

The Myths and Symbols of the Constitutional Debate in Canada

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CONTENTS

<i>Foreword</i>	v
<i>Preface</i>	vii
<i>Sommaire</i>	ix
<i>Abstract</i>	xi
INTRODUCTION	1
THE MYTHS OF THE STATE	9
SURVIVAL AND THE VICTIM MYTH	11
THE GARRISON MENTALITY	23
THE NATION	25
NATIONALISM	34
DUALITY	37
EQUAL PROVINCES	44
CULTURE AND MULTICULTURALISM	47
MEECH LAKE REVISITED	57
THE SYMBOLIC ASPECTS OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL PROCESSES	63
BIBLIOGRAPHY	69

FOREWORD

The series of publications of the Institute of Intergovernmental Relations under the series title *Reflections/Réflexions* was created to provide an opportunity to present the personal thoughts and arguments of their authors on a wide range of subjects touching in some ways on federalism and intergovernmental relations. It was intended that many of these would focus on a variety of public issues affecting Canada's future development as a nation and federation and that some would be experimental, intended to place new ideas into the public forum where they will be open to challenge and rebuttal without necessarily involving the completeness required by publications in the *Research Paper* series of the Institute.

This publication by C.E.S. Franks, *The Myths and Symbols of the Constitutional Debate in Canada*, fits well into the *Reflections/Réflexions* series. It explores the role of myths and symbols in the constitutional deliberations of the past decade and particularly in relation to the debate over the Meech Lake Accord, although it does include references to the more recent public discussion of the Charlottetown Agreement and the debate during referendum on it. The analysis focuses deliberately on the myths and symbols themselves and on how they have contributed to the attitudes, perceptions and reasoning that have caused Canada's constitutional difficulties rather than upon the relationship of the myths and symbols to particular ideologies, political parties, groups and interests.

In the author's analysis of our constitutional myths and symbols he presents some insights into how they have influenced our attitudes and behaviour and have complicated the task of reaching agreement. Many may find his interpretations of particular myths contentious and even provocative. Nevertheless, he does amply illustrate the importance of myths and symbols in influencing attitudes, behaviour and action during the constitutional deliberations and debates.

Professor C.E.S. Franks is Professor of Political Studies at Queen's University where he has held an appointment in the Department of Political Studies since 1967. He is a leading authority on Parliament and the author of *The Parliament of Canada* (1987).

The genesis for this paper lay in a research study done by Professor Franks for the Federal-Provincial Relations Office in the summer of 1991. This paper goes considerably beyond that work, however, and the Institute of Intergovernmental Relations is pleased to have this opportunity to place these ideas into the public forum for consideration.

Ronald L. Watts
Director
February 1991

PREFACE

This paper arose out of an interest of mine in language and politics, in how language shapes people, politics and events, and in how the ideas and approaches in literary theory and anthropology can help understand politics. It was first written as a research study for the Federal-Provincial Relations Office in summer 1991, and was, after much discussion and reexamination, revised in late 1992. The project was originally stimulated by the profound confusion and despair following on the failure of the Meech Lake Accord. The period of its revision includes the formulation of the Charlottetown Agreement and its subsequent rejection by the people of Canada in the national referendum. The paper shows this history. The prime references in it are to the Meech Lake debacle, which in my view is a nearly ideal episode for illustrating the mythic and symbolic levels of the processes of constitutional reform in Canada. I have, however, also brought the paper up to date, as of December 1992, by examining and referring to the later constitutional events.

The issues and problems examined in the paper are very complex, and the paper does little more than scratch their surface. I am putting it forward for publication in this form in the hope that it will encourage more discussion and exploration of this somewhat unorthodox approach to the problems of confederation.

Many people have contributed to the project. It was originally encouraged by Ron Watts, and the preliminary study was, as noted, commissioned by the Federal Provincial Relations Office. Linda Epp and Patricia Loveridge helped in the early stages. Istvan Anhalt, Ed Black, Doug Brown, Alan Cairns, Jock Gunn, Richard Johnston, John Meisel, Brian Osborne, Jon Rose, Michael Tait, Doug Williams, and Robert Young gave helpful comments on the earlier drafts. These readers suggested many sources, ideas and examples in what has been for me a voyage into largely unfamiliar territory. Shirley Fraser undertook the heroic job of reading my handwriting and typing the manuscript. This paper reports the findings of what is still a preliminary exploration. More work is urgently needed, for these symbolic and mythic aspects of politics influence much more of our political life, thinking and attitudes than is generally appreciated.

SOMMAIRE

Cet article analyse le rôle joué par les mythes et les symboles au cours des divers débats qui ont marqué à ce jour la fédération canadienne. Les mythes peuvent être définis comme une interprétation des événements et de l'histoire visant à expliquer et justifier à la fois l'action politique et les idéologies. Les symboles constituent, pour leur part, la manifestation ou la représentation synthétique de ces mythes. De par leur nature, ceux-ci ne rendent compte que de manière partielle de la réalité: c'est pourquoi ils sont par essence discriminatoires et biaisés. Des événements donnés pourront être interprétés de différentes façons selon le mythe concerné.

Les mythes qui entourent l'Etat ont quelque chose de romanesque dans la mesure où 1) ils sont fondés sur l'antagonisme héros/ennemi, et 2) les promesses faites aux citoyens vont bien au-delà de la pure félicité. Le mythe de la survivance et de la victimisation, fréquemment associé à la « mentalité de garnison », s'avère par ailleurs l'un des mythes fondamentaux à la base de la littérature et du discours politique canadien. La « nation » et le « nationalisme » sont tous deux des mythes romantiques. On fait un usage différent au Québec et dans le reste du Canada du terme « nation », lequel renvoie à des mythes bien distincts. Pareillement, le nationalisme québécois diffère beaucoup du nationalisme anglo-canadien en grande partie parce que le type québécois exalte les valeurs d'homogénéité et d'unicité tandis que le modèle canadien-anglais met plutôt l'accent dans son cas sur les valeurs de diversité et d'intégrité. On note également des différences fondamentales entre le Québec et le Canada anglais quant au sens accordé de part et d'autre au concept de « culture », entendu ici dans sa relation avec la société et la politique ainsi qu'en ce qui a trait aux attitudes adoptées envers le multiculturalisme; ce dernier constitue par ailleurs l'un des symboles les plus puissants au Canada hors Québec.

D'autre part, les Québécois, dans leur ensemble, conçoivent la fédération dans une perspective dualiste, articulée autour du mythe des deux peuples fondateurs; à l'opposé, dans le reste du Canada, c'est plutôt la croyance en une égalité entre toutes les provinces qui s'impose. L'incompréhension manifestée de part et d'autre lors du débat sur la réforme constitutionnelle découle, pour une bonne part, des tensions générées par ces symboles conflictuels. En ces temps incertains, l'opinion publique a tendance en effet à adhérer à des mythes et à des symboles réducteurs. Le phénomène s'est produit lors de la débâcle du Lac Meech, provoquant du coup des frictions ainsi qu'une polarisation malsaine, et au surplus inutile, de l'opinion publique canadienne. En raison de son caractère éminemment symbolique, il apparaît quasi inévitable que le débat autour de la réforme constitutionnelle prenne un telle tournure exacerbée.

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the role of myths and symbols in the Confederation debates in Canada. Myths are interpretations of events and history that explain and justify political action and ideologies. Symbols are short-hand expressions or images that embody these myths. Myths are by their nature only partial explanations of reality, and are selective and biased. The same events can be interpreted in different ways through different myths. The myths of the state are romances, which identify enemies and heroes and promise larger than life happiness.

One of the fundamental myths in Canadian literature and political rhetoric has been that of survival and victimhood, often combined with a garrison mentality. "Nation" and "nationalism" are both romantic myths. The term "nation" is used in quite different ways in Quebec and the rest of Canada and embodies quite different myths. Similarly, Quebec nationalism is very different from English Canadian, in large part because the Quebec variety extols homogeneity and uniqueness, while English Canada extols variety and inclusiveness. There are also profound differences between the English-Canadian and Quebec concepts of "culture" and its relationship to society and politics, and to attitudes to multiculturalism, which is one of the stronger symbols in Canada outside Quebec. Quebec espouses an image of Confederation as duality, representing a myth of two founding nations, while the rest of Canada espouses a contradictory image of provincial equality.

The tension between these conflicting symbols is a large source of much of the mutual incomprehension during discussions of constitutional reform. In times of stress and anxiety opinion tends to cluster around grossly simplified myths and symbols. This happened in the Meech Lake debate, creating tensions and polarization of opinion of a dangerous and unnecessary sort. Debate on constitutional reform, because so much of it is at the symbolic level, inevitably runs the risk of this sort of polarization and tension.

THE MYTHS AND SYMBOLS OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL DEBATE IN CANADA

INTRODUCTION

The bare bones of the Meech Lake debacle are that the prime minister and the ten provincial premiers of Canada agreed in 1987 to a set of amendments to the *Constitution Act, 1982* largely to meet five demands of Quebec, which had not assented to the amendments of 1982. The new amendments included a phrase recognizing Quebec as a "distinct society." There was a three-year period during which the legislatures of the ten provinces and the federal Parliament would have to approve the Meech Lake Accord before it became part of the constitution. In June 1990 the Accord lapsed because two of the provincial legislatures — Manitoba and Newfoundland — had failed to ratify it. The Newfoundland legislature had ratified it once, but Clyde Wells, newly elected as premier, had caused the legislature to reverse this. In Manitoba one member of the legislature, Elijah Harper, a status Indian, had prevented the legislature from voting on the Accord. At the time that the Meech Lake Accord lapsed, it had been approved by all parties in the federal Parliament and by eight out of ten provincial legislatures representing nearly 95 percent of Canadians.

By any standard apart from unanimity eight out of ten and 95 percent would be regarded as overwhelming endorsements and support, but the constitutional arithmetic and political logic in Canada caused it to be regarded as an absolute failure and a rejection of Quebec. The debate on the Accord had, especially during its last months, become bitter and acrimonious. Opinion became polarized, with a sense gradually developing in Canada outside Quebec that Quebec was asking for too much, and within Quebec that the rest of Canada was rejecting Quebec and did not want it to be part of Canada on any reasonable terms. The subsequent outpouring of anger and resentment in Quebec led to strong nationalist reactions, and the production of two comparably strong official pro-nationalist and independence documents: *A Québec Free to Choose* (the Allaire Report) of Quebec's governing Liberal Party,¹ and *L'Avenir*

1 *A Québec Free to Choose*, Report of the Constitutional Committee of the Québec Liberal Party, for submission to the 25th convention, 28 January 1991.

Politique et Constitutionnel du Québec of the Bélanger-Campeau Commission² established by the Quebec National Assembly.

One of the most striking things about this series of events leading to the present constitutional problems is that with one exception there were no acts, new laws, or judicial rulings that were a logical cause for the polarization of attitudes and growing resentment. The army did not march into Quebec to suppress riots or enforce federal power. The federal Parliament passed no laws limiting the language rights of French-speaking Canadians. One incident was widely publicized and televised in Quebec of six persons in Brockville, Ontario, trampling on the Quebec flag. In previous years there had been comparable incidents of persons in Quebec burning the Canadian flag, though these had received much less media attention. The Brockville incident was used by the Quebec media to symbolize Quebec's rejection by the rest of Canada. The one exception was the Quebec government's use of the constitution's notwithstanding clause to override a Supreme Court decision declaring unconstitutional the Quebec laws forbidding stores to have signs in English (Bill 178) created some outrage in English Canada. But the national political parties and every major provincial politician had continued to support Quebec's aspirations as expressed in the Meech Lake Accord. Nevertheless, the outcome of Meech Lake was that a strong polarization developed, Quebec nationalist-sovereigntist opinion reached its highest level ever, and Canada was plunged into a constitutional mess.

The events leading to the mess were not actual hostile or discriminatory deeds, regulations or policies. Rather they possessed their significance and power at the symbolic level, as proofs that confirmed previously held convictions in Quebec about the hostility of the rest of Canada and in the rest of Canada about the unreasonableness of Quebec demands. In a very real sense the struggle over the Meech Lake Accord, however it appeared as a battle between politicians or as arguments over competing claims of rights, was a struggle at the level of symbols and perceptions. And it is a struggle in which Canada was the loser; while it is doubtful that anyone, apart from extremists on various sides, won.

It is quite natural, but mistaken, to downplay the importance of this symbolic level of politics. After all, politicians, political scientists, and journalists, like citizens in general, live in the real world of politics, and political symbols, at least effective ones, are part of that real world and help shape perceptions of it. These symbols are not, for the most part, something that can be regarded as external to oneself and juggled and manipulated as can clauses in a bill, or sections of a constitution. Rather they are an internal part of ourselves, unseen

2 *Rapport de la Commission sur l'avenir politique et constitutionnel du Québec* (Québec, 27 March 1991).

but powerful. They have a life of their own. The history of symbols in the Meech Lake debacle is a history of increasing extremism and polarization of the symbols themselves, of pronounced shifts in public perceptions and growing adherence to these highly polarized symbols, and of increasing simplifications, starkness and crudity of the symbols. Far from being fixed, either in their content, complexity or power, all these elements were proven changeable, and the end result of the changes, which were to no small extent caused by the Meech Lake process, was the attitudes and perceptions that underlie the present constitutional mess.

The purpose of this paper is to explore some of the aspects of the symbols, myths, and terms of discourse of Confederation in Canada. It is not an exhaustive study, but simply an introductory exploration of a very complex and not very well understood side of politics. The findings are, I believe, provocative and useful. They suggest ways in which the impact of words and actions on symbols and perceptions can be better understood, as can the impact of symbols and perceptions on politics.

"Symbols" and "myths" are terms used in many different disciplines, including anthropology, religion, arts, literary criticism, psychology and sociology. Not only do they not always mean the same thing from one discipline to another, but even within a single discipline the terms can have different and often conflicting and competing meanings. There is no single true meaning to these and other terms which represent their essence and which can be discovered through diligent intellectual pursuit. Rather there are clusters of meanings depending on the author, the discipline, the context, and the uses to which the terms are put. Words used to discuss politics are often contradictory, loose, elusive and slippery in meaning.³

"Myth" refers to a story that includes characters and events.⁴ The plot of the myth is a narrative which has importance beyond itself in interpreting, explaining, justifying, evaluating and motivating human action. Freud, for example, argued that the Oedipus myth portrayed an important reality in Western society. The plot of the myth is of king Oedipus, who acted out the prediction of the oracle, killed his father and married his mother. Freud in his argument for an "Oedipus complex," claimed that this sort of illicit emotional relationship of a man with his mother affected male relationships with females and older men

3 A useful discussion of some of the difficulties in using words in this sort of analysis can be found in T.D. Weldon's classic *The Vocabulary of Politics: An Enquiry into the Use and Abuses of Language in the Making of Political Theories* (London: Pelican, 1953), especially Chapter 2, "The Logic of Classical Theories."

4 Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (Toronto: The Academic Press, 1982), p. 31. Among the other authors I have drawn upon in this examination of myth are Ernst Cassirer, Mireea Eliade, B. Malinowski, and Edward Sapir.

generally in society. The emotional consequences of this and related complexes had to be resolved before human beings could integrate the warring aspects of their personalities. The Oedipus myth vividly illustrates the more general problem.

The point of a myth is not that it is true or false, for a myth can never in a fundamental way be true or false. It is irrelevant to the power of the Oedipus myth whether King Oedipus really lived or not, whether he really killed his father or not, whether he really married his mother or not. What is important is that the myth has metaphorical and symbolic meaning, and that it has enormous emotional and explanatory power. The plot of a myth can be reproduced in other forms — in politics as an accepted form of behaviour, explanation or narrative. Myths in this sense are essential, integral parts of culture, human personalities and social interaction.

Myths can recur in many different forms and guises. The Homeric myth of Odysseus reappears in James Joyce's twentieth century Dublin and in the television series about a space ship in the distant future, *Star Trek*. Elements of the Babylonian Gilgamesh epic form the structure of Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* set in Toronto in this century. Ian Fleming's James Bond spy thrillers have the plot structure of a traditional romantic myth.

Roland Barthes, using a "semiological" approach, concludes that everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by discourse. His own list of myths includes the Eiffel Tower, professional wrestling, the striptease, pictures of food in women's magazines, Poujade's political rhetoric, the railway dining car, and the bourgeois art of song. Barthes argues that the knowledge contained in myth is confused, made of yielding and shapeless associations. Its unity and coherence are due to its function, which is found in its meaning and emotional power for its audience.⁵ Barthes also argued that myth is the most ideological form of speech, and should be contrasted with its dialectic opposite, the direct and transformative speech of labour and revolution.⁶ The anthropological and literary approach, which I adopt, does not make this distinction between myth and transformative speech. Rather it accepts that myths, symbols, and metaphors, with their partial and biased interpretations, are pervasive and inescapable parts of the human condition and human discourse.

The term "symbol" is used by anthropologists and others to include anything from words and terms of discourse, such as "snake" denoting a class of reptiles,

5 See Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," originally published in his *Mythologies*. The version I have drawn on here is in Susan Sontag, ed., *A Barthes Reader* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1982), pp. 93-149.

6 See Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 5.

or "fire" denoting a particular sort of chemical and physical phenomenon, to the most general and complex of images such as "the cross" connoting the entire Christian mythology and doctrine. The word "Oedipus" not only denotes the king, but is a symbol, standing for the myth and all its connotations. As the psychologist Jerome Bruner describes, human beings operate within, and construct meaning by using symbolic systems that are "already in place, already 'there,' deeply entrenched in culture and language." They constitute a very special kind of communal tool kit where tools, once used, make the user a reflection of the community.⁷ Culture shapes human life and the human mind, and gives meaning to action by situating its underlying intentional states in an interpretive system. It does this by imposing the patterns inherent in the culture's symbolic systems, its language and discourse modes, the forms of logical and narrative explication, and the patterns of mutually dependent communal life.⁸ Meaning itself is a culturally mediated phenomenon that depends upon the prior existence of a shared symbolic system.⁹

Politics shares these mythic and symbolic bases with all other social human activities. Murray Edelman, who has done pioneer work in exploring the symbolic dimension of politics, argues that:

Practically every political act that is controversial or regarded as really important is bound to serve in part as a condensation symbol. It evokes a quiescent or an aroused mass response because it symbolizes a threat or reassurance. Because the meaning of the act in these cases depends only partly or not at all upon its objective consequences, which the mass public cannot know, the meaning can only come from the psychological needs of the respondents; and it can only be known from their responses.¹⁰

A large part of Edelman's exploration of the symbolic uses of politics is in effect an extension of Machiavelli's principle of government by fraud into modern mass politics. The sort of symbols he deals with is a special class with strong connotations and emotional resonance — "race riots," "standing tall," "war on poverty," would be recent examples from American politics. But these more general symbols share with the simpler ones their importance in creating the patterns and directions of human thoughts and feelings.

Studies of art, literature and culture, as well as sociology, anthropology and psychology, have led to a new understanding of how myths, symbols, individuals and social phenomena interact. Now it is apparent that observers and what

7 Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 11.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 34.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

10 Murray Edelman, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* (Urbana: Illinois University Press, 1964), p. 71.

they observe construct one another, and that political developments are ambiguous entities that mean what observers choose for them to mean.¹¹ Political actions and people engaged in politics alike are constructions because their actions and language create a sense of who they are. People involved in politics also become symbols to other observers, stand for ideologies, values or moral stands, and become role models and symbols of good and evil.¹² Political leaders and followers act and speak in reflection to situations, and attempt to impose interpretations on events and actions that are consistent with their symbolic roles and meanings. "Mulroney," "Trudeau," "Clyde Wells," "Bourassa" and "Elijah Harper," for example, all were powerful symbols in the Meech Lake process.

