

Eminent Pearsonians: Britishness, Anti-Britishness, and Canadianism

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Abstract



Britishness in mid-Twentieth century Canada is usually treated as a fading overseas tie, a foreign allegiance, or a mark of dependency and colonial immaturity. There is a tendency to assume a kind of Manichean division between pro-British and anti-British: either in favour of Canadian independence, or beholden to the British connection, and to draw too sharp a distinction between what was “British” and what was genuinely “Canadian.” However, a study of the Eminent Pearsonians – three generations of Canadians whose anglophilia and Canadianness were intermingled – suggests that they were neither purely anglophile nor quite anglophobe but a tertium quid. Britishness and Canadianism were far more interpenetrated than is commonly thought. The nationalism and internationalism of Pearson and his contemporaries adumbrated their adoptive English liberalism and British liberal imperialism. Indeed, Britishness was interwoven into the Canadianness of the actors, bit-players, and stage-hands of all classes, ethnicities and genders in the Canadian pageant. In the

positive sense of the term, Canadianism was an excrescence of Britishness.

Résumé

On a habituellement interprété la « britannicité » du Canada au milieu du XX^e siècle comme un lien outre-atlantique évanescent, un sentiment d'allégeance à un pays étranger, ou un signe de dépendance et d'immaturité coloniale. On a tendance à diviser de façon manichéenne les pro- et les antibritanniques – les uns favorables au lien britannique, les autres, à l'indépendance du Canada – et de distinguer sans nuance ce qui est « britannique » de ce qui est authentiquement « canadien ». Toutefois, une étude portant sur les célèbres Pearsoniens (trois générations de Canadiens qui ont assumé à la fois leur anglophilie et leur « canadienité ») suggère qu'ils n'étaient ni purement anglophiles ni tout à fait anglophobes, mais qu'ils se situaient entre les deux. La britannicité et la canadienité s'interpénétraient bien plus qu'on le pense généralement. Le nationalisme et l'internationalisme pratiqués par Pearson et ses contemporains étaient teintés de libéralisme anglais et d'impérialisme libéral britannique. En fait, la britannicité a coloré la canadienité de tous ceux et celles qui, de près ou de loin, et quelles qu'aient été leurs origines sociales et ethniques, ont participé à l'aventure historique canadienne. Dans le sens positif du terme, le canadianisme était une excroissance de la britannicité.

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