

The Canadian Mind: A Culture So Open, Its 'Brains Fall Out'

by David Solway



The Canadian national temper is a funny thing, riddled with contradictions. It is plainly an abstraction, and yet it does seem to have discernible traits. Some jokingly regard it as absurdly apologetic – a Canadian is someone who says “sorry” when he is jostled. Canadians are polite and amiable, pacifist by nature; they are the world’s peacekeepers. Canadians regard themselves as morally superior, especially with regard to Americans. Canadians are inwardly attracted to failure, as Margaret Atwood contended in [*Roughing It in the Bush*](#) is an early classic detailing the rigors and challenges of domesticating an unforgiving milieu. Canadian fortitude is a national foundation myth.

One recalls Northrop Frye’s analysis in [*Studies in Canadian*](#)

[Literature](#), Sherrie Malisch [Town Crier](#), André Forget, for example, thinks that Frye's analysis is *passé*, that the "garrisoned mind" has opened up to an anonymous urban and Internet landscape which "has done away with most of the practical limitations geography used to enforce." Canadian writers in particular have become more sophisticated. His argument is not entirely without merit and may be initially persuasive. Yet any reading of our literature and study of our culture and politics would strongly suggest that the Canadian imagination remains for the most part local, indigenous, imitative and mired in a state of general insipidity.

Everywhere one turns one sees a tendency toward mimesis – we tend to copy rather than invent – qualified by intellectual emptiness. In other words, it may be that the vacancy of the Canadian mind reflects the vacancy of the Canadian landscape. Of course, much of the land is variegated – lakes, rivers, forests, the impressive mountain ranges running down the length of "beautiful British Columbia" – in the same way, metaphorically speaking, that we can boast a number of resonating exceptions to the staple of tepid cultural and intellectual sameness.

One thinks of novelist Mordecai Richler, poet Irving Layton, critical minds Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan and Northrop Frye, musicians Leonard Cohen and Gordon Lightfoot. Our founding father, Sir John A. Macdonald, was the *ne plus ultra* of our political class; there has been none like him since, which may explain why he is now on [Guns, Germs and Steel](#), geography governs the development of culture and spirit.

Any nation the preponderance of whose citizens regularly elects left-wing political parties; accepts single-payer healthcare; believes in the efficacy of the welfare state; endorses the hoax of global warming (as does even Sherrie Malisch, above); accommodates swarms of third-world immigrants

and refugees who have no love for or understanding of a country becoming an open-to-all multicultural tombola with the [Joseph Boyden](#) and [Judgment](#) finds “that not all truthful statements must be free from restriction. Truthful statements can be interlaced with harmful ones or otherwise presented in a manner that would meet the definition of hate speech.” Section 15 (2) of the [said](#): “Freedom of speech is an American concept, so I don’t give it any value.” Openness to everything except freedom of speech, chartered principle and practical reason is the hallmark of our justice system, as it is of the nation. As Carl Sagan quipped in [The Imperialist](#) had the measure of the country, especially in her character Alfred Hesketh, soon to be a naturalized citizen. Hesketh’s “open mind” was ironically being filled “to capacity,” which augured very little of substance though the act was accompanied by “satisfaction.” He would make a good Canadian. The Canadian mind was always “open” in the pejorative sense, but it has inflated exponentially in the current era. Regrettably, the opening of the Canadian mind does not signify an expanding hospitality to the world of truth, fact and reason but, on the contrary, a growing vacancy of disciplined thought, creative virility and common sense.

Susanna Moodie felt there was great hope for this country – her heart, she writes, “bounds with glee to hail thy noble destiny.” Philosopher George Grant in [PJ Media](#).