These strategies of analysis lead to an open-ended view of politics. Human beings, leaders and followers alike, think and act in terms of symbols and myths which are embedded in their culture. Events and statements are interpreted in terms of these symbols and myths. Nevertheless, this is not a static process. There are contradictions and anomalies within the events, the actors, the symbols and myths that make them amenable to many different interpretations and meanings. In a well-developed society there is also usually enough variety in and competition between the many myths and symbols that no single interpretation of events and meaning remains uncontested. At the same time, any single myth or symbol is only a partial interpretation of events and meaning, inevitably leaving some aspects out, and emphasizing others. Myths and symbols are often a way of pasting over and ignoring contradictions as they "abridge reality." When harnessed to political purposes they can obscure as much as they reveal. Myths are also highly ideological, and both the selection and interpretation of myths in politics has a partisan and ideological aspect.

This is not to say that analysis of myths is only a matter of relativity and one interpretation is as good as another. Some myths correspond more closely to reality than others, or give meaning to a wider range of events, texts and other phenomena, or create a stronger resonance with the internal world of feelings, values and perceptions. Myths, symbols, and their interpretations can be compared and argued over. Persuasive arguments can be made in favour of some, and against others. In a very fundamental sense myths are not "true" or "false." But they can be "better" or "worse." And their merits can and should be the subject of disputation and choice. Political philosophers have adopted this sort of approach to the discussion and analysis of questions of human rights.¹³

11 Nelson Goodman, *Of Mind and Other Matters* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 28.

12 Murray Edelman, *Constructing the Political Spectacle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 1-2.

13 For example, see Margaret Macdonald, "Natural Rights," in Jeremy Waldron, ed.,

Analysts now adopt this approach to a broad range of political phenomena, and use it to explore in depth the relationship between individuals, collective actions and the symbolic world. The mythic and symbolic components of politics can be exposed, analyzed, criticized, and perhaps even changed.

These features can be seen at work in the Meech Lake debacle. As was noted above, during the process the symbols became increasingly simplified and crude. A dominant perception emerged in Quebec that the rest of Canada was against Quebec, even though governments and legislatures representing an overwhelming majority of Canadians had approved the Accord. Canadians outside Quebec became increasingly hostile to Quebec's demands. The conception of Canada as made up of two founding nations became more dominant in Quebec, while in the rest of Canada the conflicting perception of ten equal provinces became stronger. "Distinct society" became a rallying point for opposed causes. Canada as one country seemed to be totally neglected. Events such as the flag episode and the actions of Clyde Wells and Elijah Harper gained their own symbolic and mythic proportions. Mulroney came to symbolize one view of Canada, Trudeau an opposite one. Discussion was carried out in terms of these symbols and the myths they encapsulated at the same time as the symbols became cruder and less compatible.

In Canada there are many varieties of myth and symbol. In this paper I have not tried the impossible task of portraying them all, but have attempted to open up for consideration some that became particularly prominent during the Meech Lake process. One of the most damaging aspects of the Meech Lake process was that the worst elements of some of these myths — victim, survival, being under siege, nationalism, etc. — grew in power and polarization in both English and French Canada. The process of repairing this sort of damage is inevitably slow and difficult.

In a fully-developed civil culture and polity, politics will in part be a process of forming, choosing between, adapting and revising myths and symbols. It is in the nature of myths that they are selective and only deal with some facts and issues, and ignore others. They are intensely ideological, and each major ideology, including nationalism, Marxism, socialism, liberalism, or conservatism, has a system of myths and symbols associated with it. *The argument in this paper is not that the myths and symbols examined in it give a total and accurate picture of Canadian politics and culture, but that they are important aspects of politics and culture, and, through emphasis and interpretation, have become part of the political landscape, and have contributed to the attitudes, perceptions and reasoning that cause Canada's constitutional difficulties.*

Many other important myths and symbols I have left unexamined, but writing, like myths, is embedded in a culture and is ineluctably partial and selective.

There are several important dimensions of the myths and symbols that I will not examine in any depth in this paper. The most tantalizing unexamined path is the relationship of these myths and symbols to ideologies, to political parties, groups and activities and to mass opinion. For example, it is clear that there is a Quebec nationalist-sovereigntist version and interpretation of events, just as there is a pro-English, at the least unsympathetic to Quebec and French language, version and interpretation of events. The former is clearly articulated by the Parti Québécois, by the Bloc Québécois, and by many other prominent Quebec politicians, intellectuals, media pundits and others. It is also supported by a significant proportion of the Quebec population, though how large is far from clear, as is whether it is a stable or growing proportion. The pro-English, anti-French version was articulated, at least in part, by the Reform Party and by other smaller and often fringe groups.¹⁴ This ideology was rejected by all the major political parties in Canada, and does not have the intellectual or organizational coherence of its Quebec counterpart. Nor is its level of political support at all clear.

These two ideologies embody fundamentally contradictory myths of the foundations of Canada and of what the country is all about. The French Canadian and Quebec version of the myths, which is accepted by most non-nationalist, non-sovereigntists as well, is of Canada as a duality, of a partnership of two founding peoples, with Quebec representing one of the partners. The competing English-Canadian myth in its moderate version portrays Canada as a partnership of ten equal provinces, and this has been espoused by many prominent English-Canadian politicians, including Premier Wells of Newfoundland and Premier Getty of Alberta. Pierre Trudeau also espouses a version of it.

It would require a different, and much bigger study than this to explore these ideologies in depth, to identify who holds them and why, how they were created, and are propagated, and how they are related to economic and social forces and factions in Canada. Of necessity, and reluctantly, I have not pursued this important line of inquiry. Nor have I attempted to correlate in any serious way the political myths and symbols, views and arguments examined in the paper with public opinion. The results of opinion surveys are often unclear, and are far more difficult to analyze than normal media reportage would suggest.

14 See J.W. Berry, and Diane Bourcier, "Attitudes towards Official Bilingualism in Eastern Ontario," a paper presented to the annual meeting of the Canadian Psychological Association, Halifax, 1989.

THE MYTHS OF THE STATE

Plato in *The Republic* discussed the myths of the state, or noble lies, which justify the arrangements of power in society. These myths refer back to a golden age when the state was created, just as the social contract theory in more modern political theory is attached to a fable about something in a past so remote that it cannot be verified except by the evidence of the present. The myth of the contract theory claims that men once upon a time surrendered, or delegated, or were tricked into giving up their power. From this myth follow conclusions about the role of the state, the relationship of individuals to it, and the need to preserve or change the status quo, depending on the version of the myth being recounted. Myths of the state are not only alive and well, but are an essential part of politics, ancient and modern.

The key myths of the state have the structure of romance.¹⁵ Central to a romance is a hero, and a romance includes a stage of perilous journey and preliminary minor adventures, a crucial battle or struggle, and the final exaltation of the hero. In effect, a larger-than-life hero meets a larger-than-life villain, they have a larger-than-life confrontation, the villain is vanquished, and the hero wins larger-than-life happiness and success. According to Northrop Frye "the romance is the nearest of all literary forms to the wish-fulfilment dream, and for that reason it has socially a curiously paradoxical role. In every age the ruling social or intellectual class tends to project its ideals in some form of romance, where the virtuous heroes and beautiful heroines represent the ideals and the villains the threats to their ascendancy." There is also a proletarian element to romance "which is never satisfied with its various incarnations, and in fact the incarnations themselves indicate that no matter how great a change may take place in society, romance will turn up again, as hungry as ever, looking for new hopes and desires to feed on."¹⁶ The nearer the romance to myth, the more the attributes of divinity cling to the hero, and the more the enemy has demonic mythical qualities. "The central form of the romance is dialectical: everything is focussed on a conflict between the hero and his enemy, and all the reader's values are bound up with the hero. Hence the hero of romance is analogous to the mythical Messiah or deliverer who comes from an upper world, and his enemy is analogous to the demonic power of a lower world."¹⁷ The conflict takes place in the middle world, which is ours.

15 This analysis is largely based on Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957). I also discussed these issues with Northrop Frye before his death.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 186.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 187.

Nowadays we do not have mythical romances of chivalric knights and damsels in distress to explain and justify the state. However, we do have ideologies that serve the same purpose and have the same form. Marxism, for example, in its essence is a romantic myth. A larger-than-life hero, the proletariat, is oppressed and alienated by a larger-than-life villain, capitalism and the bourgeoisie. A titanic battle of the classes ensues between the two, the proletariat wins, and larger-than-life happiness, the non-alienated society, is the result. Similarly, economic market liberalism has its romantic structure. The evil villain is economic inefficiency and low productivity, the hero is the free market, and the outcome of the triumph of the market is efficiency and prosperity. Nationalism is a romantic myth. Every modern political ideology, and many more minor aspects of politics as well, are expressed through this sort of romantic structure. The "war on drugs," the "war on poverty," "free trade," various sorts of religious fundamentalism, all also embody romantic plots and myths.

Northrop Frye's analysis of mythic forms in literature postulates four basic structures: romance, tragedy, comedy, and irony. It is easy to see why the myths of the state are romances. They are the optimistic myths. They glorify the hero and dramatize the villain and make them greater than oneself. These features serve the needs of the state. They justify the exalted position of leader, give the leader a cause around which to rally support and demand sacrifice, postulate an enemy that must be battled, and promise a marvellous future. Romantic myths give reasons for action and change. The opposite of romance, tragedy, would in no way serve the same purpose. Though the hero in a tragedy is, as in romance, larger than life, the outcome is the hero's destruction. This creates a deepened awareness of the human condition, but it would not serve the interests of rulers. Tragedy, unlike romance, is not a call to action. Instead, it is a means of reconciliation and acceptance of the human condition. Irony and comedy reduce their characters to less than life, smaller than the audience, and do not have the seriousness of romance or tragedy. They too would not serve the interests of the state, anymore than does the ironic fable of the emperor's own clothes.

Nevertheless, for a full appreciation of the human condition all four mythic modes are needed. Romance by itself is unrealistic and self-serving. It needs tragedy to underline human limitations and the capacity to accept and survive misfortune, failure and disaster. Comedy and irony are needed to create an alternative perspective which does not exalt the state and the ruler over the citizens, and which points out the foolishness and fallacies of the romantic myths and pretensions of the rulers. Plato proposed kicking the poets out of the republic precisely because they would serve these debunking functions. It is a very dangerous situation when romantic myths of the state, especially simplistic and misleading ones, are accepted without question, and where there are no

competing myths or processes which actively test, ridicule, debunk and pose alternatives to them.

SURVIVAL AND THE VICTIM MYTH

Margaret Atwood in *Survival*, her thematic study of Canadian literature, argues that every country has a single unifying and informing symbol at its core. This symbol functions like a system of beliefs that holds the country together and helps the people in it to cooperate for common ends. "The central symbol for Canada — and this is based on numerous instances of its occurrence in both English- and French-Canadian literature — is undoubtedly survival, *la survivance*."¹⁸ Survival according to Atwood is a multi-faceted and adaptable idea. For settlers and explorers it meant surviving in the face of danger. For others it means surviving natural or man-made disasters such as hurricanes, shipwrecks (the Titanic) or explosions (Halifax). For French Canadians *la survivance* has meant hanging on to language, religion and culture under an alien government. For English Canada it has meant creating an identity in face of domination by England and then the United States. "But the main idea is the first one: hanging on, staying alive. Canadians are forever taking the national pulse like doctors at a sickbed: the aim is not to see whether the patient will live well but simply whether he will live at all."¹⁹

"Let us suppose," Atwood continues, "that Canada as a whole is a victim, or an 'oppressed minority,' or 'exploited.' Let us suppose in short that Canada is a colony. A partial definition of a colony is that it is a place from which a profit is made, *but not by the people who live there*."²⁰ The characteristic of a colonized people is that they are oppressed and victimized. The concept of "victim" is closely related to survival. There are, according to Atwood, four basic victim postures or positions. The first is to deny the fact that you are a victim. The second is to acknowledge that you are a victim, but to explain it as an act of a powerful force outside human control, such as fate, the will of God, biology (for women), historical necessity or economics. The third is to acknowledge the fact that you are a victim, but to refuse to accept that the role is inevitable. Here "you can distinguish between the *role* of victim (which probably leads you to seek victimization even when there is no call for it), and the *objective experience* that is making you a victim. And you can probably go further and decide how much of the objective experience could be changed if

18 Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972), p. 32.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 33.

20 *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

you made the effort."²¹ Position four is to be a creative non-victim. This is a position for non-victims or ex-victims. In this position creative activity of all kinds becomes possible because energy is no longer being suppressed (as in position one), or used up in displacement or passing your victimization on to others, as in position two, or anger (position three). In position four, victor-victim games are obsolete. Atwood might have added a fifth posture: of maintaining the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour of a victim even after victimhood is over, where the victims are now victors; of pretending to be a victim.

Pierre Vallières described French Canadians as "white niggers of America" because they were exploited, oppressed, and treated as second-class citizens by English Canadian and American capitalists. French Canadians according to Vallières were not the only whites in North America who deserved this degrading title. The majority of immigrants to North America have remained hired servants of "the first white men, the entrepreneurs of the superior English race, who ever since the time of the Washingtons, Jeffersons and Franklins have considered themselves the sole proprietors of North America."²² The phrase "white niggers" in this manifesto of French-Canadian protest had been used in the previous century by Haliburton, a Nova Scotian author, to describe English-speaking colonists in British North America:

The slave is a slave, and that's his condition. Now the English have two sorts of niggers — American [British North America] colonists, who are free white niggers; and manufacturers' labourers at home, and they are white slave niggers... A colonist don't differ in anythin' but color: both have naked rights, but they have no power given 'em to clothe those rights, and that's the naked truth.²³

This similarity of metaphor and image is not coincidental: both the English Canadian and the French Canadian have seen themselves as oppressed victims of colonization, the one by outside powers, the other by forces inside the country. A group that saw itself as victim was seen by another as oppressor. Many observers have noted this paradox. Léandre Bergeron, in his influential patriot's handbook, stated that "Canadians are colonized economically, politically and culturally by the U.S. American companies that dominate the economy of Canada and by the same process, its political life. American T.V., American magazines, American professors spread American ideology systematically from coast to coast, from 49th parallel to the North Pole." At the same time the Canadian ruling class:

21 Ibid., p. 38.

22 Pierre Vallières, *White Niggers of America*, translated by Joan Pinkham (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), p. 49.

23 Quoted by Northrop Frye in "National Consciousness in Canadian Culture," in Northrop Frye, *Divisions on a Ground: Essays in Canadian Culture*, James Polk, ed. (Toronto: Anansi, 1982), p. 45.

is giving away the country to the U.S. for immediate profits, is acting vis-à-vis the Québécois as a colonizer. It is members of that class who have organized the exploitation of Quebec. It is they who control the production in Quebec. It is they who hire and fire Québécois workers and decide where the products will end up. The vast majority of the Québécois are strictly labour power in an organization of production that is absolutely foreign to them. The capitalist mode of production was imposed on a people who had been isolated by military conquest.²⁴

The Québécois, Bergeron concludes, are an imprisoned people subjected to colonialism. The colonizers are not the Americans, but the English in Canada. Bergeron equates colonialism and capitalism. The colonizer is the capitalist, the colonized are the proletariat. The battle against the colonizer is equated with the battle against capitalism. English Canadian socialism has used a similar, but anti-American, rhetoric, and has been similar in nationalistic tone.

A particular set of political attitudes and emotions is associated with a sense of victimization. Basic to it is the sense that a victimized people is powerless. Because they are powerless, the victimized people can do no wrong. They are innocent. The exercise of power is always tinged with moral ambiguity; power is never pure, never absolutely right, and regardless of the justness of the cause always has an element of force, impersonality, coercion and violation of human decency. Because the victim is powerless, his or her actions, motives and thoughts are untinged by moral ambiguity. This is one of the reasons why even the most powerful (e.g., the United States and its allies in the recent Gulf War) will claim that they have been victimized, and that is the justification for their use of force. Everybody wants to be a victim; it is the only innocence left.

If the victim is powerless and can do no wrong, then it follows that victims cannot themselves be victimizers. Only people with power can victimize other people. A people's perceptions can be out of line with reality. The sense of being a victim can exist and endure when a once-victimized people has power over others, giving them a peculiar blindness towards their own capacity to cause harm. Hannah Arendt once commented that a victimized people's sense of common humanity does not last for one minute once they gain power.

In this manner English Canadians have a peculiar and abiding inability to see themselves as oppressors of French Canada. It took intensive studies by the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism in the 1960s to prove conclusively that French Canadians had been disadvantaged, and that the dominance of English language and culture systematically discriminated (though often unconsciously) against the French language and French Canadians. Successive federal governments and parliaments accepted these findings, and attempted to redress the imbalance through official bilingualism and related

24 Léandre Bergeron, *The History of Quebec: A Patriot's Handbook* (Toronto: New Canada Publications, 1971), pp. i, ii.

programs. With the polarization of attitudes during the Meech Lake process the consensus in favour of these programs weakened. A vocal and strong movement in English Canada claimed that it was systematically victimized and oppressed by French Canada and the French language. Official bilingualism, as symbolized by French on Corn Flakes boxes, became a target of these feelings. The trampling of the Quebec flag in Brockville was another manifestation.

Similarly, the difficulties that French-speaking Québécois have in accepting that the English-speaking Québécois are no longer economically, culturally or politically dominant, that their economic status is no better, and probably worse, than that of comparable French Canadians, and that there is no threat to the French language and culture in Quebec from the English, are products of a sense of victimization and a history and a long-lasting myth of oppression and colonization. This same sense of victimization and consequent assumption of inability to harm others lies behind the Quebec laws on commercial signs which exacerbated the tensions of Meech Lake. And they also affect Quebec attitudes towards multiculturalism.

Another tendency associated with the sense of victimization is to interpret misfortunes and other events as plots and conspiracies against the oppressed. Thus a 1991 best-selling book in Quebec expounds the theme that the unhappy confrontations between Mohawk Indians and police at Oka in 1990, which culminated in the massive use of the military to end an armed standoff, is a plot by English Canadian media against Quebec.²⁵ And the Macdonald Commission on the economic union had studies made to determine whether, as some Quebec economists including Jacques Parizeau have claimed, the St. Lawrence Seaway and other national projects were, apparently intentionally, ways of weakening the Quebec economy.²⁶

The victimized people also tend to consider the oppressor as evil and inhuman. The kind of attitude that Gandhi espoused, of accepting the common humanity of oppressor and oppressed, and of using the oppressor's strength against himself, is relatively rare in human affairs. Far more common is the attitude of Franz Fanon that violence is a liberating force and desirable for the full development of the colonized as human beings; an attitude embodied in Jean Paul Sartre's ugly rationalization that when a colonized person kills a

25 Robin Philpot, *Oka: Dernier Alibi du Canada Anglais* (Montréal: Etudes Québécoises, 1991).

26 See Mireille Ethier, "Regional Grievances: The Quebec Case" in Keith Norrie, *Disparities and Interregional Adjustment*, Research Study of the Royal Commission on the Economic Union and Development Prospects for Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), pp. 159-184.

colonizer he "kills two birds with one stone, to destroy an oppressor and the man he oppresses at the same time; there remains a dead man and a free man."²⁷ The rhetoric and actions do not have to be that extreme for the victim attitude to exist. Undoubtedly much of the ignorance and hostility of parts of the Quebec elite and media towards English Canada and English-Canadian culture has its basis in the Nietzschean sort of "ressentiment" that is associated with a sense of victimization.

The myths of victimization and survival are deeply entrenched in Canadian culture and politics, both English and French. In fact, it is difficult to understand regionalism in Canada, federal-provincial relations or constitutional politics without recognizing that a great deal of the underlying attitudes and rhetoric are based on the attitudes of the victim and oppressed people. Canadians, Margaret Atwood noted, are the only people who, when they read *Moby Dick*, identify with the whale.

