"Lawless and Vulgar Innovations": Victorian Views of Canadian English*

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Visitors to Upper Canada from Britain were surprised by the differences they discovered between the English language spoken here and in the mother country, and they were inclined to judge the differences as "lawless and vulgar innovations" on the Queen's English. Historically, we can see the differentness of Canadian English as the inevitable result of our settlement history (§1). However, the Victorians disapproved of the language they heard just as they did the economy and the society, and they berated all three equally (§2). As linguists, we are likely to be as impressed by the aspects of Canadian English which they overlooked as much as by what they singled out for comment (§3). For the features they did comment on, we can now trace a range of developments: some innovations which the Victorians complained about did not survive (§4.1); some remain marginal even today (§4.2); some are now accepted, but only in informal styles (§4.3); some have become established North Americanisms (§4.4); and some have become standard wherever English is spoken (§4.5). One recurring criticism by the Victorians fits none of these categories; this was their repugnance at what might be called the "vocabulary of modesty," the penchant for North Americans to avoid certain words as 'coarse' or 'immodest' (§5). The Victorian view provides a novel perspective on Canadian English (§6).

Nowadays, it is obvious to anyone who gives it a moment's thought that Canadian English is a branch of American English rather than British English. The simplest observation is one that is forced upon Canadians traveling abroad almost daily: we sound like "Americans," and for that reason we put in part of many days explaining to our English hosts, or our German or Japanese hosts, that we are in fact Canadians. At home, even our most mundane activities reveal us to be speakers of a type of American English rather than British: if we want the grocer to sell us cookies and a roast we must ask for them
by those names, and not for biscuits and a joint; and if we go to Eaton's for undershirts and sweaters, we had better not inquire about vests and jumpers. In an age when neighbourhoods are cosmopolitan and travels are far-flung, the American-ness of our speech is common knowledge.

It was not always so. In the age of Queen Victoria, British travelers seem to have often been as surprised to hear Upper Canadians speaking English that was different from their own as they were to discover an economy in which survival took precedence over convenience, or a society in which familiarity overruled class distinctions. Canada was, after all, British North America, the Dominion that chose to retain the tie with the British Empire after the defection of the United States in 1776. The Victorians expected, not unreasonably, that the imperial link presupposed retaining the values of the mother country. Much less reasonably, they apparently expected those values to be expressed in an economy and a society and a language which were modeled on the British counterparts. Instead, they found an economy too underdeveloped to permit many amenities, and a society too sparse to permit many ranks, and a language too remote from its British origins to preserve its ancestry. The differences were the result of necessity more than of choice, but to the Victorians they were all blameworthy.

In an address read before the Canadian Institute in 1857 which includes the first published citation of the term "Canadian English," the Rev. A. Constable Geikie stated: "Certainly, the English we often hear spoken, and see written, in the United States and Canada, is by no means an improvement on the original" (1857, 4). Taken literally, Geikie is certainly correct, and even the most linguistically sophisticated audience would have to agree with him fully; the English of North America, then as now, is no better than the English of England, only different. However, there can be no doubt that he did not intend to be taken literally, and
the irony of his statement is not lost on a modern reader who has the context of Geikie's critique before him any more than it would have been lost on Geikie's pre-Confederation audience. The rest of his address shows considerably less restraint, as he goes on to point out numerous developments in the language of Upper Canada, which he characterizes as "lawless and vulgar innovations" (1857, 4). His address is thus a very valuable Victorian perspective on Canadian English, easily the most thorough and interesting document on Canadian English of the nineteenth century. Along with a few other nineteenth century comments, all less thorough but not uninteresting, Geikie's address reveals some aspects of Canadian English that might otherwise have gone unnoticed. In order to see them more clearly, it is useful first to review some of the history that lies behind the "innovations" he has recorded.

1. The English language in Upper Canada

As it turned out, the linguistic character of Upper Canada proved to be crucial to an understanding of the linguistic character of all the rest of English-speaking Canada apart from the Atlantic coast. There are two main causes for the linguistic domination of the variety of English spoken in Ontario. First, the westward expansion of Canada after 1867 was mainly carried out by white English-speaking Protestants from Upper Canada. The emigration of Ontarioans was not simply accidental, the result of geographic proximity or population density, at least not in the beginning. Instead it was a deliberate policy of Sir John A. Macdonald. Following the Riel Rebellions of 1870 in Manitoba and 1885 in Saskatchewan, Macdonald, in a characteristic macchiavellian move to submerge the French-speaking Catholic Méťis population which had dared to demand the protection of their civil rights after the Canadian takeover of the land in which they had been the majority, directed the mass movement of Ontarioans to form the west's new majority, offering incentives of land and position to ensure the necessary numbers. Politically, Macdonald guaranteed
himself a smoother course in the implementation of federal policies in the new territory in the short run, although one might easily condemn his policy in the long run, which had the effect of isolating Quebec as the French-speaking enclave rather than allowing the west to develop bilingually, as it showed every sign of doing before the federal intervention. Linguistically, Macdonald exported to the west the variety of English then spoken in Upper Canada, which was not his own variety, since he was a native Scot, but the northern "American" dialect descended from the United Empire Loyalists and post-Loyalists, as we shall see.

