origins have been used by some to call into question the genuineness of his adult radicalism, but this is a judgement I won't comment on here. A portrait of Sir Wilfrid Laurier hung in the dining room of his family's home, where the newspaper of choice (and source of the Laurier photograph) was the Toronto *Globe*, then still the voice of Ontario Liberalism that it had been since the pre-Confederation days of its most famous editor, George Brown. The family, especially Frank's mother Sarah, was staunchly Presbyterian, hence his frequent identification of himself later in life as having been born a "North York Presbyterian Grit."[2]

Underhill's intelligence — even precociousness, in the judgment of his biographer, Douglas Francis — was evident from an early age, and he progressed through public school, high school in the

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[1] E.R. Forbes, "In Search of a Post-Confederation Maritime Historiography, 1900-1967," in *Challenging the Regional Stereotype: Essays on the 20th Century Maritimes* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1989), 53. The article originally appeared in *Acadiensis* 8 (Autumn 1978). See also Frank H. Underhill, *The Image of Confederation* (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1964), 63.

[2] R. Douglas Francis, *Frank H. Underhill: Intellectual Provocateur* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986).

neighbouring town of Markham, and university (first at Toronto, then at Oxford) winning scholarships and the high regard of his teachers and professors along the way.[3] He took his first teaching post at the University of Saskatchewan in 1914, left a year later for infantry service in the First World War, and returned in 1919, remaining in Saskatoon for another eight years. Finding himself on the Prairies during the heady days of the building of the Progressive Party and the struggles of the labour movement in the aftermath of the Winnipeg General Strike — not to mention the editorial leadership of John W. Dafoe at the *Winnipeg Free Press*, which made that newspaper one of the liveliest, intellectually, in English-speaking Canada — he was converted to a belief that the future lay in the west. In other words, he came honestly by his westward orientation. It followed easily enough in his thinking, and in that of others of the same generation, that orientation westward was an orientation away from the past, from which it was easy to further conclude (in doubtless too glib a mode of metaphorical thinking) that points furthest to the east lay furthest in the past. This went for Europe, as well, one might add.

Future promise notwithstanding, Underhill jumped at the opportunity to return to the Toronto centre (and, of course, his home territory) when it arose in 1927. There he remained until 1955, when he departed for Ottawa — that other, more political centre — to take up the position of curator of Laurier House, a kind of archive-*cum*-shrine of the Liberal Party of Canada. This too was a return home, of sorts, since he had spent most of his years in Toronto further to the political left: he wrote (and, for a brief period of time, edited) the *Canadian Forum*, long the chief voice of democratic socialism in Canada; he organized, along with others, the League for Social Reconstruction, a voluntary organization of intellectuals from Toronto and Montreal that emerged in response to the Great Depression; he was an active participant in the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), predecessor of the New Democratic Party; and he contributed frequently to a variety of progressive organizations, such as the Canadian Institute of International Affairs and the Canadian Institute on Economics and Politics (better known as the Couchiching Conference). These activities came very close to costing Underhill his job at the University of Toronto, provoking an attempt at dismissal that became one of the most famous cases of academic freedom in Canadian history.[4] The move to the Liberals was a return to his roots, though it was also an apostasy that cost him once more, this time some of his friends.

In engaging in these politically charged activities, and most particularly in the writing he did for the *Forum* and numerous other journals of commentary and public affairs, Underhill did so self-consciously as an "intellectual," a cultural type that emerged in the early twentieth century and flourished, sometimes in the face of adversity, for many decades; in fact, it still flourishes, though I think on rather different terms than those on which it established itself in the years following the First World War. I have entitled this lecture "F.H. Underhill and *the Making* of 'The Intellectual'" because I want to suggest (without implying there is any originality in this) that "the intellectual" did not fall from the sky; rather, the type and the role of the intellectual had to be made — "constructed," if you want, or even "invented" — by the thought and action of men and women individually and collectively.

I also want to distinguish it from earlier similar "types," though without denying the kinship they shared. Consideration of the relation between the mind (or, indeed, the spirit) and the state has a long history in the Western tradition, stretching back through Voltaire in the eighteenth century, to Marsiglio of Padua on the relation of church and state in the early fourteenth century, to Plato. "The intellectual" was a manifestation of this mode of thought particular to the twentieth century, even to the *short* twentieth century — the years from the First World War to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the USSR in 1989 to 1991 — though the question of the end point, or whether there was an end point at all, is much disputed.[5]

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[3] Ibid., 6.

