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**The Mass Media in Canadian History: The Empire Day**  
**Broadcast of 1939**  
**Discours de la présidente**

Mary Vipond

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Résumé de l'article

Depuis les travaux marquants de Harold Innis, la communication a été un thème majeur de l'histoire et de l'historiographie canadiennes. Sur le plan international, des chercheurs comme Benedict Anderson, Karl Deutsch et John B. Thompson ont reconnu le rôle central des réseaux de communication, et particulièrement des médias, dans le développement du monde contemporain. Malheureusement, les historiens canadiens n'ont pas été très attirés par l'étude des médias en tant qu'éléments formateurs de l'histoire canadienne contemporaine. L'auteure du présent article a compulsé le Répertoire des thèses en cours de la Société historique du Canada et constaté que très peu de recherches au niveau des études supérieures portent sur les médias, et encore moins sur la radio- et la télédiffusion. L'auteure offre quelques pistes d'explications pour ce manque d'intérêt. L'article se termine avec l'examen de la diffusion, par la CBC, d'une émission spéciale sur le jour de l'Empire, un événement clé de la Visite royale de 1939. Cette étude de cas démontre quels mécanismes la société de diffusion a utilisés pour construire une identité sociale et valoriser les traditions. Elle illustre aussi qu'à plusieurs égards l'histoire des médias rejoint d'autres thèmes actuellement en vogue chez les historiens, comme l'histoire culturelle (spécialement l'étude des commémorations et des spectacles à grand déploiement) et l'histoire impériale (les relations entre la Grande-Bretagne et l'Amérique du Nord à la veille de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale).



**MARY VIPOND**

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# The Mass Media in Canadian History: The Empire Day Broadcast of 1939

MARY VIPOND

It has long since become a cliché to suggest that the key to Canada lies in communications. Since Harold Innis's seminal work on the fur trade, we have learned to think of this country along east-west lines of communication, waterways, railways, telegraph lines, and radio and television networks providing the technological means by which the country has been constructed economically, politically and symbolically. It has also been the case, however, that lines of communication have run irresistibly in a north-south direction as well – or perhaps I should say south-north. Today I wish to draw your attention to the symbolic construction of Canada along the tension lines of these axes of communication. More specifically, I want to talk about the importance of the mass media in facilitating communication of information and symbolic content in modern Canada, and the need I perceive for more historical examination of those media.<sup>1</sup> I will conclude with a glimpse into one of my current projects in radio history, as an illustration of how the mass media have been used to construct a sense of a Canadian community within a larger world and also to suggest some of the links between mass media history and some of the other preoccupations of contemporary Canadian historians.

But before focussing on Canada, it is important to note that my subject is one that extends beyond Canadian shores as well. As Benedict Anderson has famously argued (building, by the way, on the work of Innis and Marshall McLuhan), it was print-capitalism that “laid the bases for national consciousness” by enabling individual readers to imagine themselves part of language communities far beyond their personal contacts.<sup>2</sup> While he does not argue that communication through print (whether by functionaries or by newspaper owners)

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1 I define the mass media rather strictly to include only those media that disseminate content from one central source to a large dispersed audience with limited means of feedback. In the Canadian historical case, this would include the popular press, magazines, movies, radio and television.

2 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (2nd ed.) (New York: Verso, 1991), 44. On Innis and McLuhan see James W. Carey, “Harold Adams Innis and Marshall McLuhan,” in R. Rosenthal, ed., *McLuhan: Pro and Con* (Baltimore MD: Penguin Books, 1968), 270-308.

is the only factor in the rise of the modern nation-state, he does see it as the *sine qua non*.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Karl Deutsch argued from the social-scientist's functionalist perspective even before Anderson that "membership in a people essentially consists in ... the ability to communicate more effectively, and over a wider range of subjects, with members of one large group than with outsiders."<sup>4</sup> Again, while that effective exchange can take many forms, in most of the western world regional and national mass media have been one of the most significant means of communication, especially of the symbols of national identity, since the mid-nineteenth century.

From a wider angle social theorist John B. Thompson has suggested that the development of the media was "interwoven in fundamental ways" with other developmental processes to constitute modernity itself.<sup>5</sup> Thompson particularly emphasizes the way in which symbolic forms have become commodities bought and sold in the market, and the consequent need to examine not only their meaning, but also the social conditions that underlie their production and distribution.<sup>6</sup> The media, he argues, are central agencies of self formation in the modern world, and although they do not offer reciprocity between producer and consumer, neither are they simply one-way, monological, transmitters of power. Thompson also emphasizes that communication media, while constitutive of modernity, are also sites for the extension and consolidation of traditions, a point to which I shall return.<sup>7</sup>

Particularly during the last century, the mass media have been a major social and political force in western societies. We are all aware of examples of the influence of the media on modern historical events – Hitler's use of radio and film to stir up Nazi passions in the 1930s, the radio broadcasts that encouraged genocide in Rwanda in the early 1990s, the effects, both positive and negative, on the Arab world of the creation of the Al-Jazeera television network more recently. It is difficult to imagine any topic in twentieth century history – political, economic, military, social, or individual – that has not been shaped or conveyed by the mass media. Indeed, for most of the century many citizens of the western world have experienced major historical events *through* the mass media. Perhaps the outstanding example has been warfare. Millions of people, quite literally, followed World War I battles in the newspapers, listened on the radio to journalists' despatches from the front lines in World War II, and stayed glued to CNN's green-hued shots of Baghdad in recent months. But it goes

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3 Anderson, 65.

4 Karl W. Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality* (2nd ed.) (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1966), 97.

5 John B. Thompson, *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 3.

6 *Ibid.*, 11, 20.

7 *Ibid.*, 195.

further than that. These mediated versions of war have, in effect, become our war history. As John Chambers and David Culbert have put it, “The public memory of war in the twentieth century has been created less from a remembered past than a manufactured past, one substantially shaped by images in documentaries, feature films, and television programs.”<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the process compresses past, present and future; even as the event is being recorded, it is becoming history.<sup>9</sup>

Beyond the predominance of the mass media in providing news, information and propaganda, they are increasingly the source of historical knowledge as well. It would not be incorrect to state, I think, that at the present time in Canada more people learn about history from the mass media than from any other source. The proliferation of television channels devoted to history, the remarkable success of series such as the CBC’s “Canada: A People’s History,” Jacques Lacoursière’s “Épopée en Amérique: Une Histoire populaire du Québec,” Simon Schama’s “History of Britain” and Ken Burns’s documentary work in the United States all attest to vast audiences now available for mediated presentations of the past. While many academic historians remain uncomfortable about some of the forms this history takes, as the lengthy debate in Canada, and here at CHA conferences, about Mark Starowicz’s CBC production attest, it is a context within which we all live and teach.