The second cause of the linguistic domination of Upper Canada in inland Canada is the social, political and economic position which Ontario enjoyed throughout English-speaking Canada in the century following Confederation in 1867. As always, social, economic and political clout carries with it valuations of prestige and status which readily get transferred to the variety of speech which is its medium. It is only very recently that Ontario's position has begun to be challenged, politically and especially economically, but in the interim the English spoken by middle class urban Canadians is remarkably uniform all the way from Montreal and Ottawa to Vancouver and Victoria, and it has its roots in pre-Confederation Upper Canada. And the English of Upper Canadians, in its turn, has its roots in the northern states of America.

During the two centuries prior to the American Revolution in 1776, it was obviously meaningless to try to distinguish things "American" from things "Canadian," linguistic or otherwise. The settlement of English Canada followed the same course as the settlement of the thirteen colonies to the south, and the immigrants to one area were drawn from the same diverse pool of Britain as the immigrants to any other. Populations in both areas were largely concentrated on the Atlantic seaboard. Linguistically, the evidence of this early concentration can still be clearly
heard today in the greater variety of dialects and accents ranged along the Atlantic from Florida all the way to Newfoundland, for linguistic variety increases directly with length of settlement. About the only real distinction one can make between the colonization of the undifferentiated northern and southern areas of North America is that the northern region—the part that would become Canada—generally received fewer permanent settlers, and the population, especially inland, was much more scattered. At the time of the American Revolution, when the population of the thirteen colonies was large enough and united enough to challenge the authority of the leading world power, the northern colonies were still too jejuné to affect the conflict in any significant way.

Indeed, it was this lack of political interest, coupled with the expanses of available land, that encouraged the American anti-revolutionaries—called United Empire Loyalists in Canada, and Tories in the United States—to move northward in such numbers, often pursued by their more zealous countrymen. Thousands of refugees fled New England soon after the conflict broke out there, heading to the Maritimes, and eventually hundreds of these same New Englanders made their way inland, settling on the north shore of the St. Lawrence and Lake Ontario. The presence of this group in Upper Canada is noted in all contemporary accounts, but by the time they arrived they were too late to form the nucleus of the province's population. By then, there was already a nucleus, the Loyalists from the middle states, to whom the New Englanders, with their Yankee style and their Yankee accent, seemed quite alien. The New Englanders were soon absorbed in their new communities, and there is no trace whatever of New England speech in the speech of Upper Canada.

The direct movement into Upper Canada by Loyalists did not begin immediately after the revolution started, at least not in earnest. Until 1783, the refugee movement from Pennsylvania, New
Jersey, New York and Vermont was mainly into New York city, which
the British occupied. When the War ended and the British evacuated
their last stronghold, the Loyalists wasted no time in their move
northward. In 1784, at least 1,000 people moved from Vermont into
Quebec, and most of them later moved along the St. Lawrence basin
into the Williamsburg-Kingston area of Upper Canada. At the same
time, thousands of other Loyalists were moving onto rich farmlands
in the Niagara Peninsula and along the Detroit River. A second,
more populous wave began in 1791, when Americans lured more by the
promise of land than by anti-republican sentiment began arriving in
waves into Niagara and along the north shore of Lake Ontario from
York to the Bay of Quinte; this later wave of settlers used to be
distinguished from the first as "post-Loyalists" rather than Loyalists,
a distinction that once implied a difference in terms of fealty to
the mother country in the minds of those who saw themselves or their
ancestors as the "true" Loyalists. In any case, the successive
waves of settlers, all from the same region of the United States,
formed the first settled population of any size in Upper Canada.
Their assumption of the leadership in local and regional affairs
seems to have been almost instantaneous with their arrival, and
the variety of English they brought with them naturally formed the
standard.

The direct connection between the English spoken in the
states of Pennsylvania and New York, among others, and the English
of Upper Canada is seldom made today, even by people who are in
full command of the facts about Loyalist settlement. It was,
of course, perfectly obvious to the settlers themselves, and to
their offspring. Thus William Canniff, whose parents were Loyalist
settlers, pointed out the connection in his history entitled The
Settlement of Upper Canada, which was published in 1869:
The loyalist settlers of Upper Canada were mainly of American
birth, and those speaking English, differed in no respect in
their mode of speech from those who remained in the States.
Even to this day there is some resemblance between native Upper
Canadians and the Americans of the Midland States; though there is not, to any extent, a likeness to the Yankee of the New England States (1869, 363).