[4] Michiel Horn, *Academic Freedom in Canada: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 154-65.

[5] Stephen T. Leonard, "Introduction: A Genealogy of the Politicized Intellectual," in *Intellectuals and Public Life:*

Underhill played a major role, perhaps the pre-eminent role, in this cultural project in Canada, though (in a final note about my title) I want to say that I purposely omitted the phrase "in Canada." This is partly because I was once struck by a remark I heard in a discussion of cultural nationalism in Canada, in which the speaker claimed that the assertion of a national identity can occasionally backfire. A book entitled *A History of the Hamburger* might conceivably gain a wide audience (if you like that sort of thing), but nothing would more surely kill its prospects of sales than titling it *A History of the Hamburger in Canada*. (Actually, a book came out recently called *Hamburger: A Global History*, which might also serve to make the point.[6]) More seriously, the process I am referring to was not unique to Canada. While the idea of "the intellectual" was borrowed, it was no more borrowed in Canada than it was just about anywhere else; "the intellectual," in fact, emerged as a type more or less simultaneously everywhere in the Atlantic world, and everywhere those who considered themselves intellectuals thought that their like received a more welcome embrace *somewhere else* than in their own national milieu. Which is to say that intellectuals everywhere considered themselves embattled — even in France, which is widely thought to be their natural home. Underhill, in other words, was a participant in an international phenomenon.

This sense that one was isolated, and that other cultures showed their relative advancement by nurturing their intellectuals and their intellectual traditions, was a defining characteristic of "the intellectual," according to the British historian Stefan Collini.[7] Intellectuals also tend, occupationally, to earn their living in the "cultural sector," for lack of a better term (schools and universities, the arts, and the media); they tend, whatever their special knowledge or expertise, to have a generalist bent, and to place a high value on culture in all of its expressions; they are both willing and able to turn their knowledge or expertise to a public purpose, and to connect with an audience *beyond* their own specialized field; and they are almost always critics and dissenters.[8] They are men and women whose faces are turned, Janus-like, in one student's evocative words, "both towards the study and towards the street."[9]

The archetype emerged in France at the turn of the twentieth century, when "intellectual" was first used as a noun — or at least when that usage first took on currency — to describe the critics of the French state in the Dreyfus Affair, the notorious trial and conviction, then exoneration, of Jewish army officer Captain Alfred Dreyfus, of espionage. Subsequently, the usage spread, everywhere manifesting its own peculiarities, so that we need to be careful of abstract, universal, definitions, and to be sensitive to the ways in which the emergence of "the intellectual" was embedded in the circumstances of time and place. The newness of the usage, and of the type, is not difficult to spot. J.S. Woodsworth, for example, the founding leader of the CCF, placed the term in quotation marks when he proposed to Underhill that the power of "intellectuals" might be harnessed in an organization similar to the Fabian Society in Great Britain. The result was the League for Social Reconstruction (LSR).[10] No one today puts "intellectuals" in quotation marks in everyday usage.

Between Radicalism and Reform, eds. Leon Fink, Stephen T. Leonard, and Donald M. Reid (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 1-25; Jane Burbank, "Were the Russian Intelligenty Organic Intellectuals?" in *Intellectuals and Public Life*, 97-100.

[6] Andrew F. Smith, *Hamburger: A Global History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008).

[7] Stefan Collini, *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[8] Ibid., 46-8; see also Peter Allen, "The Meanings of 'An Intellectual': Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century English Usage," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 55 (Summer 1986): 349-50; Kenneth C. Dewar, "Frank Underhill: Intellectual in Search of a Role," *The Underhill Review* (Fall 2008): 7-10, http://www.carleton.ca/underhillreview (accessed 17 May 2010).

[9] Ray L. Nichols, *Treason, Tradition, and the Intellectual: Julien Benda and Political Discourse* (Lawrence, KS.: Regents Press of Kansas, 1978), 13.