But of course the mass media have played another extremely significant role in the lives of many of us in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. They have been one of the principal conveyors of increasingly powerful popular cultures – and indeed, it is often claimed, of a homogenized single popular culture spreading across the North Atlantic world. At the end of the twentieth century the average North American was spending over twenty hours a week in front of the television set, much of it watching big league sports, dramas and situation comedies. FM radio stations programmed by computer to play one hit after another now attract most of the listening audience. In classrooms, around water-coolers, and over the dinner table people discuss the latest hit movie or “last night’s episode,” both the mediated products of a huge cultural industry. The mass media are not the only sources of entertainment any more than they are the only sources of information, or of communication, but they are arguably one of the most significant in contemporary society. As Université de Montréal communications specialist Marc Raboy has put it: “As media institutions are among the constituting elements of our age, mediatization – that is to say the range of production and reception practices that media foster, as well as the particular

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8 John Chambers and David Culbert, eds., *World War II, Film and History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 6.

9 Andrew Hoskins, “New Memory: Mediating History,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 21 (2001), 337.

way in which they transform reality while producing it – lies at the heart of social, collective, intercultural, and international relations. At every level, from the local to the global, contemporary culture is increasingly subject to mediation.”<sup>10</sup> While acknowledging that Raboy’s comment concerns *le monde actuel*, a historian must note that we have been “increasingly subject to mediation” for over one hundred years, and suggest that it must be taken into account by those who seek to understand the history of modern Canada.

Given the range of ways in which the mass media are interconnected to the lives of virtually everyone in the modern world, then, it is imperative that they be studied as a variable, often a key variable, in historical projects. What is most important is that the mass media become opaque, that is that they lose their transparency and become subjects in themselves, objects of analysis. Given the potency of mass-mediated representations, questions about who has owned the media, how and by whom their symbolic content was constructed, and of how they have been received, need to be increasingly front and centre.

Unfortunately, this is generally not yet the case in Canada, despite the aforementioned realization of the centrality of communications to our history and our nation-building projects. What seems to be especially lacking is interest among professionally trained historians in mass media history. As one admittedly crude indicator, I have taken advantage of the search capacity of the CHA’s on-line Register of Dissertations to get a bird’s eye view of theses in progress or recently completed that have words such as newspaper, journal, magazine, revue, film, cinéma, mass media, médias, etc. in their titles.<sup>11</sup> Of approximately 3300 in-progress or recently completed M.A. and Ph.D. theses listed, I found just eighty-one that fulfilled that criterion. Narrowing my search further, I found that sixty-six of these, or about 80%, were being pursued in departments of history. Of course it is important to remember that a considerable amount of Canadian mass media history has been written by non-historians, and some of it is very good. But my point in making this distinction rests on two beliefs: that historians have skills such as research practices and contextual knowledge that enable them to make a particular contribution to mass media history, and that the number of historians pursuing mass media history is an indicator of the extent to which our scholarly community deems the field important to an understanding of the modern world.

It is difficult always to tell from the titles, but it seems that in many cases the theses listed in the Register of Dissertations treated the medium as transparent. Making quite a few judgment calls, and trying to be generous in my definitions, I found only about eighteen theses that were clearly *about* the mass

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10 M. Raboy, et al., “Cultural Development and the Open Economy: A Democratic Issue and a Challenge to Public Policy,” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 19 (1994), 303.

11 Accessed 1 May 2003.

media, as distinct from being about another topic as portrayed in (*à travers*) one medium or another. In my experience most students who do content studies utilizing the mass media do not query the structures or practices of their sources, although that may vary widely and may be changing.<sup>12</sup> Thus, I analyzed the whole group of eighty-one theses for several criteria.

Interestingly, my general search, including both those theses focussing on the media per se and those more concerned with content, picked up far more theses from French Quebec universities than from English-Canadian ones (forty-seven vs. thirty-three). Some of the largest English-Canadian schools like the University of Toronto and York, indeed, had virtually none. Probably one reason for the heavier representation of Quebec universities lies in the production of many more M.A. theses, *mémoires de maîtrise*, because of the switch to some sort of “essay” option in many of the English-Canadian Master’s programs. Controlling for this by looking only at Ph.D. theses reveals a less stark pattern – ten Quebec Ph.D.s versus twelve non-Quebec, but nonetheless an interesting one given the smaller number of Quebec universities. The bottom line: of the eighteen theses that I identified from their titles as being primarily *about* the mass media, in the sense that the structure and function of the media was the central historical concern, seven are from Quebec universities. Of these same eighteen, fifteen are History theses, and of the History theses only seven are at the Ph.D. level.

I realize that this is only a snapshot of one part of our profession. I realize as well that a perfectly sound history thesis can be written in, say, an *Études québécoises* program. But if students’ projects are any indication, the study of the mass media – remember here we’re talking about a data base of well over 3000 projects – is clearly not very hot. Even more striking to me is the fact that only six of my central eighteen and sixteen of my total involve a study of television, certainly the dominant mass medium of the latter half of the twentieth century.<sup>13</sup>

Why this seeming neglect? I have several explanations, related mainly to the training historians have traditionally received, and to their understanding of their responsibilities and role.<sup>14</sup> Certainly, for most historians up to the 1960s (for whom I will use the perhaps-unfair label “traditional”), the mass media seemed much too recent and contemporary a subject for proper historical analysis. The earliest solid works on Canadian broadcasting and film history in English-speaking Canada, for example, were written in the 1960s and 1970s

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12 So, for example, I made a distinction between a thesis sub-titled “Saskatchewan and the Arrival of Television” and one on “La révolution mexicaine dans le cinéma mexicaine entre 1930 et 1969.”

13 This also includes theses whose titles referred only to an examination of “the media.”

14 This argument is developed more fully in Mary Vipond, “Please Stand By for that Report: The Historiography of Early Canadian Radio,” *Fréquence/Frequency* 7-8 (1997), 13-32.

not by historians but by a political scientist and a film archivist/scholar respectively.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps more importantly, the historian of that era was unprepared to deal with the methodological complexities of studying the voluminous and often ephemeral products of film, radio and television.<sup>16</sup> Insofar as media history was examined at all before the 1970s, its students dared tackle only more manageable and concrete sources like newspapers, or more accessible topics such as policy history. I would suggest that another, particularly Canadian, problem existed as well. Because of the economic structure of mass media industries, social similarities and historical development, the English-Canadian mass media have been heavily American dominated. Traditional Canadian historians who assumed themselves to be part of the nation-building project saw nothing appealing about studying the Trojan horse of American media in Canada. That most of the work that was done was about the Canadian institutions created to counter that reality, the CBC and the National Film Board particularly, proves the point. Similarly in Quebec, where the discipline of history remained very traditional until well into the 1960s, most historians were still devoted to writing narrative political or intellectual history that explained or fostered orthodox forms of clerical and agrarian nationalism. As with their counterparts in English-speaking Canada, their indifference or opposition to modernism led to a lack of scholarly interest in modern cultural forms such as the mass media.<sup>17</sup>

As we know well, in the 1970s and 1980s something of a revolution occurred in the writing of history in both English Canada and Quebec. Social history, history from the “bottom up,” attracted a cohort of young scholars

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15 I refer here to Frank Peers' two volumes, *The Politics of Canadian Broadcasting and The Public Eye: Television and the Politics of Canadian Broadcasting* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969 and 1979) and Peter Morris's *Embattled Shadows: A History of Canadian Cinema, 1895-1939* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978). Several years later historian Paul Rutherford published two important works on Canadian mass media history: *A Victorian Authority: The Daily Press in Late Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982) and *When Television was Young: Prime Time Canada 1952-1967* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990). Subsequently his research interests have become more international in scope. There is no equivalent to Peers' study in French, but the work of Jean de Bonville on the Quebec press deserves note. See his *La presse québécoise de 1884 à 1914: genèse d'un média de masse* (Sainte-Foy: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1988) and *Les quotidiens montréalais de 1945 à 1985: morphologie et contenu* (Québec: IQRC, 1995).

