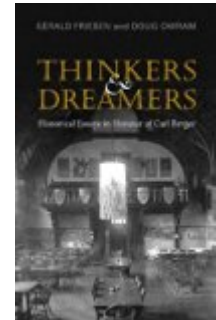




**Gerald Friesen, Doug Owsram, eds..** *Thinkers and Dreamers: Historical Essays in Honour of Carl Berger*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009. 320 pp. \$60.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4426-4195-2.



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The importance of Carl Berger's contributions to the writing, in English, of Canadian intellectual history can scarcely be overstated. Prior to the publication of Berger's pathbreaking first book, *The Sense of Power* (1970), studies of the life of the mind in Canada had largely focused on isolated issues and individuals. By contrast, Berger's investigation, which assessed the views of Canada's imperial enthusiasts between Confederation and the Great War, shed light not only on the objectives and anxieties of one group of people, but also on a broader--and enormously influential--climate of opinion that prevailed for a sustained period of time across much of English-speaking Canadian society.[1] Subsequent writings--principally *The Writing of Canadian History* (1976, 1986); *Science, God, and Nature in Victorian Canada* (1983); and *Honour and the Search for Influence* (1996)--cemented Berger's reputation as one of Canada's foremost scholars of the part played by ideas in determining northern North America's historical trajectory. Imaginative, judicious, and elegantly expressed, Berger's works ex-

hibited sensitivity toward both the lives of the imperialists, academics, and naturalists about whom he wrote and the sociocultural contexts in which their ideas evolved. Simply put, they have been integral to the development of Canadian intellectual history. Edited by two of his former students, Gerald Friesen and Doug Owsram, a recent *fest-schrift*, *Thinkers and Dreamers*, pays tribute to Berger and his tremendous contributions to this particular historiographical subfield.

To say that the essays contained in this volume are eclectic would be an understatement. They vary in terms of chronology from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twenty-first century, in terms of geographic setting from New York City to the Canadian West, and in terms of methodology from historiographical critique to cultural history. Yet, while the editors acknowledge the collection's wide-ranging diversity, they also emphasize that the essays are bound together by two commonalities: first, they reveal that, upwards of four decades after *The Sense of Power's* publication, intellectual history "remains a lively

and distinct field within Canadian history”; and second, they bring into focus “the influence Carl Berger has had and continues to have on the way [the subfield of Canadian intellectual history] is practised” (p. 11). Friesen and Owsram are correct. Seemingly incoherent though this collection may be, it in actuality attests to Canadian intellectual history’s enduring vibrancy and to Berger’s profound impact on the subfield’s growth.

*Thinkers and Dreamers* opens, appropriately, with an affectionate overview of Berger’s career by another of Canadian intellectual history’s towering figures, Ramsay Cook. While it is littered with amusing anecdotes—for example, Cook, who is clearly a long-time friend of Berger’s, recounts the time the two men quaffed beer together in Fredericton at a surprise party thrown for Richard Hatfield—the overview is by no means devoid of serious analysis. Quite the opposite—Cook, in appraising Berger’s work, offers the following insight: Berger’s ability to perceive important aspects of Canada’s past in an evenhanded manner derives from a deeply ingrained sense of irony. Central to this outlook, Cook states, is an appreciation on Berger’s part of the fact that, however compelling, the ideas advocated by intellectuals often fail to accord with actual circumstances, resulting in unanticipated—and occasionally unsatisfying—outcomes. Cook offers ample evidence in support of this interpretation, including the following excerpt drawn from *The Sense of Power*. “The imperialists,” Berger remarked, “are examples not of men who quested for Canadian identity, but of those who already found it and tried to bring reality into alignment with their vision” (p. 16).