[10] Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), Frank Hawkins Underhill Papers (hereafter UP) , vol. 9, Woodsworth to Underhill, 26 April 1929; see also Michiel Horn, *The League for Social Reconstruction: Intellectual Origins of the Democratic Left in Canada 1930-1942* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 19.

The customary approach to defining and locating "the intellectual" — an approach I have taken myself — combines elements of sociology (e.g. occupation), politics (e.g. relation to the left and right of the political spectrum), intellectual history (e.g. the rise of periodical publication), and social psychology (e.g. the posture adopted toward issues of the day).[11] It seems appropriate in this particular milieu today — a lecture in memory of an eminent literary historian and critic — to consider whether a literary approach to the phenomenon of the intellectual might not add a new dimension to our understanding. I propose, therefore, to consider this afternoon the *discourse* of the intellectual, and particularly to ask whether the writings of intellectuals might be seen as constituting an identifiable genre of non-fiction prose. Pacey, I might note, admired what he called the "crisp, idiomatic and epigrammatic quality" of Underhill's prose. He told him it was the finest non-fiction prose being written in Canada. That was in 1962 (about the time of Underhill's remark about the Maritimes that I quoted earlier), and it only echoed, Pacey said, Northrop's Frye's assessment of Underhill's *Canadian Forum* essays of the 1930s.[12]

Genre is a classificatory term widely used among students of literature, and equally widely disputed. The classifications it offers seem so flexible, open-ended, and dynamic as to undermine their very purpose, yet these are also its virtues. If I may quote Alastair Fowler, an early proponent of the modern concept of genre, "Traditional genres and modes, far from being mere classificatory devices, serve primarily to enable the reader to share types of meaning economically."[13] Genre, in these terms, encompasses writer, reader, and subject: it is interactive and inter-textual. We are "genre-bound" (according to Fowler) in our mode of communication, whether it be a literary text (such as Underhill's essay on political parties in *Social Planning for Canada*, the most famous product of the LSR), a painting (such as one of Miller Brittain's street scenes of 1930s Saint John), or the season's last episode of *The Tudors* on CBC television. We read something (or look at it, or watch it) in relation to other things. Is it similar or different? How does it present itself to us? What identifying signals does it send — genre theorists call them "cues" — and can the reader pick them up? The education of a reader, that is, whether formal or informal, is partly an education in reading these signals. Is this an essay, a scholarly article, a newspaper column? Is it investigative, persuasive, polemical? What ends does it serve: the advancement of knowledge, the stimulation of exchange, or maybe the closing off of discussion? Is the discussion public or professional, general or specialized? Is the work "objective" in intent or is it an "opinion piece"? Or does it suggest this is a false distinction? By these means we absorb an understanding of texts, not only of what they expressly say, but also of how to read them.

Some authors are helpfully explicit in sending signals. Graham Greene, for example, called *Our Man in Havana* "An Entertainment," virtually as part of the title; not so *The Power and the Glory*, implicitly a more "serious" work. One might cavil at Green's didacticism, but there is no misunderstanding his intention. In most writing, however, the signal-sending is more embedded in the structure, content, and stylistics of the text. For my purposes today, Frank Underhill's efforts to "make" (or "invent") the intellectual therefore entailed not only the express encouragement of fellow academics to engage critically in public debate, and not only the organization and maintenance of means of communication such as the *Forum* and the LSR, but also (albeit more implicitly) the encouragement of the adoption, by these people and through these means, of a manner of writing *suited* to a particular kind of public discourse and the development of a "community" of writing and reading. These efforts were manifested in his writing practice — his action, as it were, in the intellectual world — and in his reflections on the relation of professors and politics.

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[11] Dewar, "Frank Underhill: Intellectual in Search of a Role."

[12] LAC, UP, vol. 13, Pacey to Underhill, 20 July 1962.

[13] Alastair Fowler, "The Life and Death of Literary Forms," in *New Directions in Literary History*, ed. Ralph Cohen (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 79.

