One of the accepted truths of Canadian history has it that the years immediately following 1896 were characterized by a climate of opinion most succinctly expressed by Sir Wilfred Laurier in his celebrated aphorism that “the twentieth century shall be the century of Canada.” Later writers, while displaying a healthy scepticism towards Laurier’s powers of prophecy, have assumed that in so speaking he at least typified the view which Canadians had of themselves and their country in the early years of the new century. In an article exploring “the theme of ‘Canada’s Century’,” F. W. Watt wrote of “the mood of Triumphant Exultation” which characterized these years. “The modern tradition of the Canadians as a modest, self-effacing race accustomed to underestimating themselves and their nation must be modified,” he argued, “at least for this period of Canada’s history when the twentieth century was being ushered in.” For Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, this was the age of “the great transformation”. “For the majority,” they wrote, “optimism was the ruling passion... This confidence, this boom mentality swept away all the deep doubts about the future that had hung over the early 1890s like a pall.”

For the majority this was probably true. Canada appeared at last to be coming into her own, as immigrants flooded in, more railways were flung across the continent, and an urban, industrial society began to take shape. “Prosperity has brought the self-confidence and the initiative that were lacking during the long lean years” was how a writer in Busy Man’s Magazine summed it all up. A minority, a small but articulate minority, of English-speaking Canadians, however, viewed the manner in which their country was developing with an increasing sense of disquiet. It was not so much that they questioned or even necessarily disapproved of the undoubted economic expansion unfolding before their eyes. They did harbour strong doubts, though, whether Canadian
cultural achievements were keeping pace with the expanding economy, whether things of the mind and spirit were not being sacrificed to material growth, whether, in fact, a distinctly "Canadian" culture were being created at all.

This theme had permeated Sir John Bourinot's presidential address to the Royal Society of Canada in 1893, before the magic of the Laurier years had begun to work. Despite his tone of determined optimism, Bourinot, in his summing-up of "our intellectual strength and weakness", had had to admit that he could not claim for Canada "any very striking results in the course of the half century since which we have shown so much political and material activity." Canada had not produced a single great poem or great history or even a "noteworthy attempt in the direction of a novel".

These statements were echoed by critic and artist alike during the next two decades. Illustrations of this frame of mind are not difficult to find, and only a few can be mentioned by way of example here. When Castell Hopkins produced his *Canada: An Encyclopaedia of the Country* at the turn of the century, he commissioned or reprinted articles by a number of prominent artists on the history and current state of the arts in Canada. Almost without exception these men were pessimistic in the extreme. "Our Art is not Canadian", complained J.W.L. Forster of painting. W.A. Sherwood was in agreement. "The want of a broad sympathetic interest in national Art", he wrote, "has . . . deterred the progress and, to a large measure, fatally injured this branch of the Art life of our country." According to Hamilton MacCarthy, sculpture was in an even worse state. "So long as the native artist is without encouragement", he argued, "it will be impossible to inspire a national Art, an Art distinctively Canadian".

The same charge was levelled at Canadian literature by Pelham Edgar of the University of Toronto. A foreign critic, he claimed, could deal with Canada's literary history in five pages. "No one," he wrote, "and this is the gravest charge our literature has to bear, has yet synthesized for us the meaning of our Canadian life, nor revealed us to ourselves. Mere scattered hints and faint suggestions we find, but no convincing picture." If B.K. Sandwell, later to be *Saturday Night*'s most distinguished editor, was to be believed, the performing arts in Canada were in even more dire straits. Canadian theatres existed, but solely for the benefit of foreign actors and foreign playwrights. Canadians had no place there, except in the audience.
Some of this, of course, can be dismissed as the normal whimpering of a small artistic and intellectual community which felt that it was not receiving the support and recognition from public and government which it so richly deserved. The theme is a not entirely unfamiliar one in Canada even today. These lamentations, however, went well beyond that. What was being questioned was not whether Canadian cultural development were quite as healthy as it might be, but whether a Canadian cultural identity could exist at all. Such pessimism in an age of certainty deserves investigation.