Canniff's statement is so far the only one that has come to light by the generation of native Upper Canadians who actually participated in the settlement history about which he writes; it was brought to my attention by Professor Wallace Brown of the University of New Brunswick, who unearthed it in his researches for a book on the influence of the Loyalists.

The Loyalist and post-Loyalist influx to Upper Canada was matched by an influx of British settlers about one generation later. The American invasions of 1812 made Canada's governors acutely aware of the dangers of having a majority of American descendants in the country when the United States was showing imperialistic tendencies of its own, and between 1820 and 1830 about 300,000 Britons were recruited and shipped to British North America, many of them to Upper Canada. While the British influx apparently served its main purpose in altering the pro-American political sentiments, it came too late to change the linguistic mainstream, except regionally. In the few areas where the new British settlers became the basic population, the regional dialects show traces of their Irish and Scottish ancestry to this day, as in the rural dialects of Elgin county on the north shore of Lake Erie, in Peterborough county to the north of Lake Ontario, and especially in the Ottawa River valley (Chambers 1975), all the way from the confluence of the St. Lawrence River to Pembroke. However, most of the British settlers ended up in population centres founded by the Loyalists, where stores and supplies were already available, and the English spoken by their offspring was the variety spoken by their American-descended peers. William Canniff was also a witness to this process of linguistic absorption, and he did not fail to record it. "Listening to the children at any school, composed of the children of Englishmen, Scotchmen, Americans, and even of Germans," he said, "it is impossible to detect any marked difference
in their accent, or way of expressing themselves" (1869, 363-64). To a linguist, Canniff's observation is entirely predictable, since the speech of a child's peers is invariably the determinant of his or her own speech. As newcomers, the British immigrants no doubt had to accommodate themselves to the entrenched patterns they found around them in hundreds of ways, both large and small, and one of those accommodations was to watch their children grow up speaking a variety of English more like that of their Loyalist neighbours than like their own. The linguistic basis for Canadian English was set before they arrived.

2. Linguistic observation as social criticism

Susanna Moodie, whose journals of pioneer life in Upper Canada were published as Roughing it in the Bush when she returned to England in 1852, was among the British immigrants who arrived with the influx of the 1830's. With her husband, a half-pay officer, and her maid, she settled first near Port Hope on Lake Ontario and then moved north near Peterborough. She was an unlikely pioneer, to say the least, with her aristocratic pretensions, but her protests of intellectual superiority to everyone around her are belied by the fact that she seems to have arrived completely unprepared for the hand-to-mouth existence and the egalitarian society which she found when she arrived. At one point, she sniffs: "All was new, strange and distasteful to us, we shrank from the rude, coarse familiarity of the uneducated people among whom we were thrown" (1852, 139). While I think it is safe to say that Moodie was something of a darling of our English departments a generation or two ago, perhaps because her prejudices were shared by more academics then, she emerges to many present-day readers, myself included, as an intolerable gossip and prude--a sort of yenta of the bush. Her linguistic observations, which must be inferred from the snatches of dialogue she includes, seem to be designed to document what she considered to be the crudity and barbarism of her neighbours, as literary samples of what Geikie called the "lawless and vulgar innovations"
of Canadian English. As such, they are valuable samples of the emerging standards of Upper Canadian speech, giving them a legitimacy more than a century and a quarter later which would probably cause Moodie to shudder in her grave. Clearly, the linguistic observations must be extracted from the social criticism which motivates them, but in this respect Moodie is just like all of the other Victorian observers who were not natives of the land.

Linguistic observation as a form of social criticism is also the style of the Rev. A. C. Geikie, the most abundant source of information we have, and incidentally the first person ever to use the term "Canadian English" to denote a distinctive linguistic entity. Needless to say, that linguistic entity was something he scorned. The examples of "lawless and vulgar innovations" which he supplies, he says, "fully justify the use of the term 'Canadian English', as expressive of a corrupt dialect growing up amongst our population, and gradually finding access to our periodical literature, until it threatens to produce a language as unlike our noble mother tongue as the negro patua, or the Chinese pidgeon English" (1857, 14). Unlike Moodie's observations about language, Geikie's are direct, but like hers, his are embedded in a set of social values from which they must be extracted.