16 Asa Briggs, “Problems and Possibilities in the Writing of Broadcasting History,” *Media, Culture and Society* 2 (1980), 8.

17 See F. Dumont and F. Harvey, “La recherche sur la culture,” *Recherches sociographiques* 26 (1985), 104. While, as Leonard Kuffert has recently shown, some English-Canadian intellectuals before the mid-1960s did ponder how the mass media could be used to counter mass culture, this did not extend to actual scholarly study of the subject. See L. Kuffert, “Responses to Modern Mass Culture in English Canada 1939-1967,” (PhD diss., McMaster University, 2000).



coming from varied backgrounds and influenced by international historiographical developments. New questions were asked, new kinds of sources utilized, and new methodologies adopted and adapted from the social sciences.

But there was little or no sign of interest in mass media history from this cohort, which is still dominant in our universities, either. The principal reason for that, I believe, was in a sense the opposite of the one that explains the pre-1970 period. The new social history tended, especially in the first generation, to be primarily concerned with the material bases of society rather than with the superstructure of ideas and attitudes, and cultural questions seemed in less urgent need of investigation. Moreover, even those adherents of the “new” history who were interested in cultural issues tended to perceive the mass media as being the *wrong kind* of culture. The media were centralizing and homogenizing forces, enemies rather than allies of the ordinary people and their struggles, the destroyers rather than the supporters of working class culture, or women’s culture, or folk culture of any sort. The mass media seemed to serve only the interests of the capitalist advertisers or the nationalist elite; they were part of the problem, not part of the solution. As social historians quickly moved to an emphasis on the agency of the oppressed and marginalized, scholars perhaps unaware of newly developing theories of audience reception found little to interest them in the “top down” history of the mass media. As Lawrence Levine put it for the American case, “Popular Culture [was] seen as the antithesis of Folk Culture: not as emanating from within the community but created – often quite artificially by people with pecuniary or ideological motives – for the community or rather for the masses who no longer had an organic community capable of producing culture.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, for both traditional Canadian historians and for the revisionists, an inherent suspicion of the mass media as ephemeral, trivial, superficial, and above all artificial and inauthentic has discouraged serious study.<sup>19</sup>

Most recently, beginning in the late 1980s, a small number of Canadian historians have shown an interest in the “new cultural history.” Many of these scholars have begun to use sophisticated theoretical models in order to bring onto the Canadian agenda such questions as how group identities are constructed,

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18 L.W. Levine, *The Unpredictable Past: Explorations in American Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 293. “Popular Culture,” for Levine, is virtually entirely the product of the mass media; he does not hold the converse however – not all media-produced cultural products are popular.

19 As Jeffrey Shandler put it in his book on the Holocaust on American television, “Many [historians] regard television in general as a destructive presence that diminishes or distorts the quality of modern life. ... From such perspectives – which assume television to be culture’s nemesis, rather than a creator of culture – the medium seems inimical to the very notion of memory.” Cited in Hoskins, 340. A good introduction to the critique of mass culture is Patrick Brantlinger, *Bread and Circuses: Theories of Mass Culture as Social Decay* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).

how meanings are contested, and how culture relates to power. Regrettably, once again few of these historians have chosen any of the mass media as their primary focus, and they continue too often to assume that the media by which these meanings are often transmitted need not be factored into the analysis of cultural practices.<sup>20</sup> But one may note here the observation made above that there seems to be a higher proportion of theses written about mass media in francophone Quebec than in English-speaking Canada. Quite possibly this is because the mediated popular arts are more indigenous to Quebec, and perceived to be more formative of its modern identity.<sup>21</sup>

Of course, challenging problems of methodology and sources do exist for the historian of the mass media, especially if he or she wants to include audience reactions to the mass media's representations of the world. It is not surprising that in my small thesis survey, I discovered that the vast majority of those being pursued are still about the more tangible and recoverable media of newspapers, magazines and film, or on regulation issues (sixty-five of the eighty-one). But many source difficulties can be surmounted with the same kind of imaginative and gritty research techniques that history students are currently employing with respect to projects involving court records or government security operations. And our media institutions and archives can be lobbied to save more material, and to make it more accessible. As social historians have modelled, we can endeavour to work in interdisciplinary groups where we can benefit from two generations of pioneering theoretical and practical work in communications studies and cultural studies. Absent the interest and enthusiasm of a couple of generations of supervisors, however, it is only the *rara avis* these days who pursues the mass media flight-path.

We historians do seem to be quite a conservative lot, and not only in Canada. Recently a review appeared in the *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* of a British book entitled *The Historian, Television and Television History*. The reviewer, an expert in media studies, seemed quite taken aback by the considerable amount of time the editors spent in their introduction attempting to legitimize the study of television history. This painful self-justification, the reviewer observed, made it seem "as if there [were] a need

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20 Mariana Valverde, from a different angle, also bemoans the unwillingness of a generation of progressive Canadian scholars at least to debate the possible contributions of tools from semiotics and cultural studies. See M. Valverde, "Some Remarks on the Rise and Fall of Discourse Analysis," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 65 (2000), 59-77.

21 Although not by professionally-trained historians, the following works suggest this argument: E. Lavoie, "La Constitution d'une modernité culturelle populaire dans les médias au Québec (1900-1950)," in Y. Lamonde and Esther Trépanier, eds., *L'Avènement de la modernité culturelle au Québec* (Québec: IQRC, 1986) and Michèle Martin, Béatrice Richard and Dina Salha, "La pré-modernité de Radiomonde: un pas hésitant vers un Québec moderne," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 65 (2000), 37-58. See also the extensive works of Pierre Pagé and Renée Legris.

to reassure ... superiors within the academic history establishment that looking at television, rather than paper documents in archives, [was] not a one-way airplane ticket to professional oblivion.”<sup>22</sup> Importantly, however, the reviewer then went on to offer high praise to one of the authors represented in the volume, Nicholas Cull, precisely for the contribution made by his historical formation. Cull, the reviewer argued, “a trained historian venturing into popular culture topics ... always goes to the archives and does original documentary research, eliciting much new material as a result ... In this way he shows off the best of the professional historian and of the historical method in general – a method which more in literary and cultural studies could usefully adopt.” “At the same time,” the reviewer adds, Cull “is not afraid to take risks, baulking something against the natural conservatism of the historian – indeed ... he must seem a veritable anarchist within his own field. Yet it is precisely the anarchists and risk-takers which scholarship needs if it is to move on and develop into the 21st century, crossing and challenging the discipline boundaries.”<sup>23</sup> And on that note I will end my appeal – let us bring the history of the mass media into the mainstream of our examination of modern Canadian society. We cannot fully understand it otherwise.