II

One very obvious factor militating against artistic and cultural endeavours—and one which was clearly recognized at the time—was the relative immaturity of the country. Much of Canada had not advanced even beyond a pioneer stage of existence in which all energies must be devoted to satisfying the basic physical necessities of life. This inevitably gave a strong materialistic tinge to Canadian society. Educational standards were low. Population was sparse and scattered. Governments were preoccupied with economic expansion. A common complaint of artists was lack of government recognition and support of the arts. "If the Government were to subsidize Art as France does," noted J.A. Radford, "Canada would be the centre of America as France is of Europe." 12

Lack of financial support, however, was seen more as a symptom than a cause. The real weakness of the Canadian cultural achievement lay in its derivative nature. Bourinot had suggested that this was inescapable in any new country. Only rarely, he thought, could an "original mind" break "the fetters of intellectual subordination." 13 The Canadian scene ought to provide plenty of scope for the creative artist, yet somehow it was not being interpreted in a distinctively Canadian way. The problem was rarely perceived as the lack of a distinctive subject matter, although we can perhaps be grateful that no one accepted Bourinot's challenge to tell of Laura Secord's "toilsome journey" in an epic poem. 14 Pelham Edgar suggested that the difficulty lay in using nature for subject matter. What was there, after all, to distinguish the Ontario landscape from that of New York State? 15 Forster, on the other hand, thought that the key was in the technique. "Our native artists, who have studied abroad," he pointed out, "are very much inclined ... to paint a Canadian sky with the haze of Western Europe, and our verdure as though it grew upon foreign soil." 16
Implicit in all of this was the assumption that art and literature are functions of nationality. Here, certainly, was an early example of the Canadian identity crisis. Northrop Frye has postulated the development of a "garrison mentality" in Canada in which the enemy without was "a huge, unthinking, menacing, and formidable physical setting" which separated Canadians from each other and from "their American and British cultural sources". Something of the same idea was advanced by Pelham Edgar in 1913. Arguing that "literary tradition and continuity" develop according to a kind of Hegelian dialectic, he suggested that Canada was severed from "these actions and reactions" by the Atlantic Ocean. As a result Canadian literature tended to be static if not stagnant.

The major complaint voiced by the English-Canadian intellectual community in the period before the Great War, however, was just the opposite. Time and again the cry was raised that there was far too much contact with the outside world, particularly with the United States. Many of these complaints have a familiar ring to them. In literature, for example, the size of the Canadian market made the publishing of Canadian authors a risky venture. Community of language meant that Canadian authors had to share their already inadequate market with British and American competitors of the first rank. The mere presence of these rivals meant that there was less incentive for Canadians to try their own hand. Then, too, there was a constant drain of the best Canadian talent to Britain and the United States. Such well known authors as Bliss Carman, Charles G. D. Roberts and Ernest Thompson Seton had sought greener pastures in the United States while others like Gilbert Parker and Sarah Jeannette Duncan were living and working in England. "In either case", wrote T.G. Marquis in his survey of English-Canadian literature for Canada and its Provinces, "these self-expatriated Canadians shape their style and feelings into harmony with their new conditions. They in time lose their Canadian colour and atmosphere and become a literary part of the country in which they have made their home." This process had reached such a point that, towards the end of the Great War, J. M. Gibbon, the man who would shortly thereafter found the Canadian Authors' Association, could suggest that the first answer which sprang to mind to the question "where is Canadian literature?" was "on the road to New York".

Artists voiced many of the same complaints. For a painter or sculptor to achieve recognition it seemed to be necessary for him to leave Canada. Apparently only when he had ceased to be Canadian would his work be taken seriously by Canadians. "The very resemblance of the work of
Canadian artists to that of the foreign schools”, noted W. A. Sherwood, “seems too often to be the only requisite demanded by the picture purchaser in our country.”21 Those who had money to buy works of art bestowed their largesse on foreign artists, and there were few public Canadian galleries to fill the void.