When does the posture of the victim no longer become appropriate? When does a community achieve enough potential and real control over its own destiny that it is capable of exercising power instead of having power exercised over it? At that point, the victim becomes the victor and action becomes tinged with the moral ambiguity that is an inescapable concomitant of the exercise of power. At that point the posture, attitudes, and innocence of the victim are no longer appropriate, and a broader sense of humanity and human purposes is needed than the blinkered anguish and hostility of the victim. Innocence becomes pseudo-innocence.²⁸ Survival is then no longer the question; how to create a better life is. Victimization is a romantic myth which pits the oppressed against a powerful oppressor and in which the oppressed, through their own power and virtue, liberate themselves to the achievement of great happiness. It can be a very powerful myth in the cause of justice and freedom. But like all myths, it has its limitations. It does not recognize the ambiguity of power, and as all too many ex-colonial nations have discovered, the real struggle for freedom and social justice has only begun with decolonization; the internal injustices and contradictions which the colonial situation masks then have to be dealt with, and the unreasonable hopes and expectations engendered by the optimism of the romantic myth of decolonization then have to be brought down to reality. In Canada the time has long passed when either Quebec or the rest of Canada can justifiably consider themselves victims. Both have effective political systems and are capable of making choices over the paths they wish to follow. Yet the attitudes and beliefs of the victim posture still linger long after the need for them has passed.

27 Bergeron, *The History of Quebec*.

28 A useful discussion of these phenomena is contained in Rollo May, *Power and Innocence: A Search for the Sources of Violence* (New York: Norton, 1972).

This last point needs to be examined more closely. How prevalent and important are the victim posture and behaviour in English and French Canada? They were articulated in the sixties and seventies in thematic criticism by Frye, Atwood and others that tied into the then current political theme of decolonization. Literary criticism has gone on to different approaches. For example, recent feminist criticism has modified the survival and victim argument. Feminist literary criticism has pointed out the female characteristics in Canadian literature — of acceptance and reconciliation rather than confrontation and dominance — and hence, also, the importance of female writers in Canada. A second theme of feminist criticism has been to point out that the role of victim is more complex than Atwood suggested, and that victims can have power and some influence over their destiny, even while ostensibly occupying the position of victim.²⁹ The recent Quebec film, *The Decline of the American Empire* contained a scene that resonated powerfully with French-Canadian audiences, in which a woman who is beaten by her lover comments on the power that a victim has over the oppressor.

Other critics have identified different basic themes in Canadian literature. George Woodcock, for example, argues that the Odysseus myth, of journey, quest and a return to home, is a dominant theme in the novels of Hugh MacLennan and of other Canadian novelists as well.³⁰ Robert Kroetsch's *The Studhorse Man* is intentionally modelled on *The Odyssey*. Different themes can be combined in the same work. Mordecai Richler's novel *Solomon Gursky Was Here*, for example, includes the themes of the Jew as victim, the Jew as superman, and the Odysseus myth.

More recently, two decades after Margaret Atwood wrote *Survival*, Gaile McGregor returned to the theme, and concluded that survival is still an important component of Canadian art as well as literature. She criticizes the easy assumption by Canadian historians that Turner's concept of the frontier as a benign wilderness and paradise is applicable to Canada for "To borrow the old adage about history, to be oblivious to the duplicity of one's own myths is to be fooled by them, condemned, in a sense, to act them out over and over again."³¹ The Group of Seven, she claims, shows how wide the gap between intentions and results can be. Pro-nature in their stance, these artists produced collectively a vision of the Canadian landscape "which, at least in the view of

29 See, for example, Karen Gould, *Writing in the Feminine: Feminism and Experimental Writing in Quebec* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990).

30 George Woodcock, *Odysseus Ever Returning: Essays on Canadian Writers and Writing* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970).

31 Gaile McGregor, *The Wacousta Syndrome: Explorations in the Canadian Landscape* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985).

many of their contemporaries, was at best harsh and somewhat disturbing, and at its worst evoked the quality of nightmare."³² She concludes that a number of recurrent cultural themes, including negativism, lack of commitment, withdrawal from social issues, and a feeling of resignation are, as the sociologist John Porter observed, connected with a fear of being swallowed up, first by the wilderness and later by powerful neighbours. McGregor reaches an optimistic conclusion. In a typical Canadian novel, she claims, an aggregate of isolates comes together in mutual need and forms a new community. A child is born, and the people, now united, will have a firm enough grasp on life to survive.

The rhetoric of decolonization and victimization is no longer much used by political parties in Canada, though there is some lingering usage, such as some of the expressions in French Canada during both the Meech Lake and Charlottetown controversies about the Québécois being an oppressed people and of Québécois and Quebec being "humiliated." The rhetoric of western alienation and exploitation by central Canada, the above-mentioned claims of pro-English groups being denied their rights by bilingualism and a pro-French conspiracy, and most justified of all, the sense among Canada's aboriginal peoples of being disadvantaged and powerless also embody the victim rhetoric. The disadvantaged groups specifically mentioned in the 1982 constitution — women, aboriginal people, disabled, ethnic and linguistic minorities — certainly used the emotions and attitudes, and often the language of victimization in their hostility to the Meech Lake proposals.³³ An unusual feature of the Canadian constitution is the charter-sanctioned list of victim groups it contains. The women's groups in particular objected to the Meech Lake Accord because they were concerned that they were not getting their share of benefits or that the distinct society or other clauses would weaken them somehow. The anger and resentment felt by Quebec at the rejection of Meech Lake had an emotional intensity that can only be explained as a product of a lingering feeling of being treated and regarded as second-class citizens. Canadian literature still has a harsh voice, which readers used to mainstream American and British writers find unfamiliar and disturbing. Margaret Atwood's *A Handmaid's Tale* is a good example of this.

Yet the same *Handmaid's Tale* also has a sense of possible empowerment and liberation for the oppressed people (gender). Neither the Allaire nor the Bélanger-Campeau reports convey the tenor of victimization. They both present a picture of a people prepared and free to choose their own destiny, and in particular the one that suits their needs and aspirations. This is the rhetoric of

32 Ibid., p. 54.

33 See Alan C. Cairns, "Constitutional Minoritarianism in Canada" in Ronald L. Watts and Douglas M. Brown, eds., *Canada: The State of the Federation 1990* (Kingston: Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, Queen's University, 1980), p. 71 and esp. p. 81 et seq.

empowerment, not of victimization. While there is undoubtedly a substratum of sentiment including resentment and anger in French-speaking Quebec that derives from the sense of victimization, and although this did emerge during the debate on the referendum in 1992, this is no longer a dominant form of political rhetoric. On the other hand, powerful and constitutionally recognized groups in English Canada not only still use the language of victimization, but have used it to great effect. Quite likely the victim theme is more important than obvious. As recently as 1989 Robertson Davies called Canada "a nation of losers, of exiles and refugees. Modern Canada is a prosperous country, but the miseries of its earliest white inhabitants are bred in the bone, and cannot, even now, be rooted out of the flesh."³⁴

Survival is still important, and of more overt importance to French than to English Canada. The language laws in Quebec can only be understood as a product of this powerful force, as can Premier Bourassa's use of the "notwithstanding" clause to override the Supreme Court's decision on the illegality of Quebec laws outlawing the use of English on shop signs. Whether the French language is actually as threatened as the rhetoric implies is very doubtful. There has been a marked change in much of the public rhetoric in Quebec in the past 20 years however. The sense of victimization is less evident, while the sense of being a distinct people who need the power to control the element necessary for their survival is more so. In this vein Daniel Latouche writes:

In a sovereign Québec of the supranational variety, the Québec nationalism ideology will no doubt maintain its predominant position since it feeds not so much on a traditional romantic vision of the origins of the group, but, rather, in an acute awareness of group specificity within its immediate North American environment. This situation of Québec will not change after independence and one can then expect group solidarity to remain high.³⁵

Specificity in this usage means "uniqueness."

There are still elements of the victim mentality, and even stronger elements of the survival mentality, in Quebec culture. The perception that the French language is at risk endures despite demographic studies that show that French is flourishing in Quebec, and it is English that is losing ground and threatened. Premier Bourassa, in discussing Meech Lake, claimed that the "honour" of Quebec had been "insulted." The Parti Québécois government changed the motto on Quebec licence plates from the innocuous "la belle province" to the politically loaded "je me souviens." As *The Economist* commented, this "comes

34 Robertson Davies, "Signing Away Canada's Soul," *Harper's* 278 (January 1989), p. 45. Quoted in Seymour Martin Lipset, *Continental Divide: The Values and Institutions of the United States and Canada* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

35 Daniel Latouche, "Québec and Canada: Scenario for the Future," in *Business in the Contemporary World* III, 1 (Autumn, 1990), pp. 58-70, p. 69.

from a poem which goes 'I remember that I was born under the fleur-de-lis and grew up under the rose.' Everyone knows how to interpret it: 'Born French but screwed by the English ever since.' Quebecers carry their chip not on their shoulder but on their cars."³⁶ Ron Graham thoroughly debunked Mordecai Richler's inflated claims of French-Canadian hostility towards Jews in his recent *Oh Canada! Oh Quebec!* (an expanded version of an article in *The New Yorker*), but concluded that "In fact nothing in Richler's book is more damning to French-Canadian nationalists than the hysterical response of some of them to it." There were demands in Parliament by Bloc Québécois MPs that the book be banned. Many Quebec nationalists suggested that Richler had "no right to his rant and no authority at all, because he is an English Quebecer who doesn't speak French."³⁷ One thing at least that this episode shows is that feelings are intense, and, Graham concludes, Richler's "renown — and the renown thrown back at him — may help dispel the illusion that the independence of Quebec will occur without high emotion." It also shows the hostility and mutual incomprehension in the confrontation of two victim complexes, here the Jewish and the French Canadian.

A more systematic and serious examination of some of the arguments and claims of Quebec nationalists has been made by the Laval political scientist Max Nemni.³⁸ He finds a great deal of the rhetoric self-serving and manipulative. He describes the myths that have been created by Quebec media and politicians to further the cause of Quebec nationalism. These myths depend on the underlying traits that characterize the collective imagination of francophone Quebecers: "The well-defined sense of 'us'; the memory of the 'humiliation' of the Conquest; and, finally, a holistic/dualistic view of Canadian social forces — on the one side Quebec, on the other 'English Canada.'"³⁹ These are an easily renewed wellspring of ideological symbols and are the source of political mobilization that Meech Lake tapped. They are also manufactured concepts which at best reflect only a partial truth. For example, the "Conquest," Nemni argues, was not so much a conquest as the ceding of territory by one imperial power to another.

36 Reprinted in "Ignorance a factor behind the demise of Meech Accord," *The Globe and Mail*, 19 July 1991, p. 179.

37 Ron Graham, "Less Requiem than rant," *The Globe and Mail*, 28 March 1992, p. C20.

38 Max Nemni, "Canada in Crisis and the Destructive Power of Myth," *Queen's Quarterly*, 99,1 (Spring 1992), pp. 222-239. See also his "le 'des'accord du lac Meech et la construction de l'imaginaire symbolique des Québécois," in Louis Balthazar et al., eds., *Le Québec et la Restructuration du Canada 1980-1992: enjeux et perspectives* (Sillery: Les Editions du Septentrion, 1991).

39 Nemni, "Canada in Crisis and the Destructive Power of Myth," p. 226.

This set of collective beliefs provided fertile ground for the destructive myths of Meech Lake. One of these is that Quebec was betrayed and forced into isolation by the nine English-speaking provinces during the 1981 constitutional negotiations. This claim, Nemni argues, is false. But in Quebec "this idea of Quebec's forced isolation was transformed into a far more awesome symbol of 'the night of the long knives' — a symbol sadly famous in history for evoking the assassination, on Hitler's orders, of some of his trusted comrades. It is very doubtful that the use in a Canadian context of one of the most powerful and odious symbols of recent history was entirely fortuitous."⁴⁰

Another misleading myth is the claim that Prime Minister Trudeau had made a solemn promise to Quebec that federalism would be renewed and the constitution modified in order to take account of the distinct character and aspirations of Quebec. Nemni shows that this does not represent what Trudeau said. But it has become an accepted fact in Quebec, and it has even been accepted and used by the Mulroney government. Meech, according to this argument, was Canada's atonement for Quebec's humiliation in breaking the "solemn promise." This is, at best, a highly partisan and misleading interpretation of what went on in 1981-82 and later. It ignores the zig-zags and reversals on the Quebec side which had a profound effect on the negotiations. Quebec nationalists, the Quebec government, and the federal Progressive Conservative government, have all adopted it, and used it for their own ends, regardless of its distortions of truth or its potential for harm. The "humiliated" and "betrayed" Quebec is a quintessential victim symbol. Nemni, in analyzing this misleading myth, concludes that in explaining and defending Meech Lake on these grounds we find precisely "the strength of ideological discourse; once set in motion, the contrived symbols merge insidiously into reality. We have to wonder how much stronger the myth of the broken promise would have been if Trudeau had not challenged and criticized it. Nevertheless, Prime Minister Mulroney and his team never abandoned the claim that Trudeau had not kept his 'promise.'"⁴¹

Another myth which Nemni doubts is that Quebec has a legitimate set of "traditional" demands. Not only have Quebec's demands changed over time, but many of the demands expressed in the past have been met. Canada and the federal system have been far more accommodating than the myth admits. Further, the demands from Quebec, far from being fixed, have escalated, and Meech Lake, far from meeting them, was considered by members of Bourassa's Government as a springboard for making further demands. To add to Nemni, in Canada outside Quebec, Meech Lake was represented as an end to constitutional haggling with Quebec, but in Quebec it was regarded as a new starting point which would justify further demands. The distinctions between a wish-

40 Ibid., p. 232.

41 Ibid., p. 230.

list, a negotiating position, a partisan argument and a firm demand are blurred in this claim that Quebec has a consistent set of traditional demands.

Premier Bourassa's team constructed an image of a mighty and fearless Quebec, while Mulroney's team promoted Meech as a unique and historic chance to satisfy an eminently reasonable Quebec. The same event creates many different myths. The symbolic imagination of French-speaking Quebecers was filled with two powerful images: of a Quebec doubly humiliated by Trudeau's failed promise; and of a Quebec excluded from the constitution during the "night of the long knives." Onto this scene of betrayal was projected the image of a strong worthy Quebec presenting very reasonable "traditional" demands. Nevertheless, Quebec was rejected by the others for a third time. Hence the Québécois sense of legitimate outrage when Meech failed. The final myth is that English Canada rejected the Meech Lake Accord and Quebec. Nemni observes that by many standards the Accord was overwhelmingly accepted. "But holistic and dualistic discourse does not lend itself to nuances. As the Meech Lake process had all along been presented as a dialogue between 'Quebec' and 'English Canada' its failure had to be attributed to one or the other. And obviously the blame could not be laid at Quebec's door, since her demands had been so 'reasonable.'"⁴² Quebec as victim is a powerful theme in all of these myths described by Nemni.

English Canada has its political version of the victim theme. The belief that there is a conspiracy to force the French language onto unwilling English-speaking Canadians is an extremist and fringe position. But a strong component of mainstream political rhetoric outside Quebec draws on the victim theme. In the May 1992 constitutional discussions, for example, Alberta accused the "big guys" of ganging up against the smaller provinces: "James Horsman, Alberta's Intergovernmental Affairs Minister, said Ontario, British Columbia and their allies are trying to 'crush' the small members of Confederation and their dream of a Senate in which all provinces are equal."⁴³ Senate reform as a solution to the problems of Confederation and regional inequalities is itself an extraordinary, unrealistic, zany and potentially dangerous romantic myth. But an equal Senate has become an important symbol to many western politicians and interest groups.

This examination suggests that the victim myth now has two distinct forms in Canada. One, the "latent," or "hidden" form, is its manifestation in Quebec, where nationalists claim that Quebec is no longer prepared to be victimized, and is acting in a bold and courageous way to assert itself and get its rightful due in a hostile and unsympathetic environment. Underlying this non-victim posture, however, is a series of myths interpreting the past and explaining the

42 Ibid., p. 237.

43 "Senate Conflict Heats Up," *The Globe and Mail*, 29 May 1992, p. 1.

present which all assume that Quebec has been victimized; the other provinces and the federal government ganged up against Quebec; solemn promises were made and broken; legitimate, consistent traditional demands were denied; English Canada rejected Quebec. Many other interpretations could be put on all these events. The choice of the ones that present Quebec as victim — partial and inaccurate as all myths are — shows a continuing, powerful resonance with the cult of the victim from the past where it was more explicit. On the English-speaking side, Robertson Davies argues that this sense of victimhood is bred in the bone, and cannot be rooted out of the flesh. The image adopted by some factions of an English Canada tyrannized and threatened by Quebec and the French language contains strong elements of victim mythology.

The second, the "manifest" or "explicit" form of victim myth, finds expression more in Canada outside Quebec where the women's and aboriginal population groups, and other ethnic or minority groups in particular have argued explicitly that they deserve special recognition and privileges because they are victimized by the existing social, political and economic structures. Western alienation is an important expression of this sense of victimization. The Canadian polity seems to be more sensitive to these claims than many other polities, suggesting that these images of victim resonate in Canada with underlying attitudes and preconceptions.

The existence and strength of both forms of victim myth — latent and manifest — suggests that the cult of the victim is still alive and well in Canada, although it has been substantially transformed since Atwood and Frye discussed it in the 1960s. In Quebec the public posture has reached Atwood's stage four of creative non-victimhood, although much of this posture is based on, and gets strength from, underlying and inaccurate myths which embody and portray a posture of victimization. English-speaking Canada also shares this substratum, though its political expression is different and less positive. There are also important groups in English Canada who explicitly claim victimization. But no federal politicians (with the exception perhaps of Preston Manning of the Reform Party) attempt to project the image of a bold and fearless Canada having been betrayed or resisting unreasonable demands, and the political leaders from the provinces who attempt to do so are not entirely convincing. Both sides, English and French, it could well be argued, are now in stage five, responding like victims when they no longer need to, when they possess power. To the extent that this is true, Canada — English and French — is victim and prisoner of its past.

THE GARRISON MENTALITY

Northrop Frye found that the sense of place in the Canadian literary imagination was one of small and isolated communities separated from one another by a hostile wilderness, and separated by the same wilderness from their cultural sources. This he called the "garrison mentality." It is much like Gaile McGregor's Wacousta syndrome, and Margaret Atwood's survival theme. A garrison is a closely knit and beleaguered society in which moral and social values are not questioned. In a perilous enterprise one does not discuss causes or motives: one is either a fighter or a deserter. Frye argued that in such a society the real terror is not caused by the common enemy, but when a person feels himself or herself becoming an individual, moving away from the group, losing the driving power that the group gives, and aware of an internal conflict much more subtle than that of a garrison against the evil enemy. In Frye's view it is much easier to multiply garrisons than to become an individual, and when the garrisons multiply,

something anti-cultural comes into Canadian life, a dominating herd-mind in which nothing original can grow. The intensity of the sectarian divisiveness in Canadian towns, both religious and political, is an example: what such groups represent, of course, vis-à-vis one another, is 'two solitudes,' the death of communication and dialogue. Separation, whether English or French, is culturally the most sterile of all creeds.⁴⁴

According to Frye this sort of mentality produces a sub-literary rhetoric. As Yeats would say, we make rhetoric out of our quarrels with one another, poetry out of our quarrels with ourselves. The garrison mentality is an extension of the victim attitude, and leads to an overly simplified view of an individual or group's place in the world, sources of problems, and solutions to them. The real struggles in literature, and in much of politics as well, are not with evil external forces, but with the demons and angels inside ourselves. Canadian literature, Frye felt, is moving beyond the garrison mentality:

As the centre of Canadian life moves from the fortress to the metropolis, the garrison mentality changes correspondingly. It begins as an expression of the moral values generally accepted by the group as a whole, and then, as society gets more complicated and more in control of its environment, it becomes more of a revolutionary garrison within a metropolitan society. But though it changes from a defence of to an attack on what society considers as conventional standards, the literature it produces, at every stage, tends to be rhetorical, an illustration or allegory of certain social attitudes. These attitudes help to unify the mind of the writer by externalizing his enemy, the enemy being the anti-creative elements in

44 Northrop Frye, *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (Toronto: Anansi, 1971), p. 226.

life as he sees life. To approach these elements in a less rhetorical way would introduce the theme of self-conflict, a more perilous but ultimately more rewarding theme. The conflict involved is between the poetic impulse to construct and the rhetorical impulse to assert, and the victory of the former is the sign of the maturing of the writer.⁴⁵

The garrison mentality affects Canadian politics. Canadian nationalism and economic protectionism, both of which seem to have been washed away in the Conservative 1984 and 1988 election victories and free trade, were manifestations of it. So also is the continuing concern with the health of Canadian culture. The garrison mentality is even stronger in Quebec. Louis Balthazar in his book on Quebec nationalism writes that "French Canadians have almost no tradition of welcoming other ethnic groups. Aware that they themselves are a minority, they are accustomed to view everything that comes from outside (or nearly everything) as a threat to their national integrity."⁴⁶ There is a desire to protect the borders and repel the invaders. Quebec cultural policy treats French as threatened. French media in Quebec are heavily insulated from outside influences, and not only give a very different interpretation to events than English media, but also often feature totally different events. The absence of correspondents from the French media in Quebec west of the Ottawa valley (apart from the CBC) is striking testimony to the solitudes into which Canada is divided. English Canadian culture, because it shares a common language with the United States, and because of the United States world dominance in mass culture, has a much more difficult time in repelling foreign influences. Rather, for English Canada, the garrison mentality has been translated into modest programs to encourage the arts, including Canadian quotas for the electronic media, and support for artists, scholarships, performances, exhibitions and publishing.