(I increasingly find myself these days, both in class and out, offering myself as a historical artifact, so I might do so here: I clearly recall an example of this signal-sending in my own reading education when a friend pointed out to me at some point in the late 1960s that the word "capitalism" had imperceptibly entered normal language; that is, it had come simply to be used, without explanation or defense, and in a wide range of writing about contemporary affairs, not just in left-wing circles. This signalled, among other things, a return of political economy and a shift leftward in the political centre of public discourse, though, like the term "intellectual," its ubiquitousness today signifies some loss of its earlier meaning.)

Other writers have adopted different practices and produced writing in different genres, representing (I want to argue) different cultural types. Take, for example, the writing of William Dawson LeSueur, the nineteenth-century essayist and historian, and specifically an essay of his that appeared in the *Canadian Monthly and National Review* in 1875, "The Intellectual Life." Here is a piece of writing that must surely have a kinship with Underhill's, given its title, and it *does*, but it is a kinship of neighbouring genres. LeSueur's genre is different. The first thing one notices is simply what is on the page: paragraphs and sentences twice the length of Underhill's on a normal day. This is not a matter merely of the number of words, but of what linguists might call syntactical density: compound sentences, complex sentences, compound-complex sentences, nominal clauses as sentence subjects. Underhill's sentences, as a rule, are simpler — syntactically sparser — and this is one of the features that distinguishes the prose of "the intellectual" from that of LeSueur, which I would call the prose of the "man of letters," or perhaps even of "the sage."

The sage was a figure of nineteenth-century English writing, most familiarly writers like Thomas Carlyle, Matthew Arnold, and John Ruskin. The literary historian George Landow has called them "elegant jeremiahs," evoking their descent from Old Testament prophets.[14] Their central ideas commonly carried a heavy moral freight: "Whether as the result of fortunate, or in spite of unfortunate, influences and agencies," LeSueur wrote of the intellectual life, "some souls in every generation are seen to rise above the commonplace of human existence, so as to derive from the habitual exercise of their higher and nobler faculties an interest at once keen and satisfying. The life that such live is pre-eminently a life of thought, animated and kindled by strong moral feeling."[15] This passage might serve to illustrate LeSueur's diction as well as his idealism. "In the intellectual life," he went on slightly later, "there is no spirit of revolt, but rather a desire to be brought into harmony with whatever may be recognized as the decrees of Providence or the laws of Nature, in a word, with whatever is permanent and essential in the general constitution of things."[16] Genres evolve and mutate, but they are grounded in a time, and in LeSueur's time, theological and natural truths were being overturned by Darwinism, and he, like many others, was led to consider the nature of being itself and strove for a reordered intellectual and spiritual unity, deploying the imagery of truth, beauty, and nobility of soul. It seems reasonable to infer a connection between his seeking after holistic understanding and the density of his prose composition.

Underhill's moment — by which I mean particularly the two decades following the First World War — was, in contrast, one of economic and social upheaval, and ideological ferment, in response to which he and others pursued material explanations and mundane remedies. His categories were historical and

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[14] George P. Landow, *Elegant Jeremiahs: The Sage from Carlyle to Mailer* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986); see also John Gross, *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters: Aspects of English Literary Life since 1800* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969).

[15] William Dawson LeSueur, "The Intellectual Life," in *A Critical Spirit: The Thought of William Dawson LeSueur*, ed. A. B. McKillop, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), 29.

[16] Ibid., 32. For a morally inflected use of "intellectuals," see A.B. McKillop, "Public Intellectuals and Canadian Intellectual History: Communities of Concern," in *Les idées en mouvement: perspectives en histoire intellectuelle et culturelle du Canada*, sous la direction de Damien-Claude Bélanger, Sophie Coupal, et Michel Ducharme (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2004), 121-39.

relativist, rather than universal or absolute; he was disposed to irony (if often in the service of conviction), rather than earnestness; and he was a realist, rather than an idealist. Departing from the writing practice of his nineteenth-century predecessors —surely not entirely unconsciously — he and other intellectuals raised the flag of modernism: cool, even cynical; skeptical of authority, when not expressly rebellious; and resolutely secular. Genres, that is, are situated in time and circumstance: they form, combine, and change as writers seek means of communicating with their audiences. Yet, they are not (or not necessarily) successive; they do not follow one another in neat chronological order. Instead, they may persist, often in altered form or occupying a diminished place in the generic universe.