The accent that Susanna Moodie would hear in the New World was described most superciliously not in her own words but in her version of a friend's description, upon hearing the spiel of the recruiting officer who had been sent to England to fan the enthusiasm for emigration. Moodie's friend reported that the recruiting officer "had a shocking delivery, a drawling vulgar voice; and he spoke with such a twang that I could not bear to look at him or listen to him. He made such grammatical blunders that my sides ached laughing at him" (1852, 53). That would seem to have been a fair warning to the Moodies that they were unlikely to find themselves at ease in the New World, especially since the recruiting officer was obviously a man of not inconsiderable rank there. Nevertheless, they answered
the call, albeit with predictably unpleasant consequences. Upon her arrival, Susanna Moodie discovered soon enough that the unpleasant accent of Upper Canada was accompanied by what she saw as an execrable lack of manners. The "Americans," as she called the post-Loyalist settlers who had preceded her to the country, were simply odious. She says, "Unfortunately, our new home was surrounded by these odious squatters whom we found as ignorant as savages, without their courtesy and kindness" (1852, 67). To give Moodie her due, she is probably right about her neighbours being quite ignorant. William Canniff, the insider, also noted a decline in literacy among first-generation Upper Canadians (1869, 364):

Although a few of the settlers had books to read, many had none. And as there were no [professional] school teachers very many children grew up without being able to read, or at most very little, and entirely unable to write, unless it might be their name. The writer has been struck with the difference between the composition and penmanship of many of the settlers and that of their immediate children, the former being good, the latter bad; while the parent could write a bold signature, and express himself in writing a letter, intelligibly, the offspring either could do nothing of the kind, or else made a very poor attempt.

The difference between Canniff and Moodie on this point, which is partly the result of his having had at least two decades of hindsight which she did not, is that he sees the decline of literacy as a temporary condition, as it was perhaps inevitably to be in the face of the uprooting in the United States and the priorities of clearing the new land and making adequate shelters. Moodie nowhere gives the impression that the ignorance of her New World neighbours is anything less than a permanent affliction.

The critical cast of commentaries such as Moodie's and Geikie's should not be surprising at all. The commentators themselves were usually outsiders, the recent emigrés or well-to-do travelers in a land that differed enormously from their mother country, which should (they assumed) have provided its model. The insiders, with the rare exception of William Canniff, did not have the leisure to record their own commentaries, so busy were they contending with the daily business
of survival.

What the Victorians heard in Upper Canada and throughout the New World was an accent different from their own, to which they transferred the evaluation of inferiority as readily as they attributed inferiority to the underdeveloped economy and the egalitarian society for which it was the medium. Had they been able to step back and consider the linguistic situation objectively, they might have noticed that the variety of accents they left behind in the Old World was much greater, much more diverse--as it still is today--than the accents of the New World. The young people of Upper Canada also came from remarkably diverse linguistic backgrounds, but they sounded remarkably alike, so much so that, as Canniff said, "it is impossible to detect any marked difference in their accent, or way of expressing themselves." It is a linguistic fact--more than that, a linguistic law--that the smaller the population and the more recent the settlement, the more homogeneous is the language. For that reason, in Canada today, and in the United States too, there is much less linguistic variety than in any part of Britain, and indeed there is less variety in North America away from the Atlantic seaboard, which has been settled longest. A few Victorian observers did note this fact, including a visitor to Maryland named William Eddis, who made the point in a letter written in 1770 (Read 1933, 21):

The colonists are composed of adventurers, not only from every district of Great Britain and Ireland, but from almost every other European government....Is it not, therefore, reasonable to suppose that the English language must be greatly corrupted by such a strange admixture of various nations? The reverse is, however, true. The language of the immediate descendants of such a promiscuous ancestry is perfectly uniform, and unadulterated; nor has it borrowed any provincial, or national accent, from its British or foreign parentage.

It was not, of course, the variety, or the lack of variety, that drew the attention of most of the Victorian commentators. Instead, it was its differentness, and that is an aspect which, once separated from the social values ascribed to it, makes their observations linguistically useful.
3. Linguistic evidence in Victorian commentaries

The Victorian critics of Upper Canadian English included their comments on language only as adjuncts to, or aspects of, their social criticisms. None of them seem to have had specialized training in philology or any other aspect of the formal study of language. As might be expected, then, they were prone to record only the forms of language which were overtly stigmatized, and had thus come to attention because they were topics of conversation, along with a sample of other forms which had become personal peeves for the individual commentator. A modern linguist, searching this small body of literature for the structurally significant or the linguistically subtle, is bound to be somewhat disappointed with what he or she finds. In this section, I discuss three linguistic features of Canadian English for which the evidence of theVictorians varies considerably, thus imparting some idea of the range and quality that is available. The first of these features, known to linguists as 'positive anymore', is simply missing altogether from the Victorian commentaries, although there is every reason to believe that it was encountered by them, as I will show. The second feature, the merger of two low back vowels, is so structurally significant that it perhaps could not be overlooked entirely, but because the commentators were linguistic amateurs, they could not characterize what they heard directly and their evidence for the merger must be inferred. The third feature, which is the name of the last letter of the alphabet, belongs to the type of feature which was readily perceived and characterized by the Victorians.