The garrison mentality leads to a tendency to externalize problems and blame them on hostile forces or enemies, such as American or English Canadian domination. This is closely related to the survival-victim syndromes described in the previous section. Canadian literature appears to be outgrowing the garrison mentality; it is not so clear whether Canadian politics, national, provincial or regional, is. There is a tendency to regard Canadian culture as fragile and continuously threatened by outside forces. This lends a shrill tone to much of the public discussion of language, culture and related policies. The reaction of the English-Canadian cultural community to the free trade agreement with the United States reflected this tone, as did the decisions in 1991 of those responsible for popular entertainment awards in Quebec to exclude two of the most popular performers, not because the quality and quantity of their

45 Ibid.

46 Louis Balthazar, *Bilan du nationalisme au Québec* (Montreal: Editions de l'Hexagone, 1986), p. 157. (My translation.)

work in French was inadequate, but because they had done too much in English. This, of course, they had to do to reach a wide audience, just as English-Canadian authors and writers must actively enter the U.S. market to enjoy commercial success.

Frye's comments on the difference between rhetoric and literature can be extended to politics. Survival and the garrison mentality can endure as myths long after the conditions which caused them to exist have been left behind. The politics of the garrison mentality is of hostility towards outsiders, a requirement to accept a common vision, or worse, a herd mentality, and of looking at outside forces as the cause of misfortunes. To progress beyond the garrison and victim mentalities is to accept responsibility for one's fate and for the choices that affect one's destiny. It is a struggle with oneself, or between forces within one's own community. In this sense real politics, like real literature, begin when the survival and garrison mentalities end. Then the political struggle is within the community over different visions of human ultimates and the liberation of the human spirit. The monolithic consensus and unity of the garrison repelling the outside threat prevent this sort of politics from emerging.

THE NATION

There are two main meanings of the term "nation": first as a collectivity of people, and second as a political and legal entity, a state. Some political scientists have argued that different terms should be used because the two meanings are so different:

A state is a legal and political organization with the power to require obedience and loyalty from its citizens. A nation is a community of people, whose members are bound together by a sense of solidarity, a common culture, a national consciousness.⁴⁷

The *petit Larousse* defines a nation as: "human community, most often situated on the same territory, and which because of the fact of a certain unity of a historic linguistic, religious, or even economic nature, is animated by a wish to live together." A second definition offered is: "A legal entity formed by the ensemble of the individuals ruled by a single constitution, distinct from them, and holder of sovereignty."⁴⁸ The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* conflates

47 Hugh Seton-Watson, *Nations and States* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1977) p. 1.

48 "Communauté humaine, le plus souvent installé sur un même territoire, et qui, du fait d'une certaine unité historique, linguistique, religieuse ou même économique, est animée d'un vouloir vivre commun. Personne juridique formée par l'ensemble des individus régis par une même Constitution, distincte de ceux-ci, et titulaire de la souveraineté."

these two concepts and defines a nation as: "a distinct race or people, characterized by common descent, language, or history, usually organized as a separate political state and occupying a definite territory." There are additional definitions of "nation," but these two of the nation as a people and the nation as political entity and nation-state, have been, and are, of special importance in Canada. "Nation" evidently belongs to the important category of "essentially contestable concepts," that is, words that not only have many different meanings, but for which the different meanings refer to different political and ideological stances, and compete with one another at the political level.⁴⁹

In the 1968 general election in Canada one of the major issues between the Conservatives under Robert Stanfield and the Liberals under Pierre Elliott Trudeau was the precise meaning of "nation" — whether it meant a human community, or a nation-state. In 1967 the Progressive Conservative party at a conference at Montmorency, Quebec, adopted as a resolution:

That Canada is, and should be a federal state; that Canada is composed of two founding peoples (*deux nations*) with historic rights who have been joined by people from many lands;

That the Constitution should be such as to permit and encourage their full and harmonious development in equality throughout Canada.⁵⁰

The French phrase was deliberately inserted into the English text to make it clear that "deux nations" equalled "two founding peoples" and nothing more.

Marcel Faribault, who was the main Quebec spokesman on constitutional affairs at the Montmorency conference, had insisted on the use of "nation" rather than "peuple" in the French version. "Two founding races" could be translated into French as "*deux nations*." "We cannot say 'people' because 'people' in our case doesn't mean nation, the same as 'nation' in English doesn't mean 'nation.'"⁵¹

Nevertheless, in the 1968 campaign, the impression developed, encouraged by the unlikely combination of Liberal Prime Minister Trudeau and John Diefenbaker, the former prime minister and leader of the Progressive Conservatives, that the Stanfield Conservatives had adopted a two-nation policy that implied special status for Quebec.⁵² The resounding defeat of the Conservatives in the 1968 election tinged the concept of two nations with so much political opprobrium that it, or anything like it, was anathema in politics in English-speaking Canada. The "distinct society" phrase from the Meech Lake Accord

49 William E. Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1974).

50 Quoted in Edwin R. Black, *Divided Loyalties: Canadian Concepts of Federalism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1975), p. 265.

51 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 205.

52 *Ibid.*, chap. 7, "The Two Nations Controversy."

suffered from a similar sort of opprobrium in English-speaking Canada, and doubtless this distaste emerged because of the similarity of connotations of "two nations," "special status," and "distinct society." The distinction between the two different meanings of nations became blurred in these debates. The Progressive Conservative resolution of 1967 clearly meant "nation" as "people," a collectivity of linguistically, culturally and ethnically defined individuals regardless of where they were domiciled across Canada. "Distinct society" clearly meant the people within the geographic territory of the jurisdiction of Quebec. It was the ambiguous meanings of the terms, plus their additional connotations, including the historical and present controversies, that caused the difficulties.

At present there are at least four distinct meanings and uses of the term "nation" in Canada which are variations of these two main meanings. The meanings of nation in these four usages, and what they denote and connote, often conflict. Some of the meanings are ambiguous and contain the potential for internal inconsistencies and contradictions.

The first, and the easiest, is the "Canadian nation." This denotes the state of Canada, and all the people within it, and/or those who hold Canadian citizenship. Canada in this sense is a legal entity, and establishing whether a person is a Canadian or not is a legal matter, based on application and interpretation of the statutes relating to Canadian citizenship. There is no necessary implication in this usage of a common culture, religion, language or ethnic origin. "Nation" has been used in this sense to denote the Canadian nation-state since Confederation in 1867. Thus there is a Department of National Defence, and a National Film Board, etc.

Recently, under pressure from Quebec nationalists the Progressive Conservative federal government has been deleting the term from institutions and other federal references. The Office of National Unity has become the Office of Canadian Unity. "National standards" are now "federation-wide" standards. What vision of Canada, or meaning of nation, is embodied in these changes has not been made clear by the government.

The second usage is in the dual terms "French-Canadian nation" and "English-Canadian nation." These terms have a long and pervasive tradition in Canadian politics and history. Sir John A. MacDonald himself used the word "nation" in this sense, though many others, perhaps to avoid the difficulties with the term, have used other words such as "race," "people" or "group."⁵³ An important implication of this usage is that neither the English-Canadian nor the French-Canadian nation is bounded and defined by territorial limits. People of French-Canadian culture and origin, regardless of where they are located, whether in Quebec, New Brunswick or Saskatchewan are members of the

53 See *ibid.*, chap. 6, "The Dual Alliance."

French-Canadian nation; English-speaking persons anywhere in Canada, Quebec or elsewhere, are members of the English nation. This dualism received its most eloquent articulation in the 1956 Quebec *Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry on Constitutional Problems*, known as the "Tremblay Report" after its chairman.⁵⁴ This report argued that French Canadians had in common their French origin, the French language and their Roman Catholic religion. For French Canadians religion and cultural particularisms, as sociological facts, almost exactly coincided. In comparison, English Canadians were of Anglo-Saxon origin and in the great majority Protestant. The cultural milieu of each group was inspired by its religious origins, and the fact that culture and religion are so closely related gave each group an almost monolithic homogeneity. The commission went on to distinguish between the two national communities in accordance with their religio-cultural bases. The French Canadians were distinguished by their logicity and reasoning from principles as a base. For Roman Catholics social order is arranged according to an organic method, founded on the dignity of the person and tending towards the common good. Liberty is defined with respect to this order. The Anglo-Saxons were distinguished by their pragmatism and a disinclination to be concerned with theoretical principles. They were motivated by the acquisitive instinct of Calvinist materialism. Protestantism has no reference to a transcendent order and makes liberty preeminent. The two cultures hold two quite different sets of values. This, of course, was a highly inaccurate description of English Canada which was at least as much Celt as Anglo-Saxon, and had had a large Catholic minority since the eighteenth century. This stereotyping of the two linguistic groups reinforced and generated its own myths which still affect Quebec perceptions of the rest of Canada.

This dualist conception, in strictly linguistic terms, became the principle of official bilingualism in Canada. According to John Meisel, the basic principle is:

These language groups constitute two societies which share one political union. It follows from this position that both English and French occupy a special place in the life of Canada and that both languages must be accorded special and equal status in clearly defined areas. In recognizing the two principal language groups in Canada, the adherents to the country's essential dualism recognize...that people of various origins, in the process of their Canadianization, became part of one or the other of the two language groups and members of one or the other of the two societies.⁵⁵

54 Ibid., pp. 182-187.

55 John Meisel, *Working Papers on Canadian Politics* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1972), pp. 147-148. Quoted in Black, *Divided Loyalties*, p. 174.

This usage of "nation" is less in vogue now than formerly. Partly the controversy over the two nations' approach helped to discredit it. So also have the changing demographics of Canada. French Canada has largely retained its cultural and religious homogeneity, even accepting that religion is a much less salient force now than in 1956. English Canada has, however, changed dramatically. A very high proportion of immigration in postwar years has been non-Anglo-Saxon and, more recently, non-European. It would now be grossly inaccurate to describe English Canada as predominantly Protestant, or looking to English culture and cultural values for inspiration. "English Canada" is a misnomer, and conceals a heterogeneity of origins, cultures, peoples and attitudes that is far more diverse and complex than is French Canada's. The future shape of this society, the extent to which it will remain a mosaic or become a melting pot and the kinds of communal values it will espouse, are far from clear. Quebec is also undergoing profound demographic change, and in the future is also likely to experience stresses comparable to those now being felt by English Canada.

Nevertheless, to refer to "French-Canadian" and "English-Canadian" nations nowadays is to refer to two very different types of entities. The divisions by language remain, but apart from that, the strongest distinguishing characteristic between English and French Canada is not religion or cultural values, but the extraordinary diversity and lack of cohesion of English Canada compared with the relative homogeneity and cohesion of French Canada, especially within Quebec.

The third usage of nation in Canada is to refer to the Québécois nation. This usage has become the standard in French-speaking Quebec. The Tremblay Commission, even though it espoused the partnership of the two nations across Canada so that individuals could develop their personalities within a flourishing social culture, emphasized that "with regard to French-Canadian culture, the Province of Quebec assumes alone the responsibilities which the other provinces jointly assume with regard to Anglo-Canadian culture."⁵⁶ A preeminent role was recognized for Quebec. The most profound change since then has been the emergence of the claim that Quebec's role should not only be preeminent but exclusive: that the French-speaking minorities outside Quebec are shrinking, soon to be irretrievably assimilated, and are of little interest or relevance to Quebec.⁵⁷ In practice this has been carried as far as to lead the government of Quebec, far from defending the rights of French-Canadian minorities in other provinces, to intervene in a court case in Alberta on the side of the Alberta

56 Quoted in Black, *Divided Loyalties*, p. 186.

57 See, for example, Pierre Fournier, *A Meech Lake Post Mortem: Is Quebec Sovereignty Inevitable?* translated by Sheila Fischman, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991) pp. 97-103.

government against its French minority. Provincial rights were more important to Quebec than French-Canadian rights.

The Quiet Revolution and the development of a powerful French-dominated government in Quebec contributed to this Québécois nationalism. So also have the changed demographics of French Canada. At the time of the Tremblay Commission French-Canadian families were still very large, and the French-Canadian population was, ignoring immigration, growing at a faster rate than their English counterparts. Emigrants from Quebec continued to move to Ontario, further west, and to the United States. There were, as a result, community and family links between French-speaking populations across Canada. Now, nearly two generations later, the Quebec French-speaking population has one of the lowest birth rates in the Western world and is, in effect, contracting within itself with negligible emigration to the rest of Canada. The sense as well as the reality of a pan-Canadian French community is losing its power.

The Bélanger-Campeau Report describes the people of Quebec as "une collectivité nationale distincte"⁵⁸ of which the majority language and culture, itself a minority in Canada, is unique on the continent. The report is careful to include anglophone Quebecers as part of Quebec, but the overall tone of the report is of a French-speaking population that has taken, and will take, charge of its own destiny. Similarly the Allaire Report claims that Quebecers have succeeded in developing a "unique degree of cooperation between the public and private sectors, in implementing a kind of Japanese-style cooperation between the political class, the labour movement, and the business community."⁵⁹ The Allaire Report, while describing this sort of collective enterprise, uses the term "le peuple québécois" despite Marcel Faribault's concerns of 20 years earlier that such usage is not good French.⁶⁰ However, it also describes confederation as a "solemn pact between two nations" in which Quebec is the "national state of French-Canadians."⁶¹

The word "nation" is used so frequently in Quebec that its meaning seems to be accepted — the "Ecole Nationale d'Administration," the "Assemblée nationale," and the "Nation québécoise" are superficially well-understood. But "nation" seems to have a variety of components:

1. a territorial component, meaning exclusively persons living in Quebec. French Canadians outside Quebec are excluded.

58 Bélanger-Campeau, *Report*, p. 17.

59 *A Québec Free to Choose*, p. 54.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 15 (French version). Bélanger-Campeau also refers to "un peuple distinct," p. 84.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 56 (English version); p. 86 (French version).

2. a linguistic component, meaning the French-speaking people of Quebec. Sometimes English-speaking Quebecers appear to be included in the usage, more often not.
3. a cultural component, meaning sharing the cultural values of the French-Canadian majority, as described by the Tremblay Commission and many other authors.
4. an ethnic component, meaning those of French-Canadian "pure laine" descent. Sometimes manifest in hostility to immigrants, even if they are French-speaking or assimilate to the French language.⁶²
5. an ideological component. For example, the title of Michel Vastel's book *Trudeau, le Québécois*⁶³ is deliberately ironic in its stated implication that Trudeau, with his pro-Canadian political beliefs and support of federalism, could be considered a true Québécois.

The usage of the term nation and the inclusion or exclusion of various components are clearly ideological, and the exact meaning of "la nation Québécoise" depends upon who is using the term, and for what purpose.

Often "la nation Québécoise," as used by *pure laine* Quebecers, excludes English-speaking Quebecers, even if they are bilingual and work in French, and even though their families might have lived in Quebec for over 200 years. It is sometimes used to exclude immigrants and other minority ethnic groups. The term is sometimes used to divide even French-speaking Quebecers into the true members of the nation — those who adhere to the nationalist ideology — and the others, who are not members of the nation because they do not support nationalist aspirations. It can even be used to exclude groups who do not support Quebec government policies. In March 1992, the Quebec minister of energy, Lise Bacon, blamed the James Bay Cree for the cancellation of a New York State contract for \$17 billion of electricity, which in effect put an end to phase two of the James Bay hydro project. She accused the Cree of discrediting Quebec all over the world, and stated "the territory they claim is still ours — this land belongs to Quebecers and Quebecers are the ones who will develop it. Natives are not going to stop us from doing that." Making the issue one of patriotism, rather than one of environmental or native rights, on which the natives and their supporters have argued it, she demanded: "Are they Quebecers or are they not? They live on our territory. They live with us. They work with us. I hope they are still Quebecers because they are penalizing

62 See Daniel Bonin, "L'Immigration au Québec en 1990: à L'heure du choix," in Watts and Brown, eds., *Canada*, p. 164.

63 Michel Vastel, *Trudeau, le Québécois* (Montreal: Editions de l'Homme, 1989). Published in English as *The Life of Pierre Elliott Trudeau* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1990).

Quebeckers.... That is what I cannot accept."⁶⁴ This is not the normal language of a democratic politics which accepts diverse viewpoints and opinions. In its extreme, the term "nation" in Quebec becomes more the sort of definition used by a group under siege to define themselves against hostile forces than definitions of a mature polity wrestling with varieties of opinion and interest within it.⁶⁵

Only rarely in Quebec is the term "nation" used to include all the people of the province, regardless of ethnic origin, language, religion and culture. The term is normally used in the first sense of a people unified by culture, history, language, etc., and hence at most refers to French-speaking Quebecers, and is often more restricted even than that. The "state," or province of Quebec includes a much greater variety of peoples than this first sort of nation implies. The aspiration of the sovereigntist movement is to transform the Québécois nation into a Quebec nation-state. A question that would have to be resolved, were this transformation to take place, is what to do with the non-Québécois element within Quebec, whether they be of a different language, ethnic origin, or ideology. This question is one of the most potent causes of civil strife and bloodshed when a hard answer is forced — as for example, recent experience in the republics of the former Soviet Union, in Yugoslavia, or with the Kurds in Iraq and Turkey, shows.

A *fourth* usage of nation is in the expression "first nations" referring to Canada's aboriginal peoples. This usage has a more ancient history than is generally appreciated. The English colonists in North America referred to the Sioux, Cherokee, and other indigenous groups as "nations" of Indians. The six nations of Canada and the United States, recognized by the Jay Treaty over two hundred years ago, are a nation in this sense. The original usage did not mean "nation-state," but rather a group of people united by history, language and culture. They might have been referred to as "tribes," as were African peoples, and as North American Indians came to be referred to in the nineteenth century.

Nation in this usage did not mean anything more than the collectivity of a people. In recent years in Canada native peoples have frequently been referred to as "First Nations," (as in the Assembly of First Nations). This is often taken to mean that they should also be nation-states, with full sovereign powers. Used in this sense, the term "nation" has gained additional meaning and connotes powers additional to those intended when it was first used. The meaning in theory or practice is far from clear when referring to and treating aboriginal peoples whose total population in one cultural and territorial group is a few

64 Quoted in Rheel Seguin, "Creeps discredited Quebec 'all over the world,' minister says," *The Globe and Mail*, 1 April 1992.