I would like to conclude by switching gears a bit and outlining one example of doing media history, in this case radio history, an example from some of my current research. Rather than being a definitive “paper” on the topic, it is intended primarily to suggest some of the kinds of questions that may be raised by media historians, and the connections that may be made to other issues of interest to contemporary historians, especially the interlinked problems of the construction of identity, especially national identity, and the evocation of tradition.

Let me explain first how I came to this topic. Having worked for some years on the early history of Canadian radio, I initiated a project two years ago on the role of the CBC as censor and propagandist during World War II. My previous work, on commercial radio in the 1920s and on the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission, the predecessor to the CBC, had brought me to a couple of conclusions. First, I believe it uncommonly important, although not always easy, to study the history of Canada’s private radio stations. Or if that is not possible due to lack of sources, at least to keep in mind at all times the extraordinary structural (and for my period regulatory) entanglement between Canada’s public and private broadcasters. Secondly, my goal is a holistic approach to radio history: that is, to study not only structures, but also professional practices, program development and presentation, and listener response.

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22 J.R. Cook, “Review Essay: History-Makers,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 22 (2002), 376. The book being reviewed is by Graham Roberts and Philip M. Taylor.

23 *Ibid.*, 379-80.

Once again, not always easy given the scarcity of sources, but then when is research easy?

Lately I have been thinking quite a bit about the origins of public broadcasting in Canada, or more specifically about the fact that Canada's first public broadcaster was created ten years after Canadian radio listeners, not to mention Canadian taxpayers, had become accustomed to a commercial, entertainment model for radio that was simultaneously local and continental but not national. The creation of the CRBC and then the CBC in order to safeguard the existence of a national radio network was an unprecedented and quite extraordinary step in the North American cultural context, and it was not necessarily a welcome one in many quarters. Thus, despite a constant lack of the necessary resources, the top priority of the public broadcaster in the 1930s had to be to establish its credibility, its legitimacy and its authority in an alien environment. It had to convince private broadcasters that it could regulate them fairly and work with them cooperatively; it had to convince taxpayers that it could make efficient use of resources that were being diverted from many other needs in the midst of the Depression; and it had to convince listeners that it had something different yet interesting to offer. A tall order, and one that the first attempt, the CRBC, failed to fulfil. Or at least failed to fulfil sufficiently to ensure its institutional survival.

In 1936, Mackenzie King's Liberals reinvented the CRBC to create the public broadcaster we know today, the CBC. But, of course, it was not then the institution we know today. Initially, its signals reached only about half of Canadian homes. It had only 132 staff members, a budget of less than \$2 million, and only seven owned stations, the rest of its network comprising affiliated privately owned stations.

Slightly less than three years after the CBC was formed, World War II began. Almost immediately the public broadcaster was called upon by the government to perform a crucial role as the only national outlet for war news and government statements, as a censor of both itself and the private broadcasters, and as the creator of morale-building programming of many types. By all – or most – accounts, the CBC acquitted itself admirably.<sup>24</sup> Not only did it perform all the functions just enumerated, but it created some of the most outstanding drama, music and public-interest programming in its history. The latter war and immediate post-war years were the “Golden Age” of the CBC.

How was the CBC able to accomplish this turnaround? One of the answers one commonly sees in the relatively limited literature on the CBC is that the

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24 The CBC's refusal to allow anti-conscription voices on Radio-Canada stations during the period of the 1942 plebiscite remains a black mark on its history. See Marc Raboy, *Missed Opportunities: The Story of Canada's Broadcasting Policy* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press 1990), 70-2.

organization “learned the ropes” with its first great endeavour, its coverage of the Royal Tour of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth in May of 1939. For thirty days, two teams of CBC announcers travelled leapfrog ahead of the Royal Train, taking turns hopping off to organize local radio coverage of the main events at each stop, frequently by using the facilities of the local private stations. All the broadcasts went out live to the CBC’s national network; they were also recorded at the Toronto studios and hastily put back together into fifteen-minute “highlights” re-broadcast each evening. It was quite a feat, particularly as it was accomplished in both French and English, involved hundreds of personnel, and cost the CBC well over \$50,000 of its own funds on top of the \$50,000 allotted by the government for the special occasion. For the first time the CBC was able convincingly to demonstrate that it could offer what Canadian private broadcasters could not – a well-coordinated cultural project, technically up-to-the-minute, and available simultaneously to interested Canadians from coast to coast. It gave the organization an opportunity to purchase new equipment, to practice using mobile and back-pack units, and to fine-tune the complicated loops and switches needed for a national network. A moment of social and national importance was seized upon to forge ahead technologically.<sup>25</sup> But it was also a moment that required the utmost cooperation with the private stations, involving as it did the pre-empting of commercial programming on the affiliated stations, and the borrowing of their announcers and technicians. CBC officials spent a lot of time once the tour was over sending out thank you notes!<sup>26</sup>

CBC managers were conscious of the potential of the tour from its initial announcement. Despite their recognition that private broadcasters must play some role, they persuaded the Ottawa organizing committee that the Corporation must have full control over all radio coverage.<sup>27</sup> After all, this was the CBC’s “moral responsibility,” and the prestige of Canada was on the line.<sup>28</sup>

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25 Peter Bruck, “The Genealogy of News-as-Discourse: A Canadian Case Study,” Unpublished paper, 1986, 9-10.

26 CBC General Manager Gladstone Murray always believed that both commercial advertising and private stations had a place in the Canadian system and prided himself on “establishing working co-operation” between the public and private elements. See National Archives of Canada (NA), RG 41, CBC collection (hereafter cited as CBC), Accession 86-87/031, box 176, file 18-10-8, Murray to [Bernard] Trotter, 23 January 1962, attached biographical statement. See also Murray’s friendly and cooperative letter about the activities of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters (the private broadcasters’ organization) to Joseph Sedgewick, 16 February 1941 in NA, MG 30 D67, E.A. Weir Papers, vol. 4, file 7, copy.

27 All broadcasts to the national network were originated by the CBC and broadcast to both owned and affiliated stations as well as any others that requested them; local private stations were allowed to broadcast local segments that the CBC did not want to send to the network.