We see this in the case of Underhill's close friend, Carleton Stanley. The two men were almost exact contemporaries, graduating in the same class from the University of Toronto in 1911, achieving fame then and later as leading lights, with Charles Norris Cochrane, of what was seen as the finest graduating class in the university's history. Cochrane became an eminent classicist, while Stanley eventually rose to the presidency of Dalhousie University in 1931. Before then, however, Stanley led a varied life as a journalist, businessman, and professor at McGill. While still in business, he wrote essays of social criticism, including one that appeared in the *Dalhousie Review* in 1924, "The Cult of Mediocrity in Canada." Here was a jeremiad if ever there was one. Stanley began by calling attention to the lamentably low level of public debate in Canada; linking it to equally deplorable standards of education, he asked if this could possibly be the inevitable result of widening democracy. He then took his readers back to the model of ancient Greece, from which contemporary Canada had manifestly fallen away: instead of treating citizenship as an end in itself, creating thereby a community of citizens, as the Greeks had, Canada treated its citizens as tools — as *means* to an end — which was how the Greeks had regarded slaves. Taking a side-swipe at uncontrolled immigration, as well as sub-standard education, to account for the grievous condition of the Canadian polity, Stanley concluded by calling for a return to the first principles of democracy, though he was none too optimistic about the prospects for early success.[17]

This was a pattern of presentation very closely akin to that found by George Landow in his study of the genre of "the sage." I do not mean to suggest by this that generic analysis is a matter simply of checking off relevant characteristics and slotting works into boxes with one label or another. Instead, I want to argue (borrowing liberally from modern theorists of genre) that, when writers *write*, they decide not only *what* they want to say, but *how* they want to say it — how, that is, they want to present themselves, what attitude they want to project — and they structure their text with an eye to the effect they want it to achieve.[18] Stanley's essay shows him adapting the sage's mode of address, carrying it forward into post-World War I Canada, and projecting an attitude not unlike W. D. LeSueur's fifty years earlier, yearning for a humanist cultural unity amid circumstances of class conflict and materialist ambition. At more or less the same time, Underhill responded to the same circumstances by searching for a way of presenting *him*self, one that would communicate a different meaning, looking more forward than backward and designed as much to provoke political action as to stimulate reflection. The sage genre did not disappear — it was arguably revived in the public writings of Hilda Neatby, George Grant, and Donald Creighton in the 1950s and 1960s — but it was overtaken by other genres, such that it (or its users) came to be regarded as old-fashioned and inherently conservative.

In the 1920s, Underhill lectured to general audiences in Saskatoon and occasionally wrote for the Saskatoon *Star-Phoenix* and the *Winnipeg Free Press*, but it was not until his return to Toronto and his acceptance of an invitation to write for the *Canadian Forum* that he really found his public voice. Drawing on his earlier writing experience, including the experience of student essay-writing at Toronto and

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[17] Carleton W. Stanley, "The Cult of Mediocrity in Canada," *Dalhousie Review* 4, no. 1 (April 1924): 42-51; see Barry Cahill, "The Higher Educator as 'Intellocrat': The Odyssey of Carleton Stanley," *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d'histoire de l'éducation* 14, no. 1 (2002): 67-91.

[18] John Frow, *Genre* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 18.

Oxford, and on the example of writers whom he admired (George Bernard Shaw, Goldwin Smith, H. L. Mencken, Walter Lippman), he developed a posture that enabled him more effectively to shape and communicate his meaning. It was this posture, this mode of address, which I am suggesting constituted an identifiable genre. It lay behind what he explicitly said, creating (or feeding into) a system of communication, against which the meaning of his specific statement of the moment — his "speech act," to draw again on linguistic terminology — was advanced (and, it should also be said, constrained). He also developed a concept of what "the intellectual" was, as compared to "the expert" or "the scholar."