65 This, for example, is the sense of nation as used by Pierre Bourgeault in: *Now or Never: Manifesto for an Independent Quebec* (Toronto: Key Porter, 1991).

thousand as a nation. The autonomy and implications of sovereignty connoted by the term "nation" are muddy and contentious. There are much better arguments for strong native self-government than claiming an expanded meaning for the term "nation." A curious by-product of this usage is that English-speaking Canadians are prepared to accept aboriginal peoples as "nations" while they object to the use of the same terms by Québécois. Jacques Parizeau is not the only politician and commentator to point this out during the discussions of the Charlottetown Agreement.

* * *

A danger in politics as in political science is that a term with many different meanings can be taken to mean only one thing, to have only one true meaning. In this sort of political fundamentalism, "nation" becomes a conflation of the two major meanings, and must denote both a presumably homogeneous people and a state, the two together equalling a "nation-state." Extremists holding this view can be found in all three major groups in Canada: English-speaking Canadians who demand that the English language must predominate in Canada; native groups who demand to be treated as sovereign nations; and French-speaking Québécois who demand a sovereign nation-state of Quebec.

But behind this suggestion of similarity there is a profound asymmetry: French Canada, defined as French-speaking Quebecers, has a territorial, historical, linguistic, cultural and political integrity which English-speaking Canada does not enjoy. English-speaking Canada is nine provinces and part of the tenth (English-speaking Montreal is larger in population than the largest cities in six of the nine provinces outside Quebec); Quebec is only one. The English-speaking provinces revel in their differences; Quebec in its cohesion. The many meanings and usages of "nation" in Canada imply widely different and conflicting images of the country. Perhaps the most important of these is the conflict between the widely-held image in Quebec of two founding nations, or Canada as a compact of two equal peoples, and the image in the rest of Canada as ten equal provinces. The most neglected image at present is of Canada as one nation. As we have seen, the federal government, which might be expected to be the strongest proponent of it, at present seems to want to delete all references to Canada as a nation. Its ideological or other reasons for doing this have not been made clear any more than has the appropriate terminology for Canada as a whole. The word "nation," like other symbols, has power, and how it is used or avoided establishes collective identities.

In actual fact, only for a few polities in the world do the "nation" and the "state" coincide. Most states represented in the United Nations have a significant proportion of their population of a linguistic group distinct from the majority, and in a good proportion there is no single linguistic majority. A recent study found that only 19 states (such as Japan, Denmark, and Iceland) out of

164 in the world, holding only 10 percent of the world's population, fit the one nation in one state criterion.⁶⁶ A more interesting approach to nation than any of the five Canadian usages is that proposed by Karl Deutsch and others, whose argument is that nationality is not an inborn characteristic but a result of social learning and habit forming. This learning comes about through the growth of an intense and continuous network of social communication, of trade, travel, correspondence, academic and media communication, etc. which creates linking networks.⁶⁷ A nation in this sense is a process for making collective decisions rather than a specific culture, history or set of values. This sort of nation Canada has been building for two centuries and more, quite successfully, despite the challenges of geography and two major language groups.

NATIONALISM

The terms "nation" and "nationalism" are inextricably intertwined. The common way of viewing a nation, in the first sense, as a unified people, implies that the nation is an organic entity, and that the state (or perhaps better nation-state) is a political and legal expression of that naturally existing organic entity. Modern political analysts have concluded that, to the contrary in fact, nations do not create states, but rather states create nations. A political entity comes first, and it moulds the people into what we know as the nation part of a nation-state. The process demands the creation of myths about the nation and national origins. These myths are as ideological and partial as any other political myths. According to Ernest Renan, "l'oubli et, je dirais même l'erreur historique sont un facteur essentiel de la création d'une nation."⁶⁸ Nationalism is one of the most important phenomena and systems of myths associated with the creation of nations.⁶⁹

66 Cited in Shu-yun Ma, "Nationalism: State-Building or State-Destroying," *The Social Science Journal* 29, 3 (1992): 295.

67 Karl W. Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1953). Deutsch also recognized the importance of common language.

68 Quoted in Ernest Gellner, *Culture, Identity, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 6.

69 See Ernst Gellner, *ibid.*, and *Nations into Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983); Tom Nairn, *The Breakup of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism* (London: NLB, 1977); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991); and Wilbur Zelinsky, *Nation Into State: The Shifting Symbolic Foundations of American Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988). See also Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

This line of argument denies that there are any natural boundaries to nations. Boundaries are not dictated by language, geography, race, religion or anything else. Renan disliked the spectacle of nineteenth-century ethnographers as the advance guard of national claims and expressions. Renan, and the modern school of analysis that follows him, believe that nations are made by human will, not natural facts. The modern nation and modern nationalism demand an advanced industrial society, where the culture is a homogenous entity in which individuals are mobile, and can communicate with one another in speech and writing in a formal, precise and context-free manner. The preservation and extension of this culture, and hence the nation, is a conscious political act, though it can also be a by-product of economic forces.

Nationalism cannot exist without this modern concept of nation. Belief in the nation automatically breeds "some level of allegiance, or even passion, for that rather mystical, romantic concept. In its fully ripened form, nationalism is a force that supersedes and crushes all competing loyalties."⁷⁰ Nationalism is not natural, but must be drilled in. It requires print and other advanced forms of communication. Successful nationalism leads to a sense of nationhood that appears to be a natural upwelling of sentiments based upon a mutual discovery of commonalities, rather than imposed from above, but in fact both the nation and nationalism are artifacts, and could only be created in modern times. The "nation" is a romantic myth, offering a vision of heaven and the hope to achieve personally meaningful and creative lives.

According to Tom Nairn, nationalism is like Janus, the two-faced Roman god, and stands over the passage to modernity for human society. Looking ahead, nationalist movements offer the promise of economic, cultural and political progress. Looking back, nationalism draws on historical resources, resurrecting past folk heroes and myths. These idealistic and romantic well-springs belong to every form of nationalism. This backward look is necessary, but it calls on the irrational, unconscious forces in a society. A nation, like a person confronting an inescapable challenge, has to call on its inherited and largely unconscious powers. The assumption is that once the challenge is met, these latent energies will subside again into a tolerable and settled pattern of existence. But this assumption can be wrong. Once these well-springs have been tapped there is no real guarantee that they will be controllable. "The powers of the Id are far greater than was realized before Freud exposed them to theoretical view. In the same way, the energies contained in customary social structures were far greater than was understood, before the advent of nationalist mobilization stirred them up and released them from the old world." There are terrible dangers in this release of powerful, unconscious forces. "Extreme difficulties and contradictions, the prospect of breakdown or being forever held in the

70 Zelinsky, *Nation Into State*, p. 5.

gateway — it is conditions like these, surely, which may lead to insanity for an individual or nationalist dementia for a society.”⁷¹ Nationalisms, Nairn concludes, cannot be divided into the good and the bad. The whole family is spotted with forms of irrationality such as prejudice, sentimentality, collective egotism, aggression, etc. The substance of nationalism is always morally ambiguous.

There are four conclusions about nationalism in Canada to be drawn from this. First, Quebec nationalism fits into the patterns described by Gellner, Zelinsky, Nairn, et al., with the exception that there was a pre-existing linguistic, religious and cultural identity to Quebec. Linking this identity to the powers of the modern state, and adding in the claimed injustice of economic, political and cultural domination by outside forces, created a very potent mixture. Québécois nationalism has been very successful in enhancing the economic well-being and the cultural milieu of French-speaking Quebecers. But the capacity for harm exists along with the capacity for good. The relation of Québécois nationalism to minorities within Quebec is one of the crucial and dangerous factors. The risks are dependent on the extent to which nationalism calls upon the irrational and unconscious forces noted by Nairn.

Second, in comparison with other sorts of nationalism in the world, including Québécois nationalism, pan-Canadian nationalism is not likely to be either powerful or seriously irrational. As long as it attempts to include all Canadians it will have to include at least two languages and many different and incompatible myths. It is not able to draw on deep well-springs of the unconscious, or a unifying sense of race, religion, language or culture. This is not to say that pan-Canadian nationalism cannot exist, but that it will look attenuated and pallid compared with such powerful nationalism as that of the United States or of Quebec. And insofar as nationalism is a sort of modern religion which people feel is necessary to create a sense of belonging and community, Canadian nationalism will be of the Anglican or United Church rather than fundamentalist sort: undemanding, ritualistic and ecumenical, rather than fervent, dogmatic, and demanding. The keystones of Canadian nationalism include the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the government's social programs, and a possible social charter in the constitution. This is pretty weak stuff compared with manifest destiny and revolution, *la survivance*, racial purity, God's will, and other elements of the world's ardent nationalisms.

Third, there is a theoretical possibility that an English-Canadian nationalism comparable to French-Canadian nationalism could exist. Some underpinnings for it have emerged in anti-French, pro-Canadian voices in Canada's recent political difficulties. What is lacking, however, is the state that would create the nation. The Canadian federal government is bilingual and pan-Canadian. English-speaking Canada is divided into nine provinces, each with its own

71 Nairn, *The Breakup of Britain*, p. 349.

interests and voice narrower than Canada as a whole, which compete with other provincial voices. If Quebec were to separate, the potential for strong English — and at that point pan-Canadian — nationalism might be greater, because there would be an English-Canadian state. This possibility, however, is largely offset by the likelihood of a movement of the pieces towards the United States, with the attraction of its powerful nationalist ideology, and towards disintegration of the Canadian union.

Finally, it is possible for Quebec, Canadian, and other “provincial” nationalisms to cohabit in Canada. Quebec nationalism has only rarely been as fervent as it appeared during and after the Meech Lake crisis. In fact, Balthazar argues that only during brief periods has Quebec nationalism been strong, and that for most of the past century it has been much less obvious or powerful than, in comparison, American or French nationalism.⁷² When Balthazar was writing, during the mid-1980s, Quebec nationalism was in one of its periods of moderation, and Balthazar expected it to remain there. He did not anticipate the stresses and polarization of the Meech Lake fiasco, which created the present surge in ardent Québécois nationalism.

DUALITY

Regardless of the usage of “nation” in Quebec and elsewhere, one thing that is clear is that there is in Quebec a long-standing strong and continuing belief in duality: a belief in a Canada based on an agreement and mutual commitment between two founding peoples, in effect a compact that acknowledges the existence and right to survival and usage of two languages, two religions, and two ways of life. This belief had a long history before it was articulated in the Tremblay Commission Report of 1956. It was supported by the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism in the 1960s, was expressed as language laws and the official promotion of bilingualism by the Liberal government, was officially adopted by the Progressive Conservatives under Stanfield, and reappears in the Canadian constitution of 1982 in the principles of official national bilingualism.

The “distinct society” clause of the Meech Lake Accord was interpreted within Quebec as a further national commitment to duality, one that was missing in the 1982 constitutional amendment. The Bélanger-Campeau Report states that initially the Canadian federal regime was founded, from the point of view of Quebec, on duality and the autonomy of the provinces:

La dualité canadienne, qui repose sur la relation entre le peuple canadien-français et le peuple canadien-anglais, est vue comme le principe fondateur du régime

72 Balthazar, *Bilan du Nationalisme au Québec*. See, for example, pp. 211-212.

féderal. L'union fédérale est ainsi conçue comme un pacte entre ces deux peuples, qui ne peut être modifié qu'avec le consentement de chacune des parties.⁷³

This notion, the report argues, does not reflect the conception of reality of a large number of Canadians, and was one of the contradictions leading to the defeat of Meech Lake.⁷⁴ The Allaire Report similarly affirms duality and its betrayal by the federal government and English Canada:

In Quebec, Confederation has always been perceived as a solemn pact between two nations, a pact that could not be changed without the consent of the two parties. Circumstances have made Québec the "national state" of French-Canadians, so it is easy to imagine the frustration felt by Quebecers one morning in 1981 when they learned that their Constitution, the fundamental law of the country, would be amended without their agreement. Even more serious, an amending process was being institutionalized that would enable future amendments, again without the agreement of Québec. Furthermore, this result contradicted a solemn promise of the Prime Minister of Canada. In a way, the Meech Lake Accord recognized the illegitimacy of a Constitution that failed to include Québec.⁷⁵

It further states the theme of the rejection of the notion of duality by English Canada:

While the problems of economic development and regional development worsened in recent years, Canadian federalism failed to remedy cultural contradictions. To provide itself with its own identity, Canada decided to promote bilingualism and biculturalism. But the challenge of bilingualism has never been successfully met. Attempts were made in certain key regions of symbolic value (for instance, the national capital) and for some federal services to introduce a form of bilingualism. In spite of recent efforts by certain provinces to improve services to their francophone population, in practical terms, whole communities are threatened with assimilation *and even the notion of two founding peoples is rejected by English Canada*, and, sadder still, all this despite the continuing determination and heroic efforts that have always marked [sic] the struggle of francophones outside Québec.⁷⁶

This conveniently neglects to mention that the Government of Quebec has opposed in the courts the heroic efforts of these francophone minorities outside Quebec to be recognized. Pierre Fournier similarly argues that in the final analysis the defeat of Meech Lake derived from radically different conceptions of the Canadian reality in English Canada and Quebec, and argues that the

⁷³ Bélanger-Campeau, *Report*, p. 12.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 39. See also p. 44.

⁷⁵ *A Québec Free to Choose*, p. 56.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 52. Italics mine.

failure of English Canada to accept duality is one of the main reasons, though not the only one, why sovereignty is a desirable option for Quebec.⁷⁷

This sense of there being two Canadas, one French and one English, pervades French-Canadian discussion of Confederation. The Allaire and Bélanger-Campeau reports, as do many others, reject the status quo and any possibility that the federal government might itself embody the duality. Rather, they argue that Quebec must be the national state of French Canadians, and any satisfactory resolution that stops short of sovereignty must be the result of an agreement between Canada, as the national state of English Canada, and Quebec, representing French Canada. The resulting power structure might be consociational, with joint bodies representing the two collectivities. Or there could be a supranational body linking the two, as in the European Community.⁷⁸ Thus the Allaire Report concludes that "the Québec-Canada structure will be based on a thorough transformation of existing institutions," and this "new Québec-Canada union...holds promise for the future."⁷⁹ Even the negotiations leading to such an outcome must be between two bodies, Quebec and Canada. Following the rejection of Meech Lake, Premier Bourassa said that under no circumstances would Quebec come back to the negotiating table except on a one-on-one basis with the rest of Canada. Both the Allaire and Bélanger-Campeau reports support this approach.

An important transformation of the notion of duality has gone on here. The original sense of two nations or founding peoples was of collectivities of persons of one or other language and culture spread across Canada. Neither group was represented by a single government, nor were the nations territorially defined. "Nation," on the Quebec side, has changed its meaning profoundly. It now means the nation-state of Quebec, a separate entity. The anglophones within it are perhaps acceptable as a minority. The English-Canadian nation means the rest of Canada, or Canada itself for that matter (a deliberate effort to delegitimize the federal Parliament's and government's ability to represent and speak for French Canadians).

Duality in Canada now has two important and conflicting meanings. One is the sort of duality Trudeau espoused and official bilingualism promotes and protects, referring to the two languages and cultures, regardless of where they are, as part of the cross-Canada web of society. The second locates French language and culture exclusively within Quebec, with the government of Quebec representing the Québécois nation. The first meaning implies that neither the English-Canadian nation nor the French-Canadian nation is bounded

77 Pierre Fournier, "L'échec du Lac Meech: un point de vue québécois," in Watts and Brown, eds., *Canada: The State of the Federation 1990*, pp. 41-68, p. 41.

78 See, for example, Latouche, "Québec and Canada."

79 *A Québec Free to Choose*, pp. 41, 43.

and defined by territorial limits. People of French-Canadian language and culture, regardless of where they are located, whether in Quebec, New Brunswick or Saskatchewan, are members of the French-Canadian nation; English-speaking persons anywhere in Canada, Quebec or elsewhere, are members of the English-Canadian nation. The second creates two geographically distinct entities: Quebec and the rest.

This shift to a territorial notion of duality reflects the growing power and influence of the Québécois collectivity and provincial (national) government. It also reflects two other realities: first that the French-speaking minorities outside Quebec have been and still are shrinking as they are assimilated to the dominant English-speaking milieu; second, that Quebec is not prepared to consider these minorities outside its frontiers as hostages to fortune. The Bélanger-Campeau Commission, for example, observed that these groups often had to engage in legal battles against provincial governments in order to have their linguistic and cultural rights recognized. In these battles the federal government was their sole ally. And, "for reasons related to its own linguistic and constitutional position, it is not possible for Quebec to take up the cause of French-speaking groups in all their legal undertakings."⁸⁰ In fact, Quebec, in the interests of preserving its own rights, has intervened in some of these cases on the side of the provinces against the French-speaking minorities. The commission concluded its observations on this situation with the ambiguous comment that: "Were Quebec institutions and the Quebec government to more actively support the initiatives of French-speaking people outside Quebec other than through support before the courts, Quebec and Quebecers would contribute more fully to the vitality of the French-speaking community in Canada."⁸¹

The Meech Lake Accord attempted to give constitutional recognition to duality through acknowledging the unique position of Quebec in the first section of the constitution. Quebec was to be recognized as a "distinct society" and homeland to the francophone element of Canada's duality. The federal government's 1991 proposal of a "Canada clause" in the constitution also attenuates territoriality by proposing that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms should be interpreted in a manner consistent with:

- (a) the preservation and promotion of Quebec as a distinct society within Canada; and
- (b) the preservation of the existence of French-speaking Canadians, primarily located in Quebec but also present throughout Canada, and English-speaking Canadians, primarily located outside Quebec but also present in Quebec.⁸²

80 Bélanger-Campeau, *Report*, p. 71.

81 *Ibid.*

82 Canada, *Shaping Canada's Future Together: Proposals* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services, 1991), p. 4.

For the purposes of this section, "distinct society" in relation to Quebec was to include a French-speaking majority; a unique culture; and a civil law tradition. This sort of approach was supported by the Joint Parliamentary Committee which examined proposals for constitutional reform in 1991-92,⁸³ and in early 1992 was accepted by the provincial premiers.

A second major issue in dualism is the question of a Quebec veto over constitutional amendments. The 1982 amendments to the constitution were made without the consent of Quebec. The Bélanger-Campeau Report argues that the 1982 constitutional arrangements have altered the spirit of the 1867 Confederation pact, were adopted despite the opposition of a province where nearly 90 percent of French-speaking Canadians live and which accounts for over one-quarter of Canada's population, and have produced a situation in which constitutional amendments likely to derogate from Quebec's interests can be contemplated without Quebec's consent being required.⁸⁴ The questions of whether Quebec previously had a veto, and whether that veto was given up or taken away, are far too complex to deal with here.⁸⁵ It is enough to say that Quebec believes that it had a veto, that it was improperly taken away in 1981-82, and that its restoration must be part of any new constitutional deal. The Beaudoin-Dobbie committee concluded that "the accommodation of French-speaking Quebec, with its different language, legal system and culture, requires that fundamental changes to the original 1867 pact should not occur without the consent of the legislative assembly of that province."⁸⁶ However, the committee was unable to agree on a formula, and passed the problem on to the first ministers.

The final major issue in duality at present is the question of what extra powers Quebec should have. The Meech Lake Accord included an opting-out formula whereby any province could choose to go its own way on new initiatives provided they were compatible with the objectives of the national program. It was, of course, expected that the main user of these opting-out provisions would be Quebec. In the immediate post-Meech Lake period, the strong and angry Quebec response was to demand a massive transfer of federal powers to Quebec. Those demanded in the Allaire Report would have been enough to gut the federal government. The question of what special powers Quebec should have, of what additional powers any province might have, and of the extent to

83 Canada, Parliament, Special Committee of the Senate and of the House of Commons on a Renewed Canada, *Report*, 28 February 1992, (The Beaudoin-Dobbie Committee Report), pp. 25-27.

84 Bélanger-Campeau, *Report*, pp. 29-30.

85 A simplified discussion can be found in David Milne, *The Canadian Constitution: The Players and the Issues in the Process that has led from Patriation to Meech Lake to an Uncertain Future* (Toronto: Lorimer, 1991), chaps. 2-5.