The remainder of the *festschrift* is divided into four parts. The first, “Historiography,” includes spirited offerings on the practice of history by A. B. McKillop and Michael Gauvreau. McKillop notes that, while much good has come from modern historians’ emphasis on empirical rigor, an unfortunate byproduct of this orientation has

been a tendency among a great many historical practitioners to write in a formulaic manner that precludes expressions of authorial authenticity. He provides the salutary recommendation that, in addition to placing a premium on the careful accumulation and analysis of evidence, historians would do well to convey their findings in a way that reveals their innermost convictions, and that ultimately allows for the “connecting of self and subject” (p. 48). Gauvreau’s essay, which is easily the collection’s most provocative, takes Canada’s intellectual historians to task for their abiding interest in articulate elites, and for their commitment to an interpretive approach that is circumscribed by the boundaries of the Canadian nation-state. Such characteristics, he charges, have often prevented intellectual historians from engaging constructively with such subfields as social history—which typically concentrates not on the ideas of “great men,” but rather on the experiences of “ordinary” people—and with such conceptual frameworks as transnationalism—which highlights the arbitrary nature of political geography and the porousness of borders. Yet it would be a mistake to conclude that Gauvreau’s outlook is entirely, or even primarily, negative. On the contrary, he observes—rightly—that many of the best works of intellectual history produced in recent years have moved beyond the subfield’s traditional preoccupation with elites and the potentially stifling parameters of the Canadian nation-state. They have managed to do this, he explains, by investigating institutions like churches and governments whose influence has been brought to bear on large segments of society, and by casting a wider interpretive net that takes into account significant developments occurring elsewhere in the world.[2]

*Thinkers and Dreamers’* second section, “History,” includes essays by Marlene Shore, Ian Ross Robertson, Danielle Hamelin, Barry Ferguson, and David Monod. Shore’s discussion centers on the career of James Mark Baldwin, a prolific scholar who made key contributions to the development

of modern psychology. Arguably his most important innovation, Shore explains, pertained to the notion of the “social personality”—the idea that one’s behavior and conception of selfhood are influenced in large part through interactions with other people. Robertson’s essay discusses the involvement of Andrew Macphail, a vigorous public intellectual, in the Pen and Pencil Club of Montreal, an institution that drew together members of that city’s cultural community for the purposes of scholarly stimulation and fellowship beginning in the late nineteenth century. Hamelin’s piece focuses on a comparable institution, the Arts and Letters Club of Toronto, which was created in 1908 in an attempt to foster the cultural elevation of a rapidly industrializing urban center. Ferguson’s contribution, for its part, examines heated debates over citizenship that took place in the Canadian House of Commons during the first half of the twentieth century. Compounding tensions when it came to this issue, he explains, were an array of contentious phenomena, including partisan wrangling between Liberals and Conservatives; popular uncertainties over immigration from “non-traditional” countries; and, not least, struggles pitting proponents of an empire-wide approach to determining citizenship rights against advocates of a policy that would apply solely to Canada. Monod’s essay, which draws on a rich variety of sources and explores the ways in which members of the Harlem Renaissance “performed” blackness, concludes the *festchrift*’s second section. He contends that, in an era in which Victorian notions of racial fixity were beginning to crumble, influential African American cultural producers affirmed a sense of racial authenticity through literary and musical expression.

The third section, “History and Historiography,” consists of essays by the collection’s editors, Owrarn and Friesen. Owrarn’s piece considers an era—the Victorian Age—about which Canadian intellectual historians have written a great deal. He posits that three mutually reinforcing tendencies were characteristic of the Victorian mental out-

look in Canada: a belief among nineteenth-century Canadians that theirs was an unusually progressive period in world history; an urge to gain evermore knowledge about the natural world; and a sense of confidence in the existence of a superintending providential authority. Binding these convictions together, Owrarn argues, was a particular conception of truth, one that allowed such seemingly disparate phenomena as material acquisitiveness, scientific investigation, and religious faith to be viewed as complementary. For Owrarn, Darwinism was largely responsible for the disaggregation of this elaborate synthesis, thus bringing an end to the “Victorian intellectual world” (p. 226). Friesen’s essay deftly weaves together the experiences of the Kawata family, Japanese Canadians whose lives were irrevocably altered by the 1942 expulsion, and fluctuating trends in Canadian historiography. In addition to chronicling important moments in the family’s history—their immigration to Canada, their removal from British Columbia, and the successes of their university-educated daughter—he also discusses the varying ways in which their story likely would have been received by differing generations of Canadian historians. Friesen, in fusing history and historiography, ultimately sheds light on the complex interplay between experience and interpretation.