Increasingly the most significant threat to the development of a distinctively Canadian culture came to be seen as the Americanization of Canadian life. “You have little difference in language, in creed, in habits of living, in social intercourse”, Henri Bourassa informed Torontonians. “Toronto is more American than Quebec or Montreal.”22 These were blunt words, and, in view of the source, might have aroused resentment, had it not been that this was already becoming a monotonously familiar theme on the Empire and Canadian Club circuit.23 “Americanization” was not always very clearly defined. It might be a simple matter of whether the United States should be regarded as a “neighbour” or as a “neighbor”. Feeling on the spelling question ran high. “It says little . . . for our amenities in Canada”, fulminated a contributor to the Canadian Magazine. “that the suggestion cannot be made that it may be on the whole better to adhere to the system pursued in the parent country without raising angry protests that such a proposal is an indignity to Canada and betokens the worst type of ‘colonial servility’.”24 It was an absurd dispute and yet it was symbolic of the manner in which many Canadians of that generation clung to British forms and traditions as a shield against a creeping American cultural penetration.

Rarely was the relationship between British and Canadian culture and society thought out very coherently or explicitly since it rested on assumptions which were largely taken for granted by many people at a time when Canada was still very much a part of the British imperial system.25 Exceptions can be found to any generalization of this type, but some of these assumptions appeared so frequently in the literature of the day that they must have had widespread acceptance, certainly among the imperialist element who comprised a surprisingly large proportion of the intellectual community.

Central to this view of Canadian development was the Burkean vision of an organic society. “A nation must grow from the roots,” wrote Andrew Macphail, editor of the University Magazine, “and in this process of growth a thousand years are as one day.”26 Canada was fortunate in that she had preserved her historical continuity unlike the United States where bloody revolution had broken the thread. Here was the direct link between British and Canadian culture and society. It meant, for exam-
ple, that Canada enjoyed the full benefits of the British system of government, which had “broadened down from precedent to precedent”, while the United States had to make do with a written constitution which was the work of mere mortals. “It counts for something”, argued the historian G.M. Wrong, “that Canada has to-day a King Edward, as England had more than six hundred years ago... It gives this new society, in this new world, a certain old-world flavour that Edwardus Rex is still on the throne. The link with the past is unbroken. The contrast in outlook with that of a republic is sharp and important.”

Canada had gained more, however, than a superior constitution; she had been spared a revolutionary tradition. The American Revolution had bred an instinct for excessive individualism, which in turn had led to lawlessness and a spirit of materialism. Equality had been taken to mean, not equality before the law, “but the equality of exposure to violence and injustice.” Public life had been debauched, justice defiled, and society coarsened. Canada, on the other hand, according to the editor of the Canadian Magazine at least, was characterized by a “high moral tone”. Frequently comparisons were drawn between the lawlessness of the wild American frontier and the peaceful occupation of the Canadian West. Andrew Macphail could conclude complacently that “life is safer in a Yukon dance hall than in Madison Square Garden.”

These differences between Canada and the United States undoubtedly owed something to wishful thinking, but, if one accepted them, it seemed to follow naturally that contact between the two cultures could only lead to contamination of Canadian purity. Given the overwhelming disparity in population and resources, Canada could only lose. British contacts must, therefore, be encouraged and those with the United States lessened. American influence was criticised in a wide variety of areas of Canadian life, and not only by imperialists. Rodolphe Lemieux, one of Laurier's French-Canadian ministers, noted that “our theatres, sports, magazines, newspapers, are all more or less of the Yankee sort.” One writer saw great danger in the increasing links between Canadian and American labour and farm organizations, especially in the Canadian West. Another, a manufacturer, argued that the end result of American investment in Canada would be to “Americanise” the working class.
It was much easier to diagnose the problem than to prescribe remedies. According to the poet Wilfred Campbell, if Canadians had become Americanized, they had only themselves to blame. They had neglected to manipulate the instruments available to produce a strong national culture. They had failed to use "the press, the platform, the school, the pulpit, the library, the Parliament, as organizations to educate, influence and inspire our people toward Imperial and Canadian ideals." Demands were voiced for the use of the educational system and the national archives to promote the development of a national history and a national spirit. As usual the British connection was pressed into service. Robert Falconer, President of the University of Toronto, was active in promoting contacts between British and Canadian universities. Principal D.M. Gordon of Queen's called for the creation of "an imperial intelligence union". Implicit in all of these suggestions was the conviction that positive measures were necessary to safeguard Canada's cultural purity against contagion from the United States. Some form of protection was needed.