3.1. Positive anymore. In all varieties of English, the adverb 'anymore' can freely occur in sentences which are negated, and no native speaker of the language in any part of the world considers sentences like the following to be anything but fully meaningful, colloquial English:

John doesn't smoke anymore.

Mechanics are not very careful anymore.

For most speakers of English, the co-occurrence of 'anymore' with a
negative element such as 'not' (or '-n't') is essential, and positive sentences containing 'anymore' are simply incomprehensible. However, in a small part of the English-speaking world, sentences with positive anymore also occur freely, as in sentences like these:

  John watches television a lot anymore.

  Mechanics are pretty careless anymore.

The fact that such sentences are comprehensible only to a relatively few speakers makes them all the more interesting for studies of linguistic variation. Significantly, the presentation of such sentences to groups of people in present-day Ontario, such as students at the University of Toronto or audiences assembled for a talk on Canadian English, typically reveals a handful of individuals for whom these sentences seem unexceptional and a majority for whom they are simply baffling. These proportions in the audience's response can easily be manipulated: if the audience consists of first or second generation Italo-Canadians studying Italian linguistics, no one will know for certain what these sentences mean, but if it consists of old Ontarians interested in tracing their genealogies, perhaps half of them will know that 'anymore' in sentences like those means, roughly, 'nowadays'.

A comparable breakdown of the population into those who comprehend sentences with positive anymore and those who do not can also be found in states such as Ohio, Illinois, parts of New York, and elsewhere in the north and central states, with a core area where such sentences occur more frequently centred in Pennsylvania (Hindle 1975). In other words, positive anymore has a fairly narrow regional distribution, and it seems to occur in regions which have been populated partly by emigration from the vicinity of Pennsylvania. That southern Ontario should be included in this distribution is hardly surprising, in view of the Loyalist movement which we have just reviewed.

However, a linguist searches in vain for any record of positive anymore in the Victorian commentaries. In the hundreds of sentences of putative dialogue inherited from Susanna Moodie, for instance, not a single instance of positive anymore can be found. Must we conclude that
sentences with positive anymore were not heard in Upper Canada in Victorian times? Definitely not. It is much more likely that they were simply overlooked at the time, as indeed they have been overlooked more often than not since then. Positive anymore, like most syntactic variants in language, occurs so infrequently in conversations that it hardly draws attention to itself except perhaps when one participant happens to be a linguist who is trained to listen for such variants. The reaction to such a locution during the speech event is likely to be nonexistent. Among people who readily use and understand the construction, its inclusion in a conversation naturally passes unnoticed. Thus, when I was growing up in the Niagara Peninsula using and hearing positive anymore without being conscious of it in any way, it never occurred to me that some of my friends or some members of my family may or may not also have used it, and to this day I have no idea how widespread it might have been there; I only know that I used it, and I presume that it was used by most others as well. Among people who are baffled by the construction, its use in a conversation is certainly mitigated by factors of context, attention to the topic being discussed, and so on, and if a positive anymore sentence did give pause to the hearer, it would likely be dismissed as a slip of the tongue as the conversation continued. It is not at all surprising that the Victorian commentators on the English of Upper Canada apparently failed to record any instances of positive anymore, although it also seems quite likely that some astute Victorian would have picked up on it at some point, if only as a truly remarkable "barbarism," and maybe even included a sample of it in a letter home. The search for that astute Victorian continues.

3.2. The merger of /a/ and /o/. Phonologically, the most structurally significant feature of Canadian English by comparison to other varieties is the merger of the low back vowels /a/ and /o/, such that the sets of words which elsewhere contrast by having either a rounded or an unrounded vowel are homophones in Canada. Outside of Canada, for example, the words
listed below are generally distinguished from one another in this way:

\[
\begin{array}{ll}
[a] & [o] \\
\text{cot} & \text{caught} \\
\text{bobble} & \text{bauble} \\
\text{dotter} & \text{daughter} \\
\text{pall...} & \text{Paul...}
\end{array}
\]

In Canada, the distinction between the vowel sounds in these two lists is simply lost, and the vowels are the same, usually but not always being the unrounded [a]. Exactly the same distinction is lacking in western Pennsylvania and, progressively, in the region surrounding that. The coincidence of this feature, which is otherwise preserved by all varieties of English, is itself significant testimony of the Loyalist source of Canadian English.