The final section, “Millennial Reflections,” consists of a single—and commendably ambitious—essay by Alan Bowker. He begins by asserting that, on account of such developments as technological advancement, global economic integration, and deteriorating ecological circumstances, the world has in recent years entered into a wholly new age. History, Bowker continues, can play a crucial role in this incipient epoch, potentially serving as a mechanism through which a sense of cosmopolitan interconnectedness can be promoted among the world’s diverse peoples. He concludes that Canada, as a country that has experienced several of the challenges that are now confronting numerous members of the global com-

munity (including efforts to preserve a degree of national autonomy while maintaining close economic and cultural ties to larger entities), is poised to play a lead role in nurturing an atmosphere of international cohesiveness.

The essays included in *Thinkers and Dreamers* have much to recommend them, including eloquence, thoughtfulness, and thorough research. Yet it is possible to identify two respects in which the collection might have been stronger. First, while several of the essays acknowledge the importance of developments taking place beyond Canada's borders, the authors for the most part do not seek to situate their studies in expressly transnational contexts. A greater emphasis on such conceptual frameworks as the Atlantic World, the North American Borderlands, and the "New Continentalism" likely would have made a useful contribution to the collection, in that it would have thrown into relief the extent to which intellectual impulses circulating in Canada shaped, and were shaped by, external issues and events.

Second, while *Thinkers and Dreamers* illustrates the vibrancy of intellectual history, the contributors nevertheless might have done more to integrate into their analyses recent developments associated with this particular subfield. These include writings on the history of political thought by such figures as Quentin Skinner, J. G. A. Pocock, and John Dunn, who have posited that the recovery of a given text's meaning hinges on the recovery of authorial intent, including the contextual circumstances that molded the writer's intellectual orientation.[3] They also include anthropologically informed emphases on "worldviews," which take into account the importance of unconscious attitudes and assumptions in influencing the ways in which people—including "ordinary" individuals and collectivities—conceive of themselves and the world in which they live. Such an approach, in Peter Burke's words, potentially serves to "occupy the conceptual space between

the history of ideas and social history," thus allowing the historian to avoid having to choose between "an intellectual history with the society left out and a social history with the thought left out." [4]

Yet such criticisms should not obscure the uniformly high quality of the essays contained in *Thinkers and Dreamers*. Diverse though they may be, the essays, considered as a whole, represent an important contribution to Canadian intellectual history, a subfield whose contours Berger and the contributors to this *festschrift* have done so much to shape.

#### Notes

[1]. Other crucial contributions to Canadian intellectual history produced in this period include S. F. Wise, "Sermon Literature and Canadian Intellectual History," in *God's Peculiar Peoples: Essays on Political Culture in Nineteenth-Century Canada*, ed. A. B. McKillop and Paul Romney (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1993), 3-18 (Wise's essay was initially published in the mid-1960s); and Ramsay Cook, *The Maple Leaf Forever: Essays on Nationalism and Politics in Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1971).

[2]. For institutions see, for example, Michael Gauvreau, *The Catholic Origins of Quebec's Quiet Revolution, 1931-1970* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005); and Nancy Christie, *Engendering the State: Family, Work, and Welfare in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000). For transnationalism see, for example, Michel Ducharme, *Le concept de liberté au Canada à l'époque des Révolutions atlantiques (1776-1838)* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010); and Jeffrey L. McNairn, "Everything Was New, Yet Familiar": British Travellers, Halifax and the Ambiguities of Empire," *Acadiensis* 36, no. 2 (March 2007): 28-54.

[3]. See Richard Tuck, "History of Political Thought," in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke, 2nd. ed. (University Park:

Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 218-232.

[4]. Peter Burke, *Varieties of Cultural History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 165.

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