28 CBC, vol. 242, file 11-37-14-2 part 1, “Royal Visit Broadcasting Committee, Report no. 1 (Final),” 14 January 1939.

And so was the prestige of the CBC, whose management was appearing before one of the innumerable parliamentary committee investigations into broadcasting simultaneously with the final preparations for the tour.<sup>29</sup> Just to be sure, the CBC arranged that its publicity department would “be constantly on the lookout” to make sure the organization received the “maximum publicity possible.”<sup>30</sup> Bob Bowman, who as head of Special Events managed the tour broadcasts, wrote somewhat facetiously to a friend about the CBC’s saturation public relations campaign: “We won’t miss a trick – you can bet your hat on that.”<sup>31</sup> The publicity department arranged for photographs to be taken that prominently displayed the CBC microphones; equipment and staff were featured in press releases; and the newspapers (particularly those that also owned private stations) were watched “so that proper credit [was] given. ...”<sup>32</sup> Striving for legitimacy in the late 1930s, the CBC found in the Royal Tour the perfect opportunity to perform, and to be seen to perform. Again with tongue in cheek Bowman wrote to BBC official S.J. de Lotbinière just after the King and Queen sailed out of Halifax harbour for home: “We seem to have come out of the excitement quite successfully. In fact, for the first time in our history, CBC seems to be popular. Do you think you could persuade the King and Queen to come back to Canada in two or three years from now?”<sup>33</sup>

Today I want to focus briefly, for illustrative purposes, on what was described by the CBC itself at the time as the “climax” of the tour, the Empire Day Broadcast from Winnipeg on May 24. It was a key moment in constructing the legitimacy of the CBC not only nationally but also internationally, as the broadcast was carried via the BBC Empire Service to many parts of the world and via the American networks across the United States.<sup>34</sup> As one frame of reference, then, the story of this broadcast is a story of one of Canada’s most remarkable, and controversial, cultural institutions in its formative years.

In the last ten years or so, one of the most fascinating and fertile fields of growth in cultural history has been the study of pageantry, processions, spectacles and commemorations. Issues of performance, representation, collective celebration and community are all raised by these studies. In Canada,

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29 CBC, vol. 748, file 18-16-2-32 part 2, “Parliamentary Committee on Radio: Notes for Evidence on Friday, March 24th, 1939.”

30 CBC, vol. 242, file 11-37-14-2 part 1, A. Frigon memo to E. Bushnell, 19 January 1939.

31 *Ibid.*, Bowman to A.A. Schecter, 15 November 1938.

32 *Ibid.*, A. Frigon memo to E. Bushnell, 19 January 1939. See also, *ibid.*, E.A. Weir memo to Murray, 24 March 1939. Regarding the visibility of CBC microphones, one employee quite candidly wrote that he was attempting to arrange the “fullest exploitation of [the] outdoor ceremony in Winnipeg.” See CBC, vol. 748, file 18-16-2-32 part 3, E.A. Pickering to Weir, teletype, 21 May 1939.

33 CBC, vol. 243, file 11-37-14-2 part 6, Bowman to S.J. de Lotbinière, 24 June 1939.

34 As were many other parts of the tour. The CBC personnel did everything possible to facilitate the coverage of the tour on the American networks and the BBC.

inevitably, these investigations often delve into questions of our relationship with our imperial past, French or English.<sup>35</sup> In this particular case, one can easily analyze the Royal Tour of 1939 as a pageant at which the monarch performed the Empire for his Canadian and Imperial subjects. This is another context, then, within which to examine the CBC's organization and presentation of the Empire Day broadcast in 1939.

The Empire Day broadcast had a history as well. George V was the first monarch to make use of radio as an Empire-binding medium with his Christmas broadcasts, begun in 1932. The patriarchal King's emphasis on the Empire/Commonwealth as a "family" of nations, held together by common bonds of principle, has remained a constant of the Christmas messages to this day. Building on the idea, in 1933 the BBC's newly created Empire Broadcasting Service put together a special program for May 24, Queen Victoria's birthday, also celebrated by schoolchildren in some countries as Empire Day.<sup>36</sup> The Empire Service's C.G. Graves, endeavouring to involve the Dominions in some of the programming, organized the public broadcasters to exchange short-wave "greetings" with one another and with Britain.<sup>37</sup> The CRBC participated by organizing the central segment in 1935.

35 See for example such recent Canadian works as Norman Knowles, *Inventing the Loyalists: The Ontario Loyalist Tradition and the Creation of Usable Pasts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); Colin Coates and Cecilia Morgan, *Heroines and History: Representations of Madeleine de Verchères and Laura Secord* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002); H.V. Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building: Pageantry and Spectacle at Quebec's Tercentenary* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); Patrice Groulx, *Pièges de la mémoire: Dollard des Ormeaux, les Amérindiens et nous* (Hull: Vents d'Ouest, 1998); and Ronald Rudin, *Founding Fathers: The Celebration of Champlain and Laval in the Streets of Quebec* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003). The remarkable participation in the "British World" conferences organized by the Institute of Commonwealth Studies is another example of the current interest in this topic in Canada and elsewhere. On Royal Tours in Canada see Ian Radforth, "Performance, Politics, and Representation: Aboriginal People and the 1860 Royal Tour of Canada," *Canadian Historical Review*, 84 (2003), 1-32 and Phillip Buckner, "Casting Daylight upon Magic: Deconstructing the Royal Tour of 1901 to Canada," in Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich, eds., *The British World: Diaspora, Culture and Identity* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 158-89.

36 One, perhaps the principal, source of the idea of celebrating Empire Day as a children's festival was Mrs. Clementina Fessenden of Hamilton, Ontario, in the late 1890s. See R.M. Stamp, "Empire Day in the Schools of Ontario: The Training of Young Imperialists," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 8 (1973), 32-42 and Cecilia Morgan, "History, Nation, and Empire: Gender and Southern Ontario Historical Societies, 1890-1920s," *Canadian Historical Review* 82 (2001), 491-528. Whether Mrs. Fessenden first conceived the idea is a matter of some dispute; it is clear that it was spread in Britain and other Dominions mainly by the Earl of Meath, an English imperialist activist. See J.O. Springhall, "Lord Meath, Youth, and Empire," *Journal of Contemporary History* 5 (1970), 97-111 and John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 231-2.

37 Gerard Mansell, *Let the Truth Be Told: 50 Years of BBC External Broadcasting* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982), 30.

Between 1936 and 1938 there were no Christmas broadcasts or Empire Day programs, although there were a number of “royal” broadcasts, as the British monarchy was going through one of its larger crises after the death of George V and the abdication of Edward VIII. Once crowned, George VI, despite his shyness and stutter, decided to re-institute his father’s useful Christmas-time radio appearances, but announced just before Christmas 1938 that he would delay that year’s address until Empire Day, when, as was already known, he would be in Canada.