Because the contrast between Canadian English and other varieties involves a very frequent feature of speech, one would be greatly surprised if the Victorian commentators had missed this point altogether, even to the point of concluding therefrom that the feature probably did not exist at the time. However, it was not missed altogether. It is recorded, for instance, in this dialogue between Susanna Moodie and Betty Frye, on the topic of apple sauce (1852, 77):

"We have no orchard to hum," [Betty Frye says.] "And I guess you'll want saace."
"Sarce! What is sarce?"
"Not know what sarce is? You are clever! Sarce is apples cut up and dried, to make into pies in the winter. Now do you comprehend?"

Moodie's spelling of saace might at first glance suggest a completely different pronunciation from the one suggested, but it seems that way only to a North American reader. To Moodie's contemporary British audience, as to a present-day British audience, her spelling would clearly indicate the vowel [a] in sauce, the same vowel which most Britons have in other words spelled with -ar- sequences, such as barn and bar. Thus Moodie's confusion in the dialogue above stems from Betty Frye's pronunciation of sauce as [sas] rather than [sås],
a pronunciation by which Canadian English differs from British English to this day. The merger of the two vowels in Canadian English finds its way into the Victorian commentaries in this rather indirect way, but it is there all the same.

3.3. The name of the last letter of the alphabet. The most direct and straightforward evidence of linguistic differences between the language of Upper Canada and that of the Victorians involves features which were to some extent stigmatized, in the sense that they were shibboleths in "proper" (that is, British) speech. An easy example is provided by the name of the last letter of the alphabet, 'Z', which is, of course, sed everywhere in the English-speaking world and beyond, including French and German, except in the United States, where it is sée. The American pronunciation is thus unmistakeable both in its perception and in its origin, and makes a relatively easy feature for criticism. The earliest generations of school children in Upper Canada referred to the letter as sée, a fact which did not go unnoticed by the British travelers of the time or by the British settlers. For instance, a gentleman who identified himself only as "Harris" complained about the pronunciation in a letter to the editor of the Kingston Herald in 1846 (cited by William Canniff 1869: 334), by saying: "The instructor of youth, who, when engaged in teaching the elements of the English language, direct them to call that letter ze, instead of sed, are teaching them error." The reason for the American pronunciation being perpetuated in the schools of Upper Canada at the time was not simply due to the American parentage of the students, as Canniff points out: "It followed, from the presence of American teachers and school books, that peculiarities of American spelling and pronunciation were taught to the children of Canada" (1869, 333-34). Canniff himself recalls using Noah Webster's spelling book in school. Webster's book, first published in 1783 and never out of print in the United States to this day (McDavid 1981), was certainly a unifying force in the expansion of America
westward, providing the daily lessons of school children as it had for their parents and their grandparents. Its use in Upper Canada during the early years of the settlement suggests that it might have become the educational standard all over North America. That it did not stay in use in Canada is probably the result of objections like Harris's springing up in several districts. In any event, the standard pronunciation has been *sed* in Canada, not *see*, at least until very recently. In the last few years, *see* has made a dramatic return to favour after more than a century; in 1979, I elicited the last letters of the alphabet in a linguistic survey of a sample population in North Toronto, and the result showed that two-thirds of the respondents in the youngest group (twelve year olds) said *see*, not *sed*. The probable cause is the influence of the American pre-school television program, *Sesame Street*, which is the educational equivalent of Noah Webster's spelling book in the post-Gutenberg era.

Obviously, features of pronunciation like *see* and *sed* are more readily discerned than are features of phonology, like the merger of /a/ and /o/, or features of syntax, like positive *anymore*. It is not surprising, then, that they comprise the bulk of the linguistic observations made by the Victorians. Linguistically, variants of pronunciation are much more susceptible to change than other kinds of variants, simply by virtue of the fact that they are more readily discerned, and consequently more likely to be consciously altered. The pronunciations *see* and *sed* are in or out of 'fashion' at different points in time, whereas the vowel merger and positive *anymore* remain constant in the linguistic inventory of Canadian English so far (with positive *anymore* becoming a progressively less salient feature with the arrival of more and more immigrants who do not assimilate it but remaining constant in the sphere of influence of the original immigrants). The predilection of the amateur linguists among the Victorians for pronunciation variants and other highly accessible features means that they are dealing essentially with the
more ephemeral aspects of the language. During the century and a half (more or less) since they made their observations, we can trace a number of different linguistic histories for the features they scorned, all the way from simple neglect and disappearance to world-wide acceptance into the mainstream of the English language.