Few issues of public policy in late nineteenth-century Canada had generated so much controversy as that of protective tariffs. The decision of the new Liberal government after 1896 to maintain the National Policy in its essentials, together with the economic boom of the Laurier years, appeared to demonstrate that a prosperous industrialized economy could be achieved, despite American competition, through government intervention. Those concerned with the state of Canada's cultural health might bemoan the materialism of the Philistines, but they could hardly fail to appreciate the methods by which economic success had been gained. Could these same methods be applied to art and literature? Could the Canadian cultural identity be sheltered behind a tariff wall in the same way that Canadian industry was being protected? Some thought it could. "It was against this condition in matters of trade that Canadians revolted... with excellent ultimate results, a generation or two ago", noted B.K. Sandwell, "and, though our utilitarians are too blind to see it, it is quite as bad for our national life that our arts should be administered from foreign soil as that our industrial needs should be supplied by aliens." Appropriately enough this was written in 1911 while a pitched battle over freer trade relations with the United States was under way. It was not, however, a new idea. Almost a decade earlier, the Canadian Magazine had run a series on "the future of Canadian literature",...
demanding "a home market for Canadian writers and artists". "Why fill our libraries and homes with the enemy's literature?" demanded one of these pieces. By January, 1903, a new section was appearing regularly in the magazine, "Canada for the Canadians", a phrase, of course, which John A. Macdonald had popularized in his campaign for tariff protection for Canadian industry. Although ostensibly aimed at businessmen, "Canada for the Canadians" reiterated the need for cultural as well as economic protection. The Canadian Magazine had specific proposals in mind. A Canadian copyright law was urgently needed. A new postal agreement should be negotiated with the British government. Most important, from the point of view of the Canadian Magazine at least, was action to staunch the flow of American periodicals into Canada. It seemed illogical that blank paper imported from the United States should be subject to a 25% duty, books paid 10%, and yet periodicals could enter Canada duty-free. During the next decade the first few hesitant and tentative steps were taken to counterbalance American influences and to establish cultural protection.

A minor skirmish was fought in defence of Canadian theatre. The Canadian Annual Review for 1903 reported that on November 6, "the constant appearance of United States flags in Canadian theatres results in another hostile reception—this time at Vancouver, B.C. Three days later a similar incident occurs at Ottawa, and another on November 11th in Montreal." The most eloquent voice raised in protest against American domination of the Canadian stage was that of B.K. Sandwell. "You may look in vain", he said, "in a country such as Poland, occupied and administered by an alien conqueror, for any such foreign domination of the Polish stage as exists in Canada, although Canada has not been even invaded for the last hundred years." These were strong words, but probably no exaggeration. The Literary History of Canada begins its survey of Canadian drama in 1920 on the ground that there really was no "Canadian theatre" before that time.

According to Sandwell, the problem was not lack of theatres, but the fact that the theatrical business of the entire continent had become centralized in New York in one or two booking offices which exercised a monopoly. "The only road to the applause of a Toronto theatre audience", he complained, "is by way of Broadway." It was small wonder, then, that Canada produced few actors and no playwrights. The tragedy, as Sandwell saw it, was that the American theatre—to which Canadians were being exposed—was a violently "national" institution. Equally unfortunate was the corollary that modern British and European drama was unknown in Canada.
In an effort to break the American stranglehold on Canadian theatre, Frank Lascelles, who in his capacity of “Master of the Pageants” had managed the theatrical extravaganzas of the 1908 Quebec Tercentenary celebrations, developed ambitious plans for a chain of new theatres in the leading Canadian cities in order to offer modern British plays and develop local theatrical companies. Lascelles and his associates looked for advice and probably financial backing to Sir Edmund Walker, President of the Canadian Bank of Commerce. Walker was sympathetic but dubious. “Such a change would be in every way most desirable,” he noted in his diary, “but I could not encourage such a venture from the business aspect.” Nevertheless, by 1914 the “British Canadian Theatre Organization Co. Ltd.” had been formed and under its auspices both Laurence Irving and Martin Harvey performed on the Canadian stage.