Once the Canadian schedule was worked out, it became clear that on May 24 the King and Queen would be in Winnipeg. This was most appropriate, or so it was said, because Winnipeg was “the geographical centre” not only of Canada but of the whole Empire!<sup>38</sup> So in the midst of a busy day of other activities, the King and Queen retired for half an hour to the library of Manitoba’s Government House, where he delivered a fifteen-minute speech full of the familiar rhetoric of the Imperial family and its bond. “It is not in power or wealth alone, nor in dominion over other peoples,” he asserted, “that the true greatness of an Empire consists. Those things are but the instruments; they are not the end or the ideal. The end is freedom, justice and peace in equal measure for all, secure against attack from without and from within.”<sup>39</sup> And, of course, here one must add yet another contextual matter. The Royal Tour, which included four days in the United States, was, some argue, intended as a means of rallying the support of Canadians, and probably more importantly of Americans, to Britain’s side in what was becoming clear was a looming war.<sup>40</sup> And so the language was particularly that of the solidarity and community not only of the Empire, but also of the English-speaking peoples. “The faith in reason and fair play, which we share with [the United States],” the King intoned, “is one of the chief ideals that guide the British Empire in all its ways to-day.” The torch was being passed from the “Old World” to the “New”; in these days when “the skies are overcast,” the youth of North America must lead the future with “faith, hope and love,” he concluded.

Prior to the King’s speech, and at the initiative of the BBC, a program comprised of CBC-organized broadcast greetings to the King from different parts of the Empire was aired.<sup>41</sup> Fortunately the continuity for this program survives

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38 CBC, vol. 749, file 18-16-2-48, CBC press release “Bulletin No. 4,” 24 April 1939.

39 Text taken from R.K. Carnegie, *And the People Cheered* (Ottawa: self-published, 1939), 136-7.

40 See H.L. Keenleyside, *Hammer the Golden Day: Memoirs of Hugh L. Keenleyside*, vol. 1 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1981), 498. Keenleyside was the Secretary to the Canadian Organizing Committee for the tour.

41 Earlier Empire Day programs had not tended to emphasize the monarch so much. See John M. MacKenzie, “‘In Touch with the Infinite’: The BBC and the Empire, 1923-53,” in John M. MacKenzie, ed., *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 171.



and both the script and its production bear some further analysis. First, it needs to be stated that the process of drafting the script is not totally clear. Apparently at the request of the CBC's General Manager, Gladstone Murray,<sup>42</sup> Felix Greene, the BBC's North American representative (based in New York), wrote the first draft, which he then revised in consultation with CBC program producers in Toronto. A draft was shown to Murray, who suggested some changes in it.<sup>43</sup> The rest of the program – the technical connections, the incidental music (arranged and directed by Percy Faith), and the announcing – were in the charge of CBC personnel. The BBC agreed to contribute half the cost of the program, up to a maximum of 500 pounds.<sup>44</sup>

The script begins, of course, with "God Save the King," followed by the announcement: "This is Canada calling the British Empire."<sup>45</sup> After a few more spoken words, a fanfare is played, and then a segue is made into, no surprise, Elgar's "Pomp and Circumstance" ("Land of Hope and Glory").<sup>46</sup> The announcer (Rupert Lucas, a long-time CBC Toronto employee and actor), then sets the tone and the theme with the following words (drafted by Gladstone Murray): "Canada calls all British people to pay homage to His Majesty, who, for the first time, visits us as our King. Our Empire is founded on freedom; its strength rests not upon force, but upon consent; not upon the outward forms of pomp and ceremony, but upon the lives and thoughts and daily tasks of all of us who dwell within it. The crown is to us all a symbol of justice and tolerance."

After a bit more "Pomp and Circumstance," the script moves to its main focus, the mutual distribution of greetings. Here one important principle, emphasized time and again by Murray, prevailed: there were to be no "ponderous" or "pontifical" politicians or leaders; ordinary people were to convey their ordinary sentiments of loyalty and community. The fundamental note

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42 Murray, born in Canada, had worked for a number of years for the BBC before being named to head the CBC in 1936. Murray was known within the BBC as one of the group that believed that the BBC gained both political and public support by identifying with Empire sentiments. See John M. MacKenzie, "Introduction," in MacKenzie, ed., 12. See also MacKenzie, "In Touch with the Infinite," 171-2.

43 Only minor revisions were made, however. Murray's principal suggestion, that the broadcast lacked a "touch of religion" which could be resolved by including the 90th Psalm and Healey Willan's "Te Deum," was not pursued. CBC, vol. 749, file 18-16-2-48, Murray to Bushnell, 24 April 1939, attachment.

44 CBC, vol. 748, file 18-16-2-32 part 1, B.E. Nicholls to Murray, 27 January 1939.

45 CBC, vol. 749 file 18-16-2-32 part 6, "The Empire Day Programme: Canada: Wednesday May 24, 1939," 21 pp.

46 This type of martial imperial music was virtually iconographic by the 1930s. It was also very popular with listeners and made good use of radio's special qualities. See John M. MacKenzie, "Propaganda and the BBC Empire Service, 1939-42," in Jeremy Hawthorn, ed., *Propaganda, Persuasion and Polemic* (London: Edward Arnold, 1987), 43 and John M. MacKenzie, "In Touch with the Infinite," 179-80.

was to be the “simplicity of a family,” absent all vainglory, pomp or power.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, the speeches were all carefully scripted, and as far as can be determined mainly read by actors, with colloquial expressions added to the script to enhance their “authenticity.”<sup>48</sup> Here we see evidence of the assumptions of professional radio by the end of the 1930s. It was well accepted that radio’s strength lay in its intimate, personal appeal. Strident or pompous declarative speeches simply were not appropriate to a medium that penetrated to the family hearth. This also, as I have already suggested, coincided well with George V’s use of radio, and, of course, with that of skilled contemporary communicator Franklin Delano Roosevelt.<sup>49</sup> At the same time, however, the music chosen for the program was martial, dramatic and soul-stirring. The mixture of the two elements provided an ambiguous balance much like the one the monarchy itself was maintaining at the time: striving to “personalize” the royal family while refusing to abandon the prestige, the ceremony, or the luxury lifestyle.<sup>50</sup>

After a few bars of “O Canada” came the Canadian voices: a deep sea fisherman from Nova Scotia, a “descendant of one of French Canada’s oldest families” from Montreal (speaking in French and untranslated), an elevator operator from the Bank of Commerce building in Toronto (“the highest building in the British Empire”), a farmer’s wife from Saskatchewan, a northern bush pilot based in Edmonton, and a dock worker from Vancouver. These choices were quite carefully considered. For example, Murray rejected an initial suggestion that an apple grower from the Annapolis Valley might represent the Maritimes on the grounds that “the fruit business in Canada is fairly competitive” and that fruit-growers in the Niagara Peninsula and British Columbia might take offence. Instead, Murray suggested, “It might be better to have an old-time farmer ... of one of the remote counties of Nova Scotia or New Brunswick. Preferably one who still uses oxen.”<sup>51</sup>

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47 CBC, vol. 748, file 18-16-2-32 part 2, “Parliamentary Committee on Radio: Notes for Evidence on Friday, March 24th, 1939.”