4. A. C. Geikie's list of "transatlantic innovations"

A. C. Geikie's impressive list of linguistic features, which he calls "transatlantic innovations on the English language" (1857, 5), makes a good basis for considering aspects of the linguistic history of Canadian English, especially when supplemented by the comments of Susanna Moodie and others. It is interesting, and perhaps instructive, to consider the fate of the various innovations with the advantage of hindsight. Geikie himself did not make any explicit distinction among the features he discussed, implying that to him they were all equally "lawless and vulgar innovations." From our vantage point, it is clear that they were not equal at all, because they have undergone very different histories. Some of them have simply faded away, as Geikie hoped they would; others remain, but they are scarcely more acceptable in the language today than they were to Geikie; many have become firmly established in less formal speech; a few are firmly established in more formal speech as well, and are among the hallmarks of what is distinctive in the English of North America; and some others are firmly established not only in North America but wherever English is spoken.

4.1. Innovations which did not survive. At any moment in the history of a language, the speech of ordinary people is spiced with words and phrases which are fashionable but doomed. To an untrained observer, such slang terms and nonce phrases may seem damnable, because of their ubiquity, or their vagueness, or their circumlocution, or something else. In a sense, the observer is merely wasting his time in damning them, because the greater their popularity, the more evanescent is their currency. Few objects in the world of fashion are so hopelessly superannuated as last year's buzz-words. Of
course many of the innovations recorded by Geikie and the others belonged to this category. Compiling the list of them now may have its own special purposes, but for our purpose it should be sufficient just to note their existence in passing, since they did not affect the subsequent development of the language in any significant way. We can do this by citing Geikie's tour de force, a single sentence into which he cram[s] as many innovations as he can, on the premise that "it would not be difficult to construct whole sentences of our Canadian vernacular which, to the home-bred ear, would stand nearly as much in need of translation, as an oration of one of the Huron or Chippeway Chiefs whom we have supplanted from their ancient hunting grounds on the shores of the great lakes" (1857, 14). This is his sentence:

'I traded my last yorker for a plug of honey dew, and got plaguy chiseled by a loafer whose boss had dickered his lot and betterments for notions to his store.'

The gist of the sentence is probably clear enough to present-day readers, as it probably was to his contemporary readers, but to be fully understood the sentence needs translation for us no less than it did for the "home-bred ear," because so many of its words and phrases have faded out of use. Geikie translates it as follows:

'I exchanged my last sixpence for a packet of tobacco, and got thoroughly cheated by a disreputable fellow whose employer had bartered a piece of improved land to obtain small wares for his shop.'

A few of the innovations remain, such as store for shop, and lot for building site, both of them now standard usage in Canada, but yorker, honey dew, plaguy, dickered, and the phrase to his store for his store are archaic if they are known at all today. They belong to the most superficial stratum of language, where impermanence is the main attribute.

4.2. Innovations which are still unacceptable. Only slightly more interesting are the innovations cited by Geikie which are still occasionally heard but are no more widely accepted now than
they were then. One of these is the past tense of the legalistic verb *hang*, which remains *hanged*, even though it is not infrequently confused with the past tense of the other verb *hang*, which is *hung*. The same confusion was apparently widespread in Victorian Canada, for Geikie remarks (1857, 9):

In England, beef is *hung*, gates are *hung*, and curtains are *hung*, but felons are *hanged*; in Canada, felons, beef, gates, and curtains are all treated the same way.

Jurisprudence has changed, thankfully, so that there are fewer occasions today to talk about the hanging of felons, but when the need arises, the standard form of the past tense is the one that Geikie advocates.

Other "innovations" which have not made any headway since Geikie's day include *considerable* as an intensifier meaning a great deal, as in *he has considerable money to spend*, and the 'regularizing' or (in a linguist's terms) the weakening of a number of past tense forms, such as *he freeded to death*, for *froze*.

Many of these forms show up sporadically in the speech of individuals today, perhaps somewhat less frequently than they did in Geikie's day since no one would be likely to claim that they had the kind of currency that might establish them as standard usage, and perhaps their persistance can help us to see the kinds of regularities which individuals look for in the forms of the language, but the standard forms today remain those that Geikie advocated.

4.3. Innovations which have become acceptable in informal styles. Many of the terms which Geikie deplored remain in use today with no noticeable stigma attached to them, but their use is restricted to the relatively informal contexts of casual conversation, personal letters, sportscasts, and the like.

A good instance is *bug*, used as a generic for *insect*. To Geikie, this use seemed imprecise, because a *bug* for the Canadians could be a fly, a beetle, or a grub (1857, 11), but this use remains today. Similarly, the use of *boss*, the Dutch term for *master,*
seemed to Geikie to be nothing more than an unnecessary "euphemism for the unpalatable word master" (1857, 14), and thus a signal of the egalitarian stance of the New World. The word master is no less "unpalatable" today outside of private schools, and boss remains the informal term for a superintendent, foreman, or other authority in the work-place. The adjective first-class struck Geikie as appropriate only to inanimate objects, not to human beings (1857, 6):

A man in England possesses notable capacity, and people style him capable, or able, or great. In Canada he is designated first-class. To speak of a first-class carriage, or a first-class prize, or even a first-class ox, may be right enough, but why apply phrases with such poor associations to men of splendid intellect?...Will he seem any greater when indissolubly associated with a railway van? But the association with non-humans seems perhaps to have been an idiosyncrasy of Geikie's, or at any rate was no impediment to the more general application of the term, and it is high praise indeed to say today that someone has a first-class mind, or that someone gave a first-class performance.