Battle was also joined over the increasingly large segment of the Canadian market being captured by American periodicals, many long years before the O’Leary Commission was appointed to consider the question. Bourinot, in his presidential address, had spoken despairingly of the dearth of good literary periodicals—not those filled with “romantic gush and twaddle”—in Canada. According to John A. Cooper, the editor of the Canadian Magazine, the reason was obvious: competition from American periodicals which had an enormous home market, paid no duty on entering Canada, and could be sent into Canada at the rate of one cent per pound postage. “There is no prospect of any Canadian periodical succeeding in this country in the present situation,” Cooper warned the Empire Club, “without adopting means to which no self-respecting journalist should be compelled to stoop.”

Coupled with concern for the development of good Canadian periodicals was annoyance at the manner in which British magazines were being driven out of the Canadian market by their American competitors. Once again British and Canadian cultural traditions were interpreted as being virtually synonymous and in some significant way different from that of the United States. One of the villains of the piece was the British Postmaster General, who, prior to 1907, refused to enter into a reciprocal agreement to allow a cheap rate on periodicals and magazines between Britain and Canada. The Canadian government unilaterally lowered its rate to one-half cent per pound on material going to the United Kingdom, but British periodicals coming to Canada had to pay eight cents per pound, at a time when American magazines were entering Canada at a rate of one cent per pound. The cheap American rate meant that both Canadian and British magazines were facing for-
midable competition on the Canadian market. Of those British periodicals which did manage to come in, many were American editions carrying American advertising. Already some of the American magazines were adopting the practice of issuing a separate Canadian edition, but the editorial policy was not always kept separate. G.M. Wrong claimed that *Colliers*, “a powerful weekly in N[ew] Y[ork] with . . . a circulation of 45,000 a week in Canada, is preaching as openly as it dares, the doctrine of a Canadian Republic.”

Agitation for a tariff duty against American competitors met with no success, and Canadian periodicals were left to struggle along as best they could. The picture was altered slightly in 1907 when Rodolphe Lemieux, Laurier’s Postmaster General, managed to negotiate with the British authorities a more favourable agreement, which, according to Lemieux at least, led to a considerable increase in the number of British publications coming to Canada. This provided increased competition for American magazines, but it is difficult to see how it would assist purely Canadian ventures.

Another issue closely related to that of Canadian magazines and periodicals was the problem of newspaper wire services. Canadian newspapers were dependent for overseas cable news on the American Associated Press, and it was only natural that this news should be directed to an American audience and be reflective of American opinions and attitudes. This was irritating enough when the news stories dealt with European affairs. It became completely insufferable when British and imperial concerns were being discussed. “How much British sentiment”, demanded a writer in the *Canadian Magazine*, “do you think the Stars-and-Stripes enthusiast will let stay in it [the news] as it leaves Buffalo?” Concern was also voiced at the increasing use by Canadian newspapers of American syndicated material and even comic strips.

The agitation for cultural protection achieved its greatest success in the creation of a direct overseas cable service for Canadian newspapers. When, in 1903, W.S. Fielding, the Minister of Finance and a former journalist, introduced a bill “to assist in establishing and maintaining an independent and efficient service of telegraphic news from Great Britain for publication in the Canadian press”, he received support from both parties in the House. The government was to pay up to half the cost, on a declining scale, for five years, with the balance to be furnished by a new organization of major newspaper proprietors, the “Canadian Associated Press”. The service went into effect the same year, with two correspondents in London, and later was integrated into the fledgling
Canadian Press. Within a year of its founding complaints were being aired that the Canadian Associated Press was a creature of the government that subsidized it, and almost fifty years later B.K. Sandwell would complain to the Massey Commission that American wire services were still filling Canadian newspapers with news stories "written from a point of view and in a tone determined by the tastes of the American reader." The Canadian Associated Press was, for all that, an early attempt to use the financial power of the state to protect the Canadian cultural identity and as such helped to set the pattern for what has become a deep-rooted Canadian tradition. It was also virtually the only attempt during this period.