86 Beaudoin-Dobbie, *Report*, p. 93.

which the powers of the provinces can and should be asymmetrical, would have been a key element of any major constitutional change.

Non-territorial dualism has been attacked in recent years by growing expressions of hostility to bilingualism. Official bilingualism enjoyed a good level of public support by the mid-eighties. The process of polarization of opinion caused by the Meech Lake debacle may have reversed this, though the data from opinion surveys are not conclusive on this score. English Canadians had raised few objections when both Alberta and Saskatchewan severely limited the linguistic rights of their French-speaking citizens, but when, in December 1988, Premier Bourassa of Quebec introduced Bill 178, which was intended to override a Supreme Court decision declaring the banning of English shop signs in Quebec unconstitutional, there was a strong, hostile, English-Canadian reaction. This, as was noted above, was a contributing factor to the failure of the Accord.

The embodiment of duality in Quebec and the rest of Canada (or Canada itself) gives rise to profound contradictions and problems. Immediately after the collapse of the Meech Lake Accord, Premier Robert Bourassa, feeling that Quebec's "honour and dignity" had been "insulted," stated that he would refuse to participate in further first ministers' meetings. As a result, in 1992 the prime minister of Canada and the premiers of the nine other provinces began a series of meetings to attempt to create a proposal for constitutional amendment that would satisfy both Quebec and the rest of Canada. A federal government whose largest caucus component was from Quebec, and nine provincial governments, attempted to agree to something that could then be agreed to by the tenth provincial government.

The end result of this process was the Charlottetown Agreement of 1992, which was accepted by the premiers of all ten provinces and the prime minister, but rejected in a referendum by majorities of the voters in Quebec, Nova Scotia, and all provinces from Manitoba west. The Charlottetown Agreement was a curious document. Unlike the Meech Lake Accord, it attempted to resolve a wide range of constitutional issues, including Senate reform, the favoured pet of Premier Getty of Alberta and Premier Wells of Newfoundland, and the constitutionalization of aboriginal self-government, favoured by Premier Rae of Ontario.

The resulting document at first glance appeared to have much more to say about Senate reform and aboriginal self-government than about Quebec. Its defenders claimed that all of Quebec's demands of Meech Lake were met in it and then some. Its critics in Quebec argued that this was not so, and that one Meech Lake demand in particular, that of a Quebec veto over constitutional changes to central institutions of government, had become meaningless because all the significant reforms, especially to the Senate, had already been agreed to. The Charlottetown Agreement failed in the essential role of expressing in a

convincing way the symbolic importance of duality. This problem is illustrated clearly in the Agreement's proposed "Canada clause," which in contrast to the federal government's earlier proposal, included far more than duality and was a grabbag of competing visions of Canada in which duality is mentioned in only four out of eight clauses:

2. (1) The Constitution of Canada, including the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the following fundamental characteristics:

- (a) Canada is a democracy committed to a parliamentary and federal system of government and to the rule of law;
- (b) the Aboriginal peoples of Canada, being the first peoples to govern this land, have the right to promote their languages, cultures and traditions and to ensure the integrity of their societies, and their governments constitute one of three orders of government in Canada;
- (c) Quebec constitutes within Canada a distinct society, which includes a French-speaking majority, a unique culture and a civil law tradition;
- (d) Canadians and their governments are committed to the vitality and development of official language minority communities throughout Canada;
- (e) Canadians are committed to racial and ethnic equality in a society that includes citizens from many lands who have contributed, and continue to contribute, to the building of a strong Canada that reflects its cultural and racial diversity;
- (f) Canadians are committed to a respect for individual and collective human rights and freedoms of all people;
- (g) Canadians are committed to the equality of female and male persons; and
- (h) Canadians confirm the principle of the equality of the provinces at the same time as recognizing their diverse characteristics.⁸⁷

The notion of duality underlies and motivates virtually all discussion of federalism in French-speaking Quebec. In discussions of constitutional reform it is something that a revised constitution must clearly articulate. For those advocating sovereignty, it is a principle that has been so utterly betrayed that no possibility of reconciliation is left. The issue has not disappeared with the demise of the Charlottetown Agreement, and will arise again, whenever constitutional revision rears its head.

87 Canada, *Consensus Report on the Constitution*, Charlottetown, 28 August 1992. Final Text (Charlottetown Agreement), p. 1.

EQUAL PROVINCES

Opposing the vision of Canada as a duality is the conception of Canada as ten equal provinces. This is an outgrowth of the compact theory of Confederation and of executive federalism which became a major national decision-making forum in the post-second world war era.⁸⁸ The Canadian constitution and parliamentary-cabinet system of government give the provincial governments particular strength. The allocation of powers in the constitution gives the provincial governments responsibility for many of the spending powers, especially in the fast-growing areas of social and educational policies. Fiscal federalism and the joint cost-sharing programs which gave the federal government a strong position in the post-war decades have lost much of their importance with the federal government's chronic cash shortage and cutbacks in transfer payments. At present the provincial governments combined spend significantly more than Ottawa, and their proportion of total government spending is steadily increasing. Nevertheless, federal-provincial relations are still a major political and policymaking forum in Canada.

First ministers' meetings themselves are so prominent, and so important, that in 1991 the federal government proposed as a constitutional reform that they be institutionalized as a "Council of the Federation." This Council would perform much the same functions as first ministers' meetings now do, and would have the same composition. The difference would be that it would be recognized as a formal part of the constitution, and would become a part of the law-making machinery. A federal initiative would come into force in Canada if approved by the Council and the federal Parliament. Dissenting provinces could opt out for a limited period, and the decision-rule for the Council would be the same as that for the present amending process for most of the constitution, that is to say that federal proposals would be ratified provided that at least seven provincial governments representing at least 50 percent of the population agreed.⁸⁹ This proposal did not get much support, and has been abandoned for the time being, but the fact that it was seriously proposed does show how important executive federalism has become and that there are problems with it as a decisionmaking process.

Provincial governments, with their growing strengths and powers through executive federalism, have been enthusiastic and vociferous in demanding further influence and legitimacy. Their demands have become particularly important in the areas of Senate reform and constitutional amendment. Where

88 I discuss this in more detail in my "Decision Process and Decision Rules: Canada's Problems," paper presented to conference, Kingston, April 1991.

89 This proposal is presented in Canada, *Responsive Institutions for a Modern Canada* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services, 1991), pp. 23-26.

in the seventies the sort of reform proposed to the Senate was a house of the provinces based on the German Bundesrat, in the eighties the goal became a more populist "Triple-E" Senate — elected, effective, and equal. The argument used to justify equal representation was that all the constituent members of a federation are, and ought to be treated as, equal. Thus, merely because Ontario has nearly one hundred times the population of Prince Edward Island, or because Quebec has a unique language and culture, there is no justification, proponents of a Triple-E Senate would claim, for treating either of them differently by giving them any special powers or greater representation in the Senate. Bad political science is also often used to buttress this claim. Premier Wells of Newfoundland, for example, often stated that in all federations there is an upper house in which the constituent members have equal representation, ignoring or perhaps unaware of the many federations in which this is not true (Germany and India are two prominent examples to the contrary).

The constitutional theory that underlies this doctrine of provincial equality is termed the "compact theory" of confederation. It argues that Canada was created through a compact of equal bodies, and that maintaining this equality is essential. This is not only bad history, because Canada was not created that way (for example, two of the original provinces, Ontario and Quebec, did not even exist before Confederation), but it also ignores the many ways in which the constitution treats provinces differently.⁹⁰ Provincial equality has nevertheless become an important symbol and rallying cry. Provincial equality was entrenched in the constitution in 1982 with ratification of an amending formula that requires unanimous provincial assent to amendments affecting the office of the Queen and her vice-regal representatives, representation in Parliament, the Supreme Court, the amending formula itself, and the official languages. Even though most of the provisions of the Meech Lake Accord could have been approved through the less demanding formula of seven provinces with 50 percent of the population, the entire document was subjected to the unanimity rule, in a sort of tacit recognition of the compact theory. The straightjacket of this stringent amending formula is a large part of the explanation for why two provinces with 5 percent of the population were able to veto the entire proposal.

The doctrine of provincial equality is one of the principal stumbling blocks to acceptance of some of the demands of Quebec. As the Bélanger-Campeau Commission stated:

Pursuant to this principle of equality of the provinces, any constitutional change, prerogative or power obtained by Quebec must also be granted to the other nine provinces. Strict application of this principle has prevented Quebec from obtaining special status.

90 See Black, *Divided Loyalties*, chap. 5, "The Compact Theory."

not be allowed to hold portfolios in areas where Quebec has opted out. It would likely be impossible, for example, if this principle were adopted for a member from Quebec to be minister of culture, of health, of communications, or of immigration. Perhaps ministers from Quebec would not even be allowed to vote in Cabinet on these matters. A system like this would be unworkable. It would, for example, be almost impossible to define a matter of confidence in the house of commons. But a system in which Quebec had as much influence in the federal Cabinet and Parliament as it now has, and at the same time was largely autonomous, would also be unworkable and would be unacceptable to the rest of Canada.

CULTURE AND MULTICULTURALISM

Culture is used in four important different senses in Canada: first, as commerce, education, improvement and entertainment, such as in "high" and "low" or "popular" culture; second in the anthropological sense as the language, norms, institutions, processes, beliefs, etc. of a society; third, as an aspect of nationalism; and fourth, as a form of ethnic heritage in "multiculturalism." When English-speaking Canadians talk about government programs and policies for culture they usually mean the first and fourth senses, culture as commerce, entertainment, or multiculturalism. When French-speaking Québécois speak of culture they mean primarily the second, of culture as a living social environment, part of the air one breathes, with a minor emphasis on the first sense.

The first concern of French-speaking Québécois is to preserve the French language and culture as the context and environment of their life. To English-speaking Canadians, part of the most powerful and expanding linguistic group in the world, this concern of French-speaking Québécois is so unfamiliar and remote that most of the time it is not recognized for what it is. As a result, programs and policies that are lauded in English Canada for promoting and preserving Canadian culture are, in Quebec, looked at as an effort to denigrate the French language and culture. The Québécois writer Hubert Aquin made this point decades ago in the 1950s with regard to the proposals of the Massey Committee which was a main starting point for government involvement in high culture and the arts in Canada.

Culture, in fact, has been restricted to the limited horizons of the arts and humanities; the word *culture* has contracted to the point where it now signifies only the artistic and cognitive characteristics of a group whereas for anthropologists and many foreign intellectuals it describes the full range of behaviour patterns and symbols of a particular group and thus refers to a society that is sovereign and organic but not closed. The state of federal-provincial politics here has led us to depoliticize the word culture or, more precisely, to reject arbitrarily the comprehensive meaning conferred on it by contemporary semantics...

Consequently, the principle of equality of the provinces implies uniformly decentralizing to all the provinces any power or prerogative granted to Quebec, to which proponents of a strong central government object as they see in such decentralization a weakening of the central government.

Given the combined effect of the principle of equality of the provinces and of the views which favour the centralization of powers in the hands of a single "national" government, it is hard to meet Quebec's needs and make room in the Canadian Constitution for the political expression of Quebec's uniqueness within the federation.⁹¹

The commission concluded that the amending formula adopted in 1982 makes it hard to contemplate any modification requiring the unanimous consent of the provincial legislatures, and that this rule, in the Meech Lake affair, merely reinforced the lack of equity demonstrated when the constitutional amendments were adopted without Quebec's consent in 1982. The failure of the Meech Lake Accord not only demonstrated the extreme inflexibility of the amending formula, but also showed the extent to which the 1982 amendments and the political visions prevailing elsewhere in Canada make it hard to obtain constitutional changes that would recognize Quebec's uniqueness and satisfy its particular needs.

Duality and ten equal provinces are the main visions of Canada now operative. The one is held firmly and almost exclusively by Quebec, the other by most of the remaining nine provinces. It is certainly not beyond the wit of man to devise a constitution and create political institutions that reflect more than one vision. Politics is almost never known for its neatness and tidiness. When it is, it is usually a time of great ideological fervour and rigidity, and not a good time for the rights of citizens or the well-being of the polity. Competing and contrasting visions are an essential component of democratic politics. However, some moderation of the extreme statements of duality and provincial equality will need to happen before constitutional accommodation can be achieved.

There are limits, however, to the extent to which duality and Quebec's distinctiveness can be recognized in the constitution, just as there are limits to the extent to which all provinces can be treated as equals. The parliamentary-Cabinet framework is flexible enough to accommodate some asymmetry, and in fact already does so in Canada, but at some point the stresses it produces will become intolerable. This point will be reached well before the sort of decentralization proposed in the Quebec Liberal Party's Allaire Report is achieved. The suggestion was made, at the time the Meech Lake Accord was being considered, that Quebec members of Parliament would not be allowed to vote on matters where Quebec had opted out and claimed its own jurisdiction. This principle could be taken further. Quebec ministers, it could be argued, should

91 Bélanger-Campeau, *Report*, pp. 35-36.

French-Canadian culture becomes a kind of folklore; Quebec becomes one province out of ten. The essential duality of two cultures, the integrity of French Canadian culture, gets lost and ignored. This must be resisted.⁹²

French-Canadian commentators make this criticism at least equally strongly in the 1990s as in the 1950s. Culture and language to Quebec mean an environment in which the whole range of human activities can be carried out, whether they are social, business, commercial, educational, recreational, or whatever. It is not something to be reserved for the home, or to be trotted out as a display piece on special public occasions as part of a peculiar and increasingly decaying ethnic heritage. A fundamental requirement to Quebec is that French be recognized as a living, powerful component of all aspects of Quebec life. French does not have this status outside Quebec, except in some communities of New Brunswick and northern Ontario. The French language and culture, Quebec argues, are not, and must not be regarded as, equivalent to the other languages and cultures within the rubric of multiculturalism.

In this vein the Bélanger-Campeau Report described culture as a powerful, unique, and particular possession of a people:

L'histoire témoigne de la longue et patiente poursuite, par la société québécoise, d'un aménagement politique qui préserve la pleine mesure de son identité. La culture est à la fois la somme de l'oeuvre que les créateurs de tout un peuple ont tirée de l'imaginaire collectif en même temps que gestes, paroles, chants et accents qui sont le quotidien de ce même peuple. C'est sa culture, alimentée et soutenue par les créateurs et les chercheurs, nourrie par les artistes, reçue par tous, qui anime l'identité du peuple québécois. Elle lui permet de revivre ses racines et conduit vers un dépassement qui appelle une correspondance entre identité et statut politique. Si la définition de l'avenir politique ne commande pas de définir en parallèle l'avenir culturel, elle exige que l'on affirme fortement que seule une culture vivante et fière donne à un peuple un visage et un esprit suffisamment forts et distincts pour soutenir un avenir prometteur. Cette perspective éclaire notre démarche et lui donne tout son sens.⁹³

This impassioned argument for uniqueness and the need for a collective Québécois culture, like Aquin's, expresses a powerfully held belief. To some extent it partakes of the garrison mentality and of the constant need to reaffirm one's identity and uniqueness in the face of outside threats.

The governments of Quebec and Canada have done a great deal to support Quebec culture of the high and popular variety as part of the effort to strengthen the French language. At present, over 40 percent of the federal government's

92 Hubert Aquin, *Writing Quebec*, edited and with an introduction by Anthony Purdy (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1988), pp. 31-32.

93 Bélanger-Campeau, *Rapport*, p. 79.

budget for culture is spent in Quebec which has slightly more than 25 percent of Canada's population.

English-Canadian writers and creative artists often look with envy on the vibrant cultural scene in Quebec. Here, culture is used in the first sense, and means the commercial, educational and improving aspects of society and commerce. And, in turn, Quebec commentators, insofar as they pay any attention at all to English Canada, tend to look down their noses at its culture and sense of nationhood:

...les débats autour du Lac Meech et de l'Accord de libre-échange ont fait ressortir clairement le désir de la majorité des Canadiens de maintenir, malgré des liens économiques, géographiques, linguistiques et culturels évidents avec le reste de l'Amérique, ce qui, à défaut d'être une nation dans le sens usuel du terme, demeure tout au moins une entité socio-politique distincte et différente des États-Unis. Si les valeurs communes ne sautent pas toujours aux yeux, les consensus y sont souvent minimaux, et l'hétérogénéité y est indéniable, la volonté de survivre et peut-être la peur de disparaître y sont par contre incontestables.⁹⁴

There are profound differences in the types of beasts that English- and French-Canadian cultures are in both the first and second senses. The basic similarity is that they share the garrison mentality to the extent of insisting that they are different from what surrounds them, that the differences are important and must be recognized and preserved, even if this means protecting some or many aspects of the culture from external threats and involves government support in so doing. Survival is a common concern. But from then on the differences are more pronounced than the similarities.

One major difference is that French-Canadian culture is much less like what surrounds it than is English-Canadian. The barrier of language creates an opportunity for a separate identity, and local creativity, that is enjoyed by no other comparably-sized group in North America. The Government of Quebec, and the Government of Canada too for that matter, have vigorously supported this local cultural productivity. Some Quebec commentators have argued that there would be less demand for these sorts of cultural activities after independence:

The intellectually and culturally-associated groups will probably be the major losers in an eventual sovereignty scenario: there will no longer be much demand for their major skill, articulating the Québec collective project. Paradoxically, one can also expect the language front to lose much of its acuity as English is no longer seen as the symbol of an inferior Québec status but as a valuable resource in the new global economy.⁹⁵

94 Fournier, "L'échec du Lac Meech: un point de vue québécois," p. 57.

95 Latouche, "Québec and Canada," p. 68.

Whatever the future might hold, there is no doubt that Quebec now, and for a long time to come, enjoys and will enjoy a vibrant local culture with a mutual identity and sympathy at the level of social and political feelings between community and creator that does not exist in English Canada.

French-speaking Quebec culture is much more homogeneous than is English-Canadian culture. Its scale is smaller, on a ratio of three to one in population. It is clustered on a coherent, relatively small land mass. In contrast, English-Canadian culture occupies half a continent, stretches from one ocean to another, and from the American border to the most northerly arctic settlement. The geographical variety of English Canada is combined with a tremendous variation in origins and history, from the pre-loyalist settlements of Newfoundland to the loyalists of the Maritimes, Ontario and Quebec, from British Columbia's heritage as a separate British colony to the prairies' origins in the Riel rebellions and the immigration of settlers from dozens of non-English or French groups, and so on. The Québécois sort of sense of common roots, and common territorial identity, is not only not there, it cannot possibly be there. Northrop Frye concluded that there could never be a single Canadian literature. The country is too big. There can, however, be a maritime literature, a Quebec literature, an Ontario literature, a prairie literature, a British Columbia literature, and perhaps a northern literature. Literature must be rooted in a geographic place and time. Perhaps even these regions are too big. The variety of voices and moods in English-Canadian literature suggests that Frye was right. Quebec cultural creativity is much more located in a single identity, voice and space.

The continual impact of the United States on English Canada is impossible to resist. The spread of satellite and cable television, the power of the American movie, television and other popular culture industries, the common language, make English Canada part of the larger North American cultural community, just as it is part of the larger world-wide English-speaking cultural community. English-Canadian culture derives great benefits from this broader English-speaking culture, but it also means that English-Canadian culture, by itself, is not a full, complete and separate entity. It is constantly engaged in a dialogue with the broader culture, and its products only partly fill most of the niches in the entire cultural construct. Some it fills better than others. This is not necessarily a fault, it is reality. It makes English-Canadian culture quite different from French, just as worldwide English culture is very different from worldwide French culture. In actual fact, of course, these differences can be overstated. French-language culture, whether in Europe or North America, is not immune to outside influences, and large elements of popular culture are imported from, or imitate, worldwide English-language culture.