48 CBC, vol. 749, file 18-16-2-48, Murray to B.E. Nicholls, 30 January 1939. All BBC broadcasts were scripted prior to World War II (Paddy Scannell, personal communication). While aired “live” from the various points of origin, the greetings were in fact pre-recorded. The BBC had copies of the records on hand in case short-wave transmission and reception were poor. In the end it had to substitute its records only for the voices of the speakers from Southern Rhodesia and New Zealand.

49 In a recent book Rae Fleming suggests that the purpose of the tour was to “humanize” royalty, to move beyond ritual, which it was very good at, to “rapport.” His book focuses on the photography of the tour. R.B. Fleming, *The Royal Tour of Canada: The 1939 Royal Visit of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth* (Toronto: Lynx Images, 2002), 5.

50 John M. MacKenzie makes a similar point in “In Touch with the Infinite,” 186-7.

51 CBC, vol. 749, file 18-16-2-48, Murray teletype to [Charles] Jennings, 6 March 1939.

The general theme and tone are well represented by the voice of the Saskatchewan farmer's wife, Mrs. R.W. McKinnon: "For the people of the Prairie Provinces I'm pleased to send Your Majesties warm and loyal greetings. I'm the wife of a Saskatchewan farmer and I'm speaking to you from the living room of our home. We live on a thousand acres of land nine miles southwest of Regina. My husband and three of our children are here with me. ... Farming is not always an easy life, and we have our share of difficulties. But we're happy here, and thankful for the many blessings we enjoy. And we're proud to be a part of the family of nations." This farmer's wife and a school-girl from New Zealand were, by the way, the only women's voices heard on the program. This text also included one of the rare allusions to the Depression.

For the speakers from the rest of the Empire, Murray wired to the heads of the various public broadcasting organizations with suggestions as to what might be appropriate, but left the selection of individuals to them. He wanted, he wrote, "simple, heartfelt messages from ordinary folk whose jobs are typical of the country." Thus he suggested to C.J.A. Moses of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation that a doctor from the aerial medical service would be good, for this work had a "definite capacity to fire the imagination."<sup>52</sup> Similarly, he recommended to Southern Rhodesia a tobacco planter and to New Zealand a "Maori chief." He asked the BBC to select the representatives from England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, but had strong ideas about whom: the Englishman should preferably be from Yorkshire and definitely not from the south, the representative of Northern Ireland a linen weaver, and from Wales of course a miner "from the Rhondda valley."<sup>53</sup> His request to the head of South African Broadcasting that one of the speakers be a "native," by which he meant someone capable of giving a greeting in Afrikaans, reveals the assumptions of many of his time.<sup>54</sup>

The greatest difficulty was with India. Murray had suggested to Lionel Fielden of All-India Radio that perhaps an elephant driver would be a good representative of the "colorful variety [of] life within [the Empire]."<sup>55</sup> Fielden resisted, however, claiming that such a choice would cause an "almighty row." While Murray and Felix Greene both believed that the selection of an "Anglo-Indian" would destroy any sense of the romance of India, they compromised and accepted Fielden's suggestion that renowned Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore be asked to write and read a short poem for the occasion. Tagore thus became the

52 Ibid., Murray to Moses, 8 March 1939.

53 Ibid., Murray teletype to Jennings, 6 March 1939.

54 Ibid., Murray to Rene Caprora, 8 March 1939. Murray's stereotypes were typical of contemporary imperial discourse in Britain. See MacKenzie, "'In Touch with the Infinite,'" 182-3 and Stephen Constantine, "'Bringing the Empire Alive': The Empire Marketing Board and Imperial Propaganda, 1926-33," in MacKenzie, ed., 217.

55 CBC, vol. 749, file 18-16-2-48, Murray telegram to Fielden, 8 March 1939.

only internationally known “representative.”<sup>56</sup> In the end, among others, two engine drivers (one English, one Afrikaans) from South Africa were featured, a schoolgirl and a Maori university student from New Zealand, a schoolmaster from Glasgow, and a young apprentice naval officer from England. A quick approximation of distribution by class reveals three working-class speakers, five lower-middle and middle-class, two from farms, and eight upper-middle-class, including most of the non-English speakers.<sup>57</sup> With the exception of the Canadian French, when the greetings were in another tongue (Bengali, Afrikaans, Maori), they were shorter, leaving time for a translation. Each segment was introduced with appropriate local music and the continuity placed great emphasis on the rootedness and distinctiveness of place, devoting much space to lovingly detailed descriptions of the geography and scenery of each country. One notes the ambiguous message here as well. Whose places exactly were these? There were precisely two rather unrepresentative voices of indigenous peoples, Tagore and the Maori university student. Where were the Aborigines, the Canadian First Nations, the Africans of Rhodesia or South Africa – those truly rooted in the land? Where, indeed, was the Indian elephant-driver? Where were the women? The immigrants of other national origins now settled in the Dominions? The choices made illustrated a certain BBC view of its audience with which both Greene and Murray were imbued. The BBC had initially developed its Empire Service in the early 1930s targeted mainly to the Dominions and the whites in the colonies. While by the end of the 1930s there was a dawning realization in London that service in native languages to the indigenous peoples of the colonies and elsewhere would soon be necessary, if only to counteract German colonial radio propaganda, the principal radio focus remained on “kith and kin overseas.”<sup>58</sup> With this approach Murray clearly agreed. One of his criticisms of the first version of the script was that it did not suggest strongly enough that this great Empire was the product of the exodus of hard-working, freedom-loving Britons to all parts of the world.<sup>59</sup> These white, British and English-speaking men and women remained the imagined audience for the Empire Day broadcast of 1939.

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56 *Ibid.*, Jennings to Murray, teletype, 15 March 1939. Fielden, who had previously worked for the BBC, was known to be quite conservative in his cultural tastes, believing that the BBC Empire Service should concentrate on “giving the world the best” of English culture. See Mansell, 36.

57 Those not previously mentioned were the West Indies’ representative, Sir William Morrison of Jamaica, and R.S. Furlong, a Newfoundland lawyer. This survey is only impressionistic; deeper analysis of the class formation of each society would be necessary for a definitive count.

58 Mansell, 35.

59 CBC, vol. 749, file 18-16-2-48, Murray to Bushnell, 24 April 1939, attachment. Murray’s concept of the Empire as an expansion of British settlers and values, with its emphasis on Britain and the white settler Dominions as components of a “British world,” was widely shared at this time. See Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich, “Mapping the British World,” in Bridge and Fedorowich, eds., 3-4.

And yet there are ambiguities here too. Clearly the other European founding peoples of Canada and South Africa, the French and the Afrikaners, were considered to be a part of this community. It seems to have extended, at least in the mind of those in charge in India and New Zealand, to well-educated “natives.” Moreover – and this was a matter the Empire Service had struggled with over the years – it in some ways included listeners in by far the largest English-speaking country in the world, the United States.<sup>60</sup> Certainly the King’s message was explicitly inclusive of this group, for the pressing reasons of the day.