IV

Although the concept of cultural protection continued to be mooted, it was some years before governments in Canada became convinced either of the desirability or the efficacy of a system of tariffs and bounties to stimulate cultural endeavours and at the same time keep American influences at arm's length. From this concept eventually would emerge such bodies as the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the Canadian Radio Television Commission, and the Canada Council, as well as legislation designed to channel Canadian advertising dollars into Canadian magazines. All of this was in the future.

The seeds of these later developments were sown during the decade preceding the Great War, at a time when American cultural penetration seemed to pose a greater threat than economic domination. The reason for this is obvious enough. Economic domination had presumably been thwarted by the protective system. It was during the Laurier era that the National Policy reached its apogee. It was coming under increasingly strident attack, of course, but its critics assailed the uneven distribution of its benefits, not its effectiveness in sustaining Canadian industry. Few people, if any, yet realized that economic penetration could not be controlled by devices as simple as tariffs and subsidies. It would have been strange, in the heyday of the National Policy, had the idea of applying the same methods to safeguard Canadian culture from a similar threat not appeared. Little was actually accomplished in this direction before the War, but the concept of cultural protection had been given currency.

The impetus behind the protective concept was lost during the Great War, which necessarily diverted attention and energy to more pressing problems. The increased national self-esteem which the war effort generated perhaps also made the Canadian cultural identity seem less
fragile and vulnerable. When, towards the end of the war, J.M. Gibbon asked his question—"where is Canadian literature?"—he decided, in the end, that it was not "on the road to New York". Arguing that cultural tariffs and subsidies were irrelevant to the creation of great works of art, he suggested that the war years had produced a climate of opinion in Canada which augured well for the future. This, of course, was one man's opinion. Against it could be set Archibald MacMechan's portrait, a year or so later, of "Canada as a vassal state", in the first volume of the Canadian Historical Review. "The danger", MacMechan wrote, "... lies in gradual assimilation, in peaceful penetration, in a spiritual bondage—the subjection of the Canadian nation's mind and soul to the mind and soul of the United States." There have been few more persistent refrains in Canadian history.

NOTES

2. Ibid., 155.
5. John George Bourinot, Our Intellectual Strength and Weakness (Montreal 1893), 45.
10. Ibid., 484 - 85.
15. Edgar, 484.
16. Forster, 352.
18. Edgar, 484.
25. Many of these ideas are discussed in Carl Berger, The Sense of Power (Toronto 1970), especially chapter 6.
29. John A. Cooper, "People and Affairs", Canadian Magazine, XX, 3 (January 1903), 293.
30. Macphail, 103 - 04.
33. Campbell, 30.
35. Robert A. Falconer, "The Work of the Universities of the Empire", Empire Club Addresses (Toronto 1913); D. M. Gordon, "An Imperial Intelligence Union", Empire Club Addresses (Toronto 1907).
37. "The Future of Canadian Literature", Canadian Magazine. XVIII, 4 (February 1902), 387; ibid. 6 (April 1902), 578.
41. Sandwell, "Our Adjunct Theatre", 100.
43. Sandwell, "Annexation of our Stage", 23.
45. Ibid., Journal. II. 5, 10 March 1914; ibid., Carl F. Leyel to Walker, 6 August 1914; Martin Harvey, "Empire and Drama", Empire Club Addresses (Toronto 1914). It is not clear whether the Lascelles venture and the British Canadian Theatre Organization were the same.
46. Bourinot, 40.
47. John A. Cooper, "Imperial Postage", Empire Club Addresses (Toronto 1907), 214.
49. Willison Papers, folder 181, 18269, Lemieux to Willison, 9 May 1914.
51. Corbally, 568.
52. Canada, House of Commons, Debates. 1903, IV. 8231 - 8232, 8243.