The third meaning of culture is as a matter of national identity and survival. This is in many ways subordinate to the first and second meanings. The Quebec government states it quite explicitly in policies towards culture as entertain-

ment, improvement and education. It has also been explicitly expressed as a concern by the federal government in, for example, institutions such as the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the National Film Board, the Canada Council, and such policies as support for book publishing, Canadian content on radio and television, and the refusal to include the culture industries in free trade negotiations. This strain is strong in both English and French Canada. Bill Davis, while premier of Ontario, for example, defended a financial bail-out by the province for McClelland and Stewart, important Canadian publishers, arguing that;

when we talk about nationalism, I want to make it abundantly clear that this government has demonstrated by its involvement with McClelland and Stewart that we regard Canadian publishing and those matters relating to culture as being something different and separate and apart from some of the areas of economic investment that are necessary for this province and this country. We have an obligation to see that...the publishing industry and those matters which are culturally ours to preserve are preserved in a way that is unique for our jurisdiction.⁹⁶

This use of culture gets involved with questions of state-building in that a language, means of mass and elite communication, and the construction of a sense of community and identity is necessary for the state to survive. The argument, however, is made in nation-building rather than state-building terms. Programs to regulate Canadian ownership and content of the media, to support the arts and cultural industries, and to create indigenous materials for education and entertainment, all have a nationalistic as well as a commercial thrust. They are major policy issues at both the provincial and federal level.

Multiculturalism is capable of many different meanings and interpretations. Often it is expressed as a sentiment whose meaning is unclear. The federal government, in expressing its policies towards multiculturalism in Parliament stated:

We believe that cultural pluralism is the very essence of Canadian identity. Every ethnic group has the right to preserve and develop its own culture and values in the Canadian context. To say that we have two official languages is not to say we have two official cultures, and no particular culture is more official than another. A policy of multiculturalism must be a policy for all Canadians.⁹⁷

To say the least, the meaning of the term "culture" in this statement is not clear. It also, explicitly, applies no special status to French-Canadian culture. In the two decades since, the Canadian government and policy has attempted to sort

96 Ontario Legislature, *Debates*, 22 April 1971, p. 838.

97 Canada, House of Commons *Debates*, 8 Oct. 1971, pp. 8580-8581. See also the remarks of Prime Minister P.E. Trudeau in announcing this policy, *ibid.*, pp. 8545-8546.

out the ambiguities and contradictions in multicultural policy. Multiculturalism denotes and connotes quite different things in English and French Canada, and in multiculturalism, and attitudes and policies towards it, there are crucial areas of difference between Quebec and the rest of Canada.

Quebec wants to assimilate immigrants to its uniqueness, while the rest of Canada glories in its diversity. In the past 40 years Canada has received huge waves of immigrants, first from Europe, especially non-Anglo-Saxon Europe, and more recently from Asia. These immigrant communities have changed the flavour and complexion of Canada. Toronto is now the most cosmopolitan of cities in North America, with 40 percent of its population first or second generation Canadian. Television stations in Toronto normally broadcast in four languages, and on Sundays there are programs in more than ten languages. It is not expected that these new groups will bear the same relationship to the British heritage as the United Empire Loyalists or the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire. Even these terms have something archaic and absurd about them in a way that "*pure laine*" and St. Jean Baptiste Society do not.

Despite this huge non-English influx, there is no serious suggestion that Canada should become multilingual. Governments provide services in many languages, but simply as a necessity. Outside Quebec, parts of New Brunswick, other francophone communities, even rarer other language small communities, and parts of the federal public service, the working language of Canada is English. Immigrants outside Quebec are expected without question to assimilate to the English-speaking environment. The language of the home will with rare exception lose its separate character within a few generations.

Quebec is concerned with immigration to bolster its population because the birth rate in Quebec has become one of the lowest in the industrial world. The concerns of the Quebec government, which made control over immigration one of the five points in the Meech Lake Accord, were that Quebec should get its fair share of immigrants, and that the immigrants should assimilate to the French rather than the English-language side. The Allaire Report concluded that "the full development, perhaps even the survival, of francophone Québec society is closely tied to the judicious use of government powers in these two areas of jurisdiction: the family and immigration."⁹⁸ However, where it is often noted that English Canada's culture and attitudes have changed with their immigration, there is no suggestion that French-Canadian society will or ought to undergo similar transformations. It is not only expected that immigrants to Quebec will assimilate to the French-language side, but also that they will assimilate to the Québécois culture.⁹⁹ There is no sense, at the government level at least, that Québécois culture itself will be influenced by and adapt in response

98 *A Québec Free to Choose*, p. 28.

99 Bonin, "L'immigration au Québec en 1990," p. 63.

to the cultural heritage of immigrants. Immigration is a means to Québécois cultural and social survival, not change.

A prominent and largely correct view in Quebec is that multiculturalism in English Canada has been a major factor in weakening the principle of duality, not just because the federal government has failed to make it clear to immigrants that Canada is a country of two languages and cultures, but also because the emphasis on multiculturalism to Canadians outside Quebec leaves French-speaking Canadians as representatives of only one among many cultures which form Canada's cultural heritage. Multiculturalism and culture in this sense are matters of preserving folkways, of using a language in the home and with children, while adopting English as the public language of government and business.¹⁰⁰

Quebec has, with these sorts of considerations in mind, been strongly resistant to the notion of multiculturalism. The Quebec provincial government has programs to encourage assimilation of immigrants to French-Canadian language and culture. The concern of Quebec has been less to encourage new immigrants to retain and value their heritage, than to encourage them to become part of French Canada. Immigration is still a smaller part of Quebec's population than it is of the rest of Canada. The crucible for this confrontation of Québécois and other cultural groups will be Montreal which receives over 90 percent of Quebec's immigrants. As immigration becomes a more important part of Quebec's population, it is quite likely that more tensions will arise, and it is unlikely that immigrant groups will buy into the whole package of Quebec nationalist political and cultural ideology.¹⁰¹

Immigration since the World War II has transformed the Canadian population mix to a point where a majority of Canadians are of neither French nor English origin.¹⁰² The multiculturalism programs in the rest of Canada that respond to this huge influx are different from those of Quebec and the United States, which are assimilationist. According to Raymond Breton, "Unlike the United States, with its belief in a 'melting pot' of immigrant cultures out of which was to emerge a more or less uniform product, Canadians opted for diversity, for the

100 Bélanger-Campeau, *Report*, pp. 77-78; Fournier, "L'échec du Lac Meech," p. 56.

101 Immigration into Quebec is thoroughly discussed in Bonin, "L'immigration au Québec en 1990."

102 See V. Seymour Wilson, "Canada's Evolving Multicultural Policy: An Assessment of Race in our Mosaic's Ethnic Mix," a paper prepared for the conference "Canada's Century: Governance in a Maturing Society," Kingston: Queen's University, April 1991. See also Daiva Stasilius, "Symbolic Representation and the Numbers Game: Tory Policies on 'Race,'" in Frances Abela, ed., *How Ottawa Spends the Politics of Fragmentation, 1996-7* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1991), pp. 229-267.

retention of the cultural attributes of its different immigrant streams."¹⁰³ Canadian society emphasizes, as well as diversity, the values of equality, change, and a collectivism that becomes a sort of communalism.

At first, many of the multicultural policies operated at the level of symbols and images. Much of the program content came to be seen as support for ethnic folklore and, according to Breton, became a "song and dance affair" in which the:

concrete expression of multiculturalism was to a degree trivializing the value it was meant to convey. Instead of enhancing the value of cultural diversity and its contribution to Canadian society, multiculturalism ran the risk of producing the opposite effect. To the extent that it was fostering the attitude that ethnocultures were not to be taken seriously, multiculturalism in its concrete form faced the danger of degrading ethnocultures rather than celebrating them.¹⁰⁴

As a response to these sorts of criticisms, in recent years the focus of multicultural policies has changed from the folkloric aspects towards eliminating barriers and prejudice, and encouraging immigrants to adjust better to Canadian society.

Nevertheless, multicultural policies have received persistent and continuing criticism from French Canada. They have been seen to dilute recognition of duality and to relegate French language and culture to the same level as all other ethnic groups. The Bélanger-Campeau Commission argues that the 1982 amendments:

constitutionalized the principle of the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians, thus imposing on Quebec a constitutional viewpoint which did not necessarily coincide with its reality within Canada: the latter was defined as a multicultural society, without constitutional recognition of "Canadian duality" and of Quebec's distinctiveness. The multicultural society, being predominantly English speaking, can easily become indifferent to Quebec's distinct identity and its unique linguistic and cultural position in Canada.¹⁰⁵

As a result:

Elsewhere in Canada, French-speaking Canadians are often perceived as representatives of one of the many cultures which make up Canada's multicultural heritage, a culture which is entitled to preserve its ways and customs and speak its language in private, but which must in essence live socially in English, as do other cultural groups. The development of French-speaking people outside

103 Raymond Breton, "Multiculturalism and Canadian nation-Building" in Alan Cairns and Cynthia Williams, eds., *The Politics of Gender, Ethnicity and Language in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), p. 9.

104 *Ibid.*, p. 53.

105 Bélanger-Campeau, *Report*, p. 29. See also p. 34.

Quebec is thus limited in fact, wrongly no doubt, through the misunderstanding of multiculturalism as a reflection of social life everywhere in Canada.¹⁰⁶

Not only, so this vein of criticism goes, does multiculturalism deny duality by grouping French language and culture along with all the others, but as was noted earlier, the federal government has made, and continues to make, the problem worse by failing to educate new immigrants in the importance and meaning of duality.

Multiculturalism has been one of the important factors leading to the growing emphasis on group rights in Canada. The relevant groups include the varied cultural and ethnic groups other than English and French, aboriginal peoples (Indian, Inuit and Métis), and women. These new groups are expressly mentioned in the 1982 constitutional amendments, and they, especially the aboriginal and women's groups, have taken advantage of this privileged position to become strong influences in Canadian politics.¹⁰⁷

Canada's aboriginal populations add many complexities to the constitutional problems. One of the most important aspects of these is self-government. In 1991 the federal government established a royal commission to examine all aspects of the situation of these generally impoverished and disadvantaged peoples. One of the first public acts of this commission was to issue a report arguing that any new constitutional provision dealing with the right of aboriginal self-government should indicate that the right is inherent, circumscribed, and sovereign within its sphere.¹⁰⁸ This is less than the inherent right to unlimited self-government demanded by some native leaders, but it is still more than many provincial premiers had previously been willing to grant.

The issue of self-government is much more complex than is generally realized.¹⁰⁹ For example, native women's groups are opposed to the demands of the leaders of the national native organizations that self-governments be exempted from the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The native women point out, with justification, that without the protection of the Charter and the courts, there is a strong risk of discrimination against women, or worse, in self-government. Perhaps surprisingly, in view of their highly vocal stand on women's rights during the discussions of the Meech Lake Accord, other women's groups have not been vigorous in their support of native women on

106 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

107 See Alan Cairns, "Constitutional Minoritarianism in Canada."

108 Canada, Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, *The Right of Aboriginal Self-Government and the Constitution: A Commentary* (Ottawa: 13 February 1992), p. 23.

109 I discuss many of these complexities in my *Public Administration Questions Relating to Aboriginal Self-Government* (Kingston: Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, Queen's University, 1987).

this issue. During the debate on the Charlottetown Agreement the women's groups did, however, take a stronger stand on these issues.

In the discussions that led to the Charlottetown Agreement, the leaders of four national native groups (not including the native women's group, which protested in the courts), participated along with the provincial premiers and the federal government. The agreement included provisions both entrenching self-government in the constitution and ensuring a process for negotiating self-government. Regardless of the sense of achievement of the native leaders and the politicians who supported these provisions, a strong majority of native Canadians, insofar as this can be measured by the location of polling booths, voted against the agreement and, it appears, against their leaders and against the proposed entrenchment of self-government. This raises questions about the relationship of constitutional politics to reality, to the concerns of citizens, and, for the native groups, of the relationship of leaders to clientele, and of the legitimacy of national organizations and their demands.

What concern with self-government certainly did was to add a further complication to the Charlottetown Agreement as a document. Undoubtedly it made it more difficult to reach a resolution satisfactory to Quebec. The provisions for self-government were treated hostilely by Quebec commentators, and, in the end, were rejected along with the rest of the agreement by Quebec, as by the natives themselves.

Women's groups had a strong influence in discrediting the Meech Lake Accord. They denied its legitimacy because of the way it was fashioned in backrooms by 11 white males. They demanded stronger clauses protecting women and minorities. They objected to the distinct society clause because it might harm women's rights in Quebec — even though Quebec women's groups disagreed with these objections. The National Action Committee on the Status of Women also objected to the Charlottetown Agreement, though by this time their arguments had an element of *déjà vue*, and were less prominent, perhaps because so many other groups also rejected it.

The striking feature of the role of these "minoritarian" groups is that their concerns and interests generally went against those of Quebec. This certainly did not make constitutional renewal any easier.

Culture and multiculturalism add a further dimension to the notions of duality and ten provinces. The three visions of Canada, of two founding peoples, with the addition of aboriginal peoples, of ten provinces, and of multiculturalism are not necessarily mutually exclusive. A polity can act as one country on some matters, operate on the principle of two prime languages and cultures for some spheres, on participation by ten provinces for other purposes, and on a recognition of cultural diversity for other matters. The problems emerge when the issues are seen as black and white, with adoption of one approach for one purpose necessarily excluding all other approaches in any other sector. This sort

of extremist mentality does violence to the traditions of Canada and the present reality of the Canadian cultural fabric. But it is an extremism that became widespread as the Meech Lake debacle unfolded. It is not made any easier to handle when politicians talk of culture being a federal or a provincial responsibility, with no clear idea of the sense in which the term "culture" is used, or what it connotes and denotes.

MEECH LAKE REVISITED

In the Meech Lake debacle the factors of survival, victim, nation and nationalism, duality versus ten provinces, culture, and multiculturalism all played a strong part. Many other factors that have not been examined here were also important, such as the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, regionalism, sovereignty, Senate reform, mosaic and melting pot, aboriginal self-government, aboriginal women's and other group rights. Nevertheless, the examination has shown the complex interplay of important myths and symbols as they are articulated in terms of discourse, how these terms then carry an enormous amount of emotional and interpretive weight, and how they construct reality and meaning, and motivate political action.

The symbolic aspects of the process leading to the death of the Meech Lake Accord are of crucial importance to understanding what happened, and how Canada arrived at its present constitutional quandary. The story went roughly as follows. Over the past 30 years Canada has attempted through varying means to come to terms with the reality of two languages, a varied population, ten provinces, and half a continent. One of these thrusts has been official bilingualism, which recognizes to some measure the duality of Canada's origin. Another thrust has been the notion of multiculturalism. Another has been constitutional reform, which led to the adoption of major constitutional changes in 1981-82. The renewed constitution recognized bilingualism, affirmed universal human rights and multiculturalism, and gave particular status to some minority or disadvantaged groups. The Government of Quebec refused to agree to these 1982 amendments, but they were adopted nevertheless. Over the years that followed gradual acceptance of the new constitution developed. By the mid-1980s official bilingualism was accepted by a majority of Canadians, as was the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, including a majority in Quebec. Constitutional issues were not important to most Canadians, and Quebec nationalism, which had been very powerful in the seventies, was dormant.

The Meech Lake reforms were an attempt to get Quebec's agreement to the constitution of 1982. The attempt did not succeed. Not only did it not succeed, but it caused profound, though perhaps short-term, shifts in public opinion. By the end of the process separatism and nationalism had achieved unprecedented

heights of popularity in Quebec. Opinion in the rest of Canada had hardened against Quebec. Official bilingualism had lost much of its popularity. Constitutional issues had become much more important than before, and the prospects of resolving them and preserving Canada were dim. These outcomes were the opposite of what had been intended.

There are many interpretations of what went wrong: failures of individuals; unsympathetic groups pursuing their own interests; hostile media coverage; proof of the irrationality of the concept of Canada; an unworkable amending process; and so on. Here I do not want to explain, but to describe, and to describe at one level only: the evolution and permutation of the myths and symbols during the process. There are four important points.

First, there was a simplification and exaggeration of the major symbols. The nation, duality, and sovereignty became focal points for mass sentiment and response in Quebec, as did a francophobic distortion of Quebec demands and provincial equality in English Canada. These symbols were caricatures of the complexity and variety of nuances, experience and flavours of reality, and for that matter of the previous political use and discussion over past decades.

Second, the symbols became polarized into incompatible oppositions. The Quebec nation came to appear to a majority of French-speaking citizens of Quebec as something that was under serious threat and attack from hostile forces in the rest of Canada, just as English-speaking Canadians felt that their values were under attack from bilingualism and the Meech Lake Accord. This process was enhanced by misperceptions, as has been documented by many opinion polls. Among these misperceptions were: a generally profound ignorance of the actual contents of the Meech Lake Accord among those who opposed it (and quite possibly among those who supported it as well); an ignorance among English Canadians as to how badly French-speaking minorities were treated outside Quebec, and of how well, comparatively, the English-speaking minority in Quebec was treated; an extreme exaggeration of the meaning of official bilingualism so that there was a widespread sense in English Canada of being under attack; a much overstated claim in Quebec that cities in English Canada were declaring themselves opposed to bilingualism, while the actions of many cities to declare themselves in support of bilingualism were ignored. The complexity of visions in the notions of two nations, ten provinces and multiculturalism got reduced to a choice between incompatible opposites.

Third, opinion increasingly clustered around these simplified, polarized symbols. Hostility towards the Meech Lake Accord grew in public opinion in English Canada as the efforts to have it ratified by the last recalcitrant provinces intensified. Support for it in Quebec grew correspondingly. This hostility and support, though initially stimulated by the Accord, became more general expressions of attitudes towards grossly simplified and emotionally-laden symbols on both sides.

Fourth, there was an intensification of feeling towards these symbols. As a result, the failure to ratify what had first seemed like a minor and innocuous constitutional amendment became a powerful statement, on the one hand to Quebec of humiliation and rejection by English Canada, and to English Canada of an affirmation of principles. Opinions over the nature of Canada, and the role of Quebec and the French language within Canada, became stronger, more divided, and more divisive as the process went on, until, by the time of the collapse of efforts to save the Accord, Canadian public opinion was more divided into two, yet more united in each camp, and more mutually hostile, than ever before in recent Canadian history.

It is not just by chance that these profound changes in the symbols of Confederation developed during the Meech Lake process. In fact, there are good explanations available for why they happened. Before proceeding to them, however, some other aspects of the symbols and myths of Confederation that are relevant to the process deserve examination.

One such aspect is the symbolic importance of the constitution and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to English Canada. This is relatively new stemming for the most part from the changes in 1982. There are several conflicting strands at work here. One is that the statements of rights in the Charter should be a statement of lofty and universal ideals. A second is that this statement should include a list of specific groups and rights. The special status of the Charter groups — women, aboriginal peoples, handicapped, etc. — has been noted earlier. There are demands on the table for other groups, and other rights to be mentioned. Future proposals for constitutional amendment will certainly contain even more such demands. The inclusion of this sort of specificity changes the Charter of Rights and Freedoms from a general statement of abstract ideals into a programmatic device for the benefit of the specified groups. It gives the courts an additional burden, which can compete with their function of interpreting the fundamental values. A constitutional statement of rights is not the same sort of document as legislation establishing specific legal rights. Nor should it be. The two are often confused in Canada. A third is that the strictness of the unanimity rule in the amending formula makes many of the key portions of the Charter very difficult to amend. An easy amending formula (such as by a majority vote in Parliament) would be compatible with demands that the constitution be specific and inclusive; a difficult amending formula is not.

A second such aspect is that two of the three decisionmaking processes now used or proposed for Canada have very little context or history and exist more at the level of conceptual ideals than as practical working devices.¹¹⁰ One of

110 I discuss aspects of these processes in more detail in my "Decision Processes and Decision Rules: Canada's Problem."

these decision processes is constitutional amendment. The formula adopted in 1982 had received very little discussion before it was adopted. It has now been tried twice on important proposals for change, and the results (the Meech Lake debacle and the defeat of the Charlottetown Agreement in the referendum) were not pleasant or successful. It has two strikes against it. It is a difficult, uncertain process, and Canadians have not yet learned how to use it properly. Yet it was, and is accepted as an absolute standard against which success or failure must be measured. Constitution-amending in Canada is in large part an extension of executive federalism. The Meech Lake failure discredited executive federalism — 11 white middle-aged males meeting in secret — yet there is no other process to replace it. Quebec's refusal to participate for a period further weakened executive federalism and constitution-amending.