The actual audience’s reaction to the program is difficult to assess; we do not even know how large that audience was. It is always easier for media historians to analyze responses to a genre, a series or a trend than to one specific program. The National Archives files do contain a number of congratulatory telegrams (carefully copied for distribution to the CBC Board of Governors) from broadcasting officials and friends of the CBC, and of course an official letter from the King to the same effect. A couple of letters from ordinary listeners expressed praise particularly for the work of Rupert Lucas and Percy Faith.<sup>61</sup> One that undoubtedly tickled Murray’s fancy came from the owner of a commercial radio booking company, who commented: “This broadcast must have convinced everyone that the CBC can handle a program of this sort just as efficiently as any other broadcasting system in the world.”<sup>62</sup> Louvigny de Montigny of Montreal made the same point: “Such an achievement is undoubtedly the best answer that can ever be offered to your critics.”<sup>63</sup>

There were some complaints as well, however. One came from J.M. MacCormack of Montreal, Scots by birth but long resident in Canada, who reported that he had been left with “mingled feelings of indignation, shame and disgust” because the only voice that failed specifically to send greetings to Their Majesties was the one from Scotland. Even worse, the Glasgow schoolmaster had spent the first few sentences thanking an acquaintance in Windsor, Ontario for sending a box of apples to his mother the previous Christmas. MacCormack felt this was in “extremely bad taste,” for it would only reinforce

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60 Mansell, 23. This all-inclusive approach towards the “British world” existed not only among broadcasters; Charles Dilke and Winston Churchill both expressed similar views. See Bridge and Fedorowich, “Mapping the British World,” 8.

61 For example, CBC, vol. 749, file 18-16-2-48, O.G. Smith to Murray, 24 May 1939, who called the broadcast “soul stirring and heart warming.” See also the letters from Reta Penwarden and Mr. and Mrs. Dean in vol. 749, file 18-16-2-32 part 5, CBC Information and Press Service, “Excerpts from Letters of Listeners.”

62 CBC, vol. 749, file 18-16-2-48, Guy Herbert to “Bill” Murray, 25 May 1939.

63 *Ibid.*, Louvigny de Montigny to Murray, 25 May 1939. While this letter addressed the broadcasts of the whole tour, it was sent the day after the Empire broadcast, so seems to have been inspired by it.

the stereotype of the “mean Scotch” who would waste valuable international airtime in order to save three half-pence in postage!<sup>64</sup> More significant protests came from Victoria, B.C. and from the province of New Brunswick. In Victoria’s case, the problem was the CBC announcers’ habit of naming the western end of the tour as Vancouver Island, or, even worse, just Vancouver.<sup>65</sup> In New Brunswick, led by an outraged Saint John newspaper owner, and fomented to some extent by both provincial and federal politicians, a huge outcry erupted over the fact that the Maritimes had been represented, once again, by a Nova Scotian.<sup>66</sup> Various grievances against the CBC were repeated in a flurry of correspondence that clearly disturbed Murray considerably. While it all died down soon enough, Murray came to the conclusion that this “panoramic” type of Empire broadcast was probably inappropriate, as “the risks of giving offence [were] just too great.”<sup>67</sup> One may note, nevertheless, that the deep feeling of Mr. MacCormack and the fury emanating from the New Brunswickers reveals the significance the broadcast held in their eyes.

The whole Empire broadcast project, then, had both positive and negative elements. The cost was quite extraordinary, coming to over \$10,500 all told, of which the BBC contributed only about \$2,200. But the CBC’s capabilities were demonstrated to the nation, the continent, and the Empire. The King and Queen were honoured with the traditional rhetoric of loyalty, consensual family bonds and glorious music. At the same time, however, amidst the pageantry and evocation of the glorious past lay the dark shadow of the looming war, the most urgent reason for the King’s call to the Empire/Commonwealth to rally around the tradition of liberty. The poem contributed by Tagore (for which he was paid 1000 rupees or about 75 pounds) struck a note sharply in contrast to the rest of the Empire Day program, but one that expressed its deepest motive. In translation it read in its entirety:

On this great occasion this is my message to Canada;-  
Through the troubled history of man comes sweeping a blind fury and the  
towers of civilisation topple down to dust.

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64 Ibid., J.M. MacCormack to BBC, 31 May 1939, copy. MacCormack thought the text was the BBC’s, and hoped that Murray, as a Scotsman himself, would share his feelings and would launch a protest with the BBC. Unfortunately no reply survives.

65 CBC, vol. 243, file 11-37-14-2 part 6, CBC Press and Information Service, “Extracts from Editorials,” *Victoria Times*, 26 May 1939.

66 In 1932 similarly outraged protests from Saint John had occurred when Halifax was the only Maritime centre selected to send greetings for the first inter-Empire Christmas broadcast. At that time the protests were somewhat assuaged by a promise to give full coverage to the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the Loyalists in 1933. See E.A. Weir, *The Struggle for National Broadcasting in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1965), 144.

67 CBC, vol. 749, file 18-16-2-48, Murray to J.H. Conlon, 30 May 1939; *ibid.*, Murray to T.F. Drummie, 6 June 1939.

## THE MASS MEDIA IN CANADIAN HISTORY

In the chaos of moral nihilism are trampled under foot by marauders the best treasures of man – heroically won by the martyrs for the ages.

Come young Nations proclaim the fight for freedom,  
Raise up the banner of invincible faith.  
Build bridges with your life across the gaping Earth blasted by hatred and  
march forward.  
Do not submit yourself to carry the burden of insult upon your head,  
Kicked by terror,  
And dig not a trench with a falsehood and cunning to build a shelter for  
your dishonoured manhood.

Offer not the weak as a sacrifice to the strong to save yourself.<sup>68</sup>

The Empire Day broadcast embodied some of the contradictions of its age. Examined within the context of the institution and personnel that created it, it demonstrates the CBC's conscious construction of itself as the pre-eminent national cultural force. Considered as a moment in national/imperial history, it reveals much about the self-formation of a Canada emerging on the world stage in a time of crisis, including the concomitant and component class and gender assumptions. Interrogated as symbolic power, it discloses the calculated use of the most technically advanced mass medium of the day to evoke community consensus around the traditional values of family and monarch and the simultaneous exclusion of "others" from anything but token membership in that family. It provides one illustration, I believe, of how the holistic study of the history of the mass media can enhance our understanding of modern Canada.

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68 Tagore, a firm opponent of British imperialism in India, nevertheless valued British "civilization," especially the concepts of freedom and reason. By the time this poem was written he was nearing the end of his long life and increasingly consumed with pessimism. While his name would likely have been known to most radio listeners, he had long ceased to be admired by the literary or intellectual elite. See Amartya Sen, "Tagore and His India," *New York Review of Books* 44 (26 June 1997), 59-77.