An instance where we see the concept and the posture presenting themselves in unison, as it were, is in a piece he wrote for the *Forum* in March 1936 entitled "On Professors and Politics," which he later included in his retrospective collection of essays, *In Search of Canadian Liberalism*.[19] University professors had long played a central role in European politics, he said, which helped (by the way) to explain the vitality of European writing on history, economics, and law, compared to similar writing in North America. "But to the business men of this country," he continued, making his main point, "universities are still very much like Dutch paintings; they are things to which you point with pride as the proof of culture, especially of its expensiveness; but they have no part in the world of practical affairs."[20] Straight off, then, we encounter one of the primary weapons in Underhill's rhetorical armory: ridicule. This is not always to the taste of modern readers, as it was certainly not to the taste of Carl Berger, when he got around to discussing Underhill in his widely read history of historical thought in Canada.[21] Nevertheless, ridicule — and its close cousins, mockery and derision — was a distinguishing feature of modernist criticism in the postwar era and was undoubtedly one axis along which Underhill connected with his readers.

The fact was, he continued, in Great Britain (otherwise held up as worthy of Canada's emulation) and even in Canada itself, the "academic man" was no stranger to politics. Why, then, was his involvement now (in the thirties) protested? Could it be because of his pink coloration? No sooner had he put this decidedly rhetorical question than Underhill turned his guns from the business enemy onto his fellow academics, whose pretense to Olympian detachment he proceeded to attack just as vigorously. There were risks, to be sure, in partisanship, he admitted: "But in trying to avoid them it is not necessary to go to the other extreme and become a fussy academic old maid always in terror lest the virginal purity of one's scientific mind be exposed to indecent assault if one ventures into the rude world."[22] If there are those in the audience who are prompted by this quotation to wonder if the genre I am attempting to map was a gendered one, I think I can say with reasonable confidence that it was, and that its gendered quality was another axis of connection. The other tendencies to which his colleagues were prone, Underhill went on, were simple indecision (a failure to climb off the fence on one side or the other) and the lure of respectability, which too many pursued before all else.

The orientation of Underhill's writing toward action was here evident in a partially stated premise that political parties were necessary to large-scale democracies, and that academics had a duty to contribute to their intelligent development of policy; to act, that is, as intellectuals. The year before, in a much longer essay that he had contributed to *Social Planning for Canada*, the LSR's analysis of national needs in the Great Depression, he had elaborated on the nature of political parties in Canada, showing another face of the same kind of writing, mapping out a plan of political action adapted to the

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[19] Frank H. Underhill, "On Professors and Politics," in *In Search of Canadian Liberalism* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1960), 107-9.

[20] Ibid., 107.

[21] Carl Berger, "Frank Underhill: History as Political Criticism," in *The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English-Canadian Historical Writing since 1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), 54-84.

[22] Underhill, "On Professors," 109.

requirements of the time — his essay being an example of the kind of symbolic action he called for in "On Professors and Politics."

The problem he began with was strikingly similar to the one Carleton Stanley had addressed a decade earlier: the need to raise the intellectual level of public discourse. However, instead of invoking Aristotle, Thucydides and the Greek ideal of democracy, Underhill embarked on an empirical (if highly coloured) analysis of the function of parties in "large-scale democratic communities," and of the history of party development in Canada over the previous three-quarters of a century. This was a subject to which he had already devoted several papers presented in academic forums. And instead of concluding with an idealist vision of a distant democratic future, he argued for a socialist party alternative and a sustained effort of public education: "No system of socialism (he wrote) will work without the support of a determined and instructed public behind it, and this work of public education is the more necessary in a democratic movement which does not contemplate a violent or forcible transition to the new order."[23] While the substance of the essay is similar to Stanley's (or indeed to Underhill's article in the *Canadian Historical Review* that same year), the manner of presentation is very different and we therefore read it differently.[24]

What I am offering here, then, is two propositions (I hope not too simple-minded): first, that it is useful to think about Underhill's writings (and others like his) in terms of genre (that is, if we consider not only *what* he wrote in his many public essays, but *how*, to *whom*, and *with what purpose* he wrote it, we will better understand both his thought and his role as an intellectual); and second, that in achieving his ends, he had to act in various ways, one of which was to participate in the establishment of a new and distinctive genre, a form of action in itself, if symbolic in nature. Both of these propositions are perhaps not unfamiliar after a quarter century of the "linguistic turn" in academic study. I'm not sure I want to take the *whole* turn, myself, but I think it is apparent — even common-sensical — that we understand texts (in their textness, so to speak) in relation to other texts, and that our understanding will be enhanced if we think about those relationships in history, literature, and other fields of study, as genre systems. We understand Miller Brittain partly in relation to Emily Carr, or the early Brittain in relation to the later, just as we understand *The Tudors* partly in relation to *Da Vinci's Inquest*. Implicit in my first proposition is that we *not* restrict the domain of literature to novels, short stories, poetry, and drama, but that we also consider "non-fiction" (that revealing catch-all category) in literary terms, at least in part: histories, sociological surveys, perhaps even lab reports (dare I say), as well as the commentary of intellectuals.