The second process is the referendums in Canada and Quebec. Canada, apart from some instances in the west, does not have a great deal of experience with referendums. The general tenor of both the Allaire and Bélanger-Campeau reports is that Quebec should achieve an internal consensus on the path to be chosen, and that this consensus should be expressed through a referendum. The question has been raised of what level of support in a referendum is adequate to prove that a consensus exists. Is it 51 percent? Or 60 percent? Or 80 percent? For Canada as a whole what constitutes consent in a referendum? Is it a majority or fixed percentage of the aggregate vote, or is it a majority in regions, or concurrent majorities in the two major linguistic groups, or in ten provinces, or what? There is no answer here, largely because the referendum process is an incompletely developed and accepted symbol. The defeat of the Charlottetown Agreement in six of the ten provinces was so decisive that these questions did not need to be addressed seriously. In contrast to both these processes is the parliamentary legislative process which has its agreed upon rules and procedures, derived from centuries of experience and practice. It functions far better than is generally appreciated, and certainly much more effectively than the constitution-amending procedures in Canada.

A side aspect of these decisionmaking processes is that the rules proposed or used for the fundamental decisions are on different bases and pose totally different tests to be passed for acceptance. The Meech Lake Accord had to be accepted by the governments and legislatures of all ten provinces. In the event, it was accepted by all but two legislatures. The two recalcitrant provinces contain less than 6 percent of Canada's population. This small fraction (less than 10 percent of Canada outside Quebec) thus exercised a veto over an important constitutional change and provoked a crisis that threatened the entire country. In theory even the smallest province, Prince Edward Island, with only one half of one percent of Canada's population, could have exercised a veto.

In comparison, if Quebec were to hold a referendum on sovereignty, it would aggregate all votes in the province, giving no group or area a veto. This is a

much easier hurdle to jump than the Canadian constitution-amending formula, or a Canada-wide referendum. Yet approval by referendum in one province has been proposed as the justification for the most serious constitutional change in Canada's history, while the approval of eight out of ten provinces representing nearly 95 percent of Canada's population is taken as total rejection. A decision rule for Quebec more similar to that for Canada would recognize Quebec's social and cultural complexity and, for example, perhaps demand, in a consociational mode, concurrent majorities of the major segments of the population.

In actual fact, there are only a small number of provisions in the Canadian constitution that are subject to the unanimity rule — those dealing with some aspects of central institutions, and the amending formula. The bulk of the Meech Lake provisions could have been ratified under the much less demanding provision of seven provinces with more than 50 percent of the population. In retrospect, it is unfortunate and an expression of unreasonable optimism about political behaviour that the Meech Lake Accord was not divided into two packages, the larger one subject to the less demanding seven and fifty formula and the smaller to unanimity.

Much closer attention needs to be paid to the decision rules, at least so there is more harmony and consistency between the rules for Quebec and the rules for Canada as a whole. Constitution-amending procedures and rules generally are more stringent and demanding than those of the legislative process. This is for good reason: constitutions have a more fundamental and general power, both symbolic and legal, than standard legislation. The stricter decision rules are there to protect minorities, not majorities. Decision processes are conventional, in the sense that legitimacy depends on accepted conventions, and passing the test of these conventional rules becomes a symbol of consent and legitimacy. Canada, in its constitutional-amending processes, does not have a satisfactory and accepted set of rules, conventions or symbols.

A third aspect of symbols is that Quebec sovereignty, and the process of reaching it, tend to be discussed as abstract concepts devoid of human reality. There has, for example, been talk likening Quebec separation to divorce, with the newly separated couple retaining close and happy relationships afterwards. This divorce metaphor, like most metaphors, is capable of many competing interpretations. It could be argued that marriage counselling is a desirable step before divorce, and that is what Canada needs. Or that divorces all too often end in bitter tensions and strife rather than happy relationships. Or, that divorce or not is not the important issue. The real challenge is to stop reliving and repeating the past and find a better way of living together and sharing the northern half of the continent. The world as a whole offers a few examples of a tranquil separation, such as Norway from Sweden, and many examples of unhappy ones, like Pakistan and India or the terrible recent events in Yugoslavia, and the problems of the disintegration of the Soviet Union. And many

examples of unhappy failures to separate, like the American Civil War, or Nigeria and Biafra. There is far more likelihood of a bitter, even violent separation in Canada than is generally realized:

Most Canadians assert that whatever else is true, violence is not possible in connection with the secession of Québec. It is difficult even to be polite about this pious attitude. Secessions are inherently unstable political events of the utmost unpredictability: no-one can rule out the possibility of violence. To take one scenario only: Québec secedes; it nervously awaits the reaction of English-speaking Canada; the native population of Québec rejects secession; barricades are erected; Québec determines on a swift, surgical removal of the problem; tension in the rest of Canada mounts; pressure builds on the Canadian government to intervene; Québec's operation is mishandled, with consequent loss of life; outrage erupts across Canada. Anyone who is prepared to dismiss such a scenario and its escalation into broader violence as simply implausible is either not thinking straight or not thinking at all. Nor is this the only "fact pattern" which could be put forward as a genesis for the outbreak of violence.¹¹¹

Whatever one's views on Quebec and Canada, whether one supports Quebec sovereignty or not, the potential for disaster should not be ignored, downplayed, or trivialized in cute metaphors. The "coûts de transition"¹¹² could be far more serious than the simple financial costs usually considered.

Finally, there is the question of the failure of Meech Lake. To Quebec leaders, as the Allaire and Bélanger-Campeau reports show, the failure of Meech Lake has taken on a powerful symbolic meaning as the rejection of Quebec and legitimate Quebec demands by the rest of Canada. But there were many reasons for its failure. Elijah Harper's single-handed achievement of preventing the Manitoba legislature from considering the Accord had nothing to do with Quebec. The opposition of women's groups had more to do with their own status and wants than with unwillingness to recognize Quebec's demands. Clyde Wells' actions were capable of many interpretations. And in one sense at least, Meech Lake was a great success: the governments and legislatures of English Canada overwhelmingly accepted it. There was more positive stuff to build on in the Meech Lake experience than was accepted in the initial shock of failure. The Meech Lake episode was capable of many interpretations and the symbolic reading of it as a rejection of Quebec was not only not necessarily the most accurate, but also was highly partisan and ideological.

The Charlottetown Agreement was a necessary next statement in the constitutional dialogue aborted by the demise of the Meech Lake Accord. The

111 Greg Craven, "Canada and Québec Playing Constitutional Chicken: The View from an Australian Pedestrian," *Constitutional Forum — Forum Constitutionnelle* 2, 2 (Winter 1991), p. 62.

112 *A Québec Free to Choose*, p. 60.

Bélanger-Campeau Commission and the government and national assembly of Quebec demanded a further response from the rest of Canada. The end result, as we have seen, was confused, complex, not well understood, and resoundingly rejected by the electorate. The referendum itself became an important symbol, and it will probably be impossible to have constitutional change in the future without a referendum. Perhaps most if not all constitutional changes will be rejected in referendums. Probably the most remarkable outcome of the referendum is that, for a while at least, it ended discussion of the constitution and all the urgent mythic and symbolic issues embodied in it. It is as though they had never existed. How long this quiescence will last is uncertain, but if the Louis Balthazar argument is accepted that Quebec nationalism is usually quiescent, and only around at infrequent, brief intervals, then there is a real possibility of some years of constitutional tranquility.

THE SYMBOLIC ASPECTS OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL PROCESSES

Living within and using a structure of myths and symbols is a necessary part of being human. Myths and symbols provide an explanation of the world and one's position in it, and give meaning and motivation to human action. In Canada the basic myths of survival and the garrison mentality became fundamental parts of Canadian literature and also joined the political sphere. These myths helped define and create Canada as a whole, as well as its French and English parts. The initial myths have developed into complex and competing visions, only a few aspects of which have been touched on in this paper. Each of the terms of discourse — nation, duality, province, etc. — has a story or stories associated with it. These stories, like all myths of the state, boil down into some sort of romance suggesting how some important actor (or people), threatened and imperilled, can conquer adversity and achieve happiness. Each of these stories describes only some aspects of reality, leaving many other parts out. Often the myths compete, as do duality and ten equal provinces. This competition does not need to be unhealthy or destructive. All myths and symbols are capable of many different interpretations and they can be related to each other in many different ways, such as opposition, conjunction, domination, subordination, complementarity, dialectical, etc. The competition and relationship between myths and symbols and their various interpretations gives dynamism and creativity to political life.

Some of the myths we have examined in Canada are so selective and partisan that they reflect a dangerously misleading picture of reality. Many need reinterpretation. Cultural and linguistic survival, for example, are no longer the urgent issues that they were. The English and French languages and cultures are both

alive and healthy. Both the Allaire and Bélanger-Campeau reports express a confidence and sense of power well beyond mere survival. At the same time, French-speaking Quebec still feels threatened and under attack, components of the garrison mentality.¹¹³ There are strong signs, in Quebec in particular, of getting beyond the fear and sense of being threatened and into more positive and creative attitudes. Among these new directions might be recognition of internal diversity and complexity and an end to the demand for a one-dimensional cohesion or consensus to combat outside threats. At the same time, there is a growing attitude in the Quebec media that Canada and Quebec are different entities, that Quebec is not part of Canada, and that Canada is irrelevant to Quebec. This is not only inaccurate and misleading, but dangerous as well. More of Quebec's trade is with the rest of Canada than with the United States or Europe, linguistic groups and provincial boundaries are not coterminous, Quebec is a powerful part of the federal government, and two hundred plus years of living together make the rest of Canada at least as important to Quebec as Quebec is to the rest of Canada. To pretend otherwise is to indulge in dreams and dangerous romances of isolation and purity.

At the symbolic level the main characteristic of the Meech Lake debacle was the process of increasingly crude simplification and polarization as the sorry story went on. In place of the rich diversity of myths and images that form the Canadian political heritage, there emerged a caricatured version of a monolithic Quebec nation under siege from a hostile English Canada, and of an English Canada whose very basis was threatened by unreasonable demands from French Canada. These symbolic visions were both incompatible and based on inaccurate perceptions and the "oubli et même l'erreur" that are part of myths.

The fact that these myths and symbols emerged as dominant and that opinion polarized around them during the Meech Lake process, show that public opinion is not fixed and absolute, but can and does change. The changes that occurred during the Meech Lake process have a strong likelihood of being harmful to the future of Canada and Canadians. They were certainly not what was intended. In fact they created the opposite of the national reconciliation planned by the government.

These counter-productive and unintended changes can to a large extent be explained through an understanding of symbolic processes. For this, the important additional factor to be recognized is that the Meech Lake process was extremely stressful and created a great deal of anxiety and tension in the general public in Quebec, in the other nine provinces, and in the politicians as well. The Canadian public was treated to a continuing performance of politics and executive federalism at their worst. At the beginning, any possibility of modi-

113 See, for example, Fournier, *A Meech Lake Post-Mortem*, chap. 6 "Sovereignty and the Future of French."

fication through discussion was rejected — some governments even appeared unwilling to discuss the Accord. As the process of ratification dragged on the stakes were continuously raised, so that Canada was threatened with disaster if a single small province failed to ratify the Accord by the set date. As the deadline drew near, the dramatics of night-long, week-long, first ministers' conferences filled the media. None of these aspects offered any comfort. Quite the opposite. They built up extreme tension, created a sense of terrible threat and uncertainty, and led to fear, anger, hostility and anxiety on all sides. The media coverage of the process, with its simple-minded emphasis on confrontation and dramatics and with the unquestionable biases, added to this atmosphere of crisis.

These moods and feelings created the simplification and polarization of symbols. Anxiety does this. Edelman¹¹⁴ argues that the stress of public anxiety in times of tension forces people to adopt simplified fantasies that explain the threats in the empirical world. Attachment to a myth replaces growing uncertainty and fearfulness (what Erikson called "ego-chill") with a vivid accord of who are friends, who are enemies, and what course of action must be pursued to protect oneself and one's friends and family. It channels individual anxieties and impulses into a widely shared set of expectations and scenario to guide action. The myth frees the individual from responsibility for his or her unhappy, threatened place in society and prescribes a clear and widely supported program for protecting one's identity. The way myth works in politics in this sort of situation shows the truth of Bruner's observation about myth: "The power is that it lives on the feather line between fantasy and reality. It must be neither too good nor too bad to be true, nor must it be too true."¹¹⁵

Myths create expectations, political roles and self-conceptions for the individuals who accept them. The degree of attachment to a myth and to the role it postulates, and the fervor with which the role is played, "depend upon (1) the degree of anxiety the myth rationalizes, and (2) the intensity with which the particular expectation that forms the central premise of the myth is held. Public policy is a paramount factor in creating both cognitions."¹¹⁶ In this manner the beliefs and perceptions of participants and observers on both sides in Meech Lake were formed by the process itself and, under the conditions of extreme threat and anxiety, congealed around the two crude and mutually hostile sets of myths symbols. People on both sides acted out the roles demanded by these myths. The media were more than willing accomplices. They were instigators and propagandizers for both myths and roles.

114 Murray Edelman, *Politics as Symbolic Action: Mass Arousal and Quiescence* (New York: Academic Press, 1971), pp. 54-55.

115 Quoted in *ibid.*

116 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

This unsatisfactory state is not the end of the story. Public opinion changed drastically during the Meech Lake saga, and is changing again. Change is certainly desirable. The crudeness of and hostility between the two presently dominant myths are potentially very dangerous. To Quebec sovereigntists the polarization and hostility might appear superficially attractive as grounds for separation. But these factors also make the likelihood of amicable separation remote, increase the probability of internal conflict between the component groups within Quebec, and make more likely the possibility of violence in a separation scenario. To those who would like Canada to remain together, the crude, mutually incompatible myths and symbols are the greatest obstacle to seeing a possible future of mutual cooperation and harmony. The process of discussion, and its emotional content, directly influence the nature of the myths and symbols. If the process is hostile, adversarial and highly emotional, if it creates tension and anxiety, then the myths and symbols will become even more crude, polarized and intensely felt. If the process is moderate, open and low-key, then the polarization and the attendant likelihood of disastrous outcomes is correspondingly diminished.

Two observations are worth bearing in mind about the Confederation debates. First, events and stories can be interpreted in many different ways. The Meech Lake experience itself is capable of this. So also are the terms and symbols of the debate, such as the meaning of nation, survival and multiculturalism. Second, all the stories, and all the terms, contain paradoxes and contradictions within them. These can and should be exposed, so that the open-endedness of the future and the wide range of possibilities for choice can be better understood. For Canada's constitution to adapt in an acceptable, let alone preferred, way, the myths, symbols and terms of discourse need to be subjected to critical public examination and discussion. The extreme polarization and intensification as caused by Meech needs to be avoided. Just as important, discussion and decision-making processes themselves need to be non-confrontational and calm. Anxiety and hostile adversarialism are the real monsters in the constitutional wilderness. The processes leading to the Charlottetown Agreement had this sort of moderation, but the debate leading to the referendum was more extreme. Some of this was caused by the media's liking for confrontation rather than moderation, some by deliberate acts, such as Prime Minister Mulroney's more alarmist claims.

The Canadian obsession with constitution-making embodies a particularly dangerous romantic myth: that constitutions and constitution-changing can solve political problems. Constitutions operate at two levels: the symbolic and the practical.¹¹⁷ At the symbolic level they are statements of noble principles

117 Raymond Breton follows a line of argument similar to mine here in his *Why Meech Failed: Lessons for Canadian Constitution making* (Toronto: C.D. Howe Institute, 1992).

and ideals that serve to encourage support and ideals. At the practical level they are legal documents that establish and interpret the law and define and constrain government. In Canada, the public argument about the constitution is largely about the symbolic aspects, with participants assuming that there is a close link between symbolic statements and actual desired outcomes. The existence of this close link is doubtful, but because it is accepted, many groups try to create through constitutional amendment changes that would be better made through the processes of ordinary legislation. But the discussion, because it is at the symbolic level, does not deal with the practical and lends itself to the processes of exaggeration and polarization described above.

The Canadian constitution, if Canada is to survive, must obviously embody and express the importance of duality, as well as of provincial rights, multiculturalism and other concerns. But it should not spell out the details of arrangements; these are much better left to legislation and the legislative process. There are things that constitutions cannot do. Constitutions cannot make government work, nor can they assure good policies. They simply provide frameworks within which politics and policymaking can take place. Constitutions (as Canadians ought to know by now) are far more difficult to amend than ordinary legislation, and far less responsive to changing circumstances and needs. Constitutions should embody eternal verities, not the concerns of the moment. Emphasis on constitution-making inevitably highlights symbols and symbolic issues, and draws on underlying myths. Like nationalism (to which it is closely related) it is Janus-faced and contains both constructive and threatening, destructive elements.

Yet Canada for 25 years has put enormous amounts of political time, energy and will into constitution-making to the neglect of many problems that need to be dealt with through ordinary policymaking and legislation. Poverty, economic development, deindustrialization, the fishing industry, environmental degradation, agriculture and crime, to mention a few, are all areas which need more attention than they have been getting. At their best, written constitutions are in large part symbolic documents stating ideals. These ideals then have to be translated and adapted into practical programs and policies. Constitutions do not, should not, and cannot define these programs and policies. Defining them is the labour of ordinary politics, a far more difficult process than is generally realized in the obsession with constitution-making.

The Canadian obsession with the symbolic concerns of constitutions has its harmful consequences in the neglect of the practical. Also neglected are the costs of the obsession, the harmful side of the Janus-faced beast. One cost is that constitution-making might fail, and the country then falls apart. The social and economic costs of this failure are likely to be horrendous. But even if the process succeeds, there is an inevitable cost in bad feelings, rekindling old quarrels, refighting old battles, reinforcing antagonism, reducing cooperation.

And there are further costs. One is economic. Investors, both Canadian and foreign, are unwilling to invest in unstable countries. Canada already suffers from capital leaving the country and too little coming in. Another is the cost of political energy and will that goes into constitution-amending. This means neglect of other social and economic policies that need examination and reform. A final cost is that the obsession with the constitution arouses unreasonable expectations. Constitutional amendment will not solve regional disparities, the tension of federal-provincial relations, the problems of our aboriginal peoples, or the position of the French language in North America. Nor will it solve any of the other various problems facing Canada. In fact, despite what is claimed, constitutional amendment has precious little to say about these topics, except to highlight them as problem areas. The Canadian tendency to indulge in the romance of constitutional reform is far more dangerous and costly than is generally acknowledged, especially by the many politicians actively engaged in playing the game and rolling the dice. Canada runs the risk of living a real-life tragedy by indulging in the romantic obsession of constitutions as cure-alls.

The myth of survival, victims, nations, garrison mentality, etc. described in this paper imply a dismal, fearful and oppressed existence in a hostile environment for Canadians. But other parts of our heritage, other myths and interpretations of myths, suggest that life is not all that bad. Some which have been alluded to above, such as the Odysseus myth, and some elements of the feminist critique, argue that life is good and has meaning, and that there are many positive factors in the Canadian experience. Much of the history of Canada portrays the successful accommodation of two major languages and many other ethnic and cultural groups exploring, settling, and cohabiting half a continent. Canada is one of the most successful and prosperous democracies in the world. These successes have been neglected in the current climate of politics of victimhood and resentment. The crucial point about myths and symbols is not that they describe the past, or explain the present, but that they define and create the future. The myths and their interpretations dominant in Canadian politics during constitutional debate do not propose a very attractive future. Other myths, other interpretations, now neglected, would serve Canada better.

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