An element of the experience of genre that I have neglected is setting. How we absorb the meaning of a text is influenced by how it is framed. Readers learned to approach an Underhill essay in the *Forum* differently from the way they approached an article in *Saturday Night* or *Maclean's*, or Stanley's essay in the *Dalhousie Review*. They brought different expectations with them, just as today, at the newsstand, we pick up the *Literary Review of Canada* or the *Nova Scotia Policy Review* with different expectations than we have in picking up *Newsweek* or *The Economist*. Genres create communities of readers, and these communities have social, political, and — depending on what journals we actually buy at the newsstand — economic dimensions. Even within a single medium, the framing of a text may elicit different expectations: the piece on the op-ed page of a newspaper *vs*. the editorial opposite, for example.

The frame of so much of Underhill's writing as an intellectual, the *Canadian Forum*, had existed for almost a decade by the time he came along, and I do not want to exaggerate his originality in carving out a place for himself in its pages (even if there were times when an awfully high proportion of its copy was his, anonymously, or with a by-line, or simply identified by his initials, F.H.U.). I do want to stress his

[23] Research Committee of the League for Social Reconstruction, *Social Planning for Canada* (Toronto: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1935), 465.

[24] Frank H. Underhill, "The Development of National Political Parties in Canada," *Canadian Historical Review* 16, no. 4 (December 1935): 367-87.

creativity, however, even if it was not singular. In times of stability, patterns of understanding are widely shared, and the study of genres is one way of identifying those patterns.[25] In times of instability, however, such as the 1920s and 1930s, patterns are disrupted; they need to be recreated, which is to say that new axes of connection need to be established, and the resulting new clusters of axes amount to a generic re-ordering. This was what Underhill was engaged in, and it was a process of creation and renovation. He did not say to himself, "I'm going to join in the establishment of a new genre today" when he sat down to write; it occurred rather as a kind of by-product of his effort of communication.

When, much later, his writing appeared more commonly in the commercial media — the *Toronto Star*, the *Globe and Mail Magazine*, even *Maclean's* — its meaning was altered, reflecting the establishment status he had achieved over time. One might say that the genre of "the intellectual" underwent a subtle mutation, because Underhill had not ceased to be an intellectual. Rather, as he himself observed in the 1960s, intellectuals were now everywhere.[26] And herein (my final point) may lie an answer to a question that has aroused debate in recent years: whether we have seen "the last of the intellectuals," or whether they have "declined" or "fallen."[27] It seems more likely to me that they have done neither, but that their mode of writing has become so common that it has lost some of the "leading edge," subversive, character it had a half-century and more ago. Intellectuals are frequently found today on the op-ed pages of the newspaper, in print or online, side by side with other commentators, ranging from think-tank experts, to management consultants, to politicians (active and superannuated), religious spokespeople, satirists, and humourists. Meanwhile, the margin that was formerly their home territory is now occupied by Greenpeace activists and the guerilla journalists of *Adbusters* magazine. Intellectuals, in short, now find themselves operating within a new genre system, the product of a new era of instability and a new re-ordering.

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[25] Carolyn R. Miller, "Genre as Social Action," in *Genre and the New Rhetoric*, eds. Aviva Freedman and Peter Medway (London: Taylor and Francis, 1994), 29.

[26] LAC, UP, vol. 24, Writings 1967, "Canadian Intellectuals and Politics."

[27] Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1987); James Pierson, "The Rise and Fall of the Intellectual," *The New Criterion* 25, no. 1 (September 2006), 52-7; "The Future of the Public Intellectual: A Forum," *The Nation*, 12 February 2001, http://www.thenation.com/issue/february-12-2001 (accessed 17 May 2010).