At least one of the innovations Geikie noticed is still struggling for acceptance after more than a century and a quarter. Among the re-formed preterites he lists, most of which are obsolete (gwav for gave, ris for rose, holf for helped, and the like), the one he pauses over longest is dove for dived, probably because he is able to cite it in a verse from Longfellow's "Hiawatha" (1857, 11). Subsequent developments have proven his instinct to be correct, for dove and dived still survive as competing forms, long after the others have passed away. All surveys of Canadian usage, whether national (Scargill and Warkentyne 1972, 72) or regional (e.g., for Toronto, Chambers 1979, 175), show a virtual stand-off in the use of dove and dived, with very close to 50% of the population favouring each, regardless of age, sex, educational background, or region. Neither form appears to be gaining or losing acceptance, and many speakers are likely to use both forms at different times, with no notion that one should be preferred to the other. For Geikie, the preference
was crystal clear, but his reason for avoiding *dove* was certainly unfounded. "As we say drive, drove, driven," he predicted, "we may look for the completion of the new verb to *dive*, on its new model, and find the next poet's hero having 'diven as if he were a beaver' or any other amphibious native of the new world" (1857, 11-12). His prognostication has proven wrong, of course, and there is no indication whatever of the paradigm extending to the past participle, but then it is probably ludicrous to look for an extension when we have still not decided on a single standard form for the past. The fact that the newer form, *doves*, exists at all today would bother Geikie, and its acceptance as an equal to the historical form, *dived*, would no doubt be construed as wanton vulgarity. One wonders what he might think of a more recent pair of preterites, *sneaked-smuck*, which are now competing with one another in Ontario and elicit the same division of responses.

4.4. Innovations established in North America. Some of the innovations noticed by Geikie have become so much a part of our speech that they now form part of the distinctive character of North American English. Two of these have already been mentioned, *store* for *shop*, and *lot* for *building site*. They are among the linguistic clues that an astute listener can seize upon in Europe and elsewhere to identify the North American origin of a speaker. Another of these is the use of the term *sick* with the general meaning assigned to *ill* elsewhere, whereas *sick* elsewhere means specifically that one is nauseous or sick to one's stomach. Geikie constructs a dialogue which makes his point about *sick* being used in a more general sense in Upper Canada, but takes some liberties with actual usage (1857, 13):

'How do you feel today?'
'I'm quite sick.'
'Sick! Why don't you take something to settle your stomach?'
'My stomach isn't unsettled. It's my toe that aches!'

In normal North American usage—presumably then as now—one would not likely describe himself as *sick* when one was suffering from an aching toe, unless of course the aching toe was only a symptom of a
more general complaint, such as the gout. Nevertheless, Geikie's point is all the clearer for his exaggerating it. Susanna Moodie occasionally puts the word into the mouths of her Upper Canadians too, as when one of them reports to her: "The fowl belonged to my neighbour. She's sick; and I promised to sell it for her to buy some physic" (1852, 76). To a North American reader, the word is unobtrusive in this context, and the passage would probably be read without any hesitation over the word at all, but Moodie's British audience would have reacted to it in much the same way that Geikie did when he heard it used by his parishioners.

A similar extension in meaning which has resulted in a consistent difference between the English of North America and elsewhere is the use of the verb *fix* with the meaning of *repair*. The more restricted meaning current outside of North America is to affix something, or to join something solidly onto another thing. Since fixing something in this restricted sense is often essential to repairing a broken object, it is not hard to see how the extension of meaning took place. Geikie, however, is clear on his opinion of the innovation (1857, 14-15): "Good writers and educated speakers... when they *fix* a wheel immovably, they will say they have fixed it; but when they mend or repair the same wheel, they will find no inconvenience in using one of the latter terms as equally apt and less ambiguous." Moodie uses the term, and some other extended meanings of it, several times in the dialogue of her Canadian characters, in sentences like these: "Mother can fix bread"; "This is a new fixing of my own invention" (1852, 78-79). Once again, her modern Canadian readers are likely to pass over these without hesitation, so entrenched are such uses in their own speech.

4.5. Innovations established beyond North America. For the past four decades at least, the United States has enjoyed cultural and economic prestige in many parts of the world. One linguistic result of this fact is that the variety of English that is taught abroad, which until recently was the English spoken in England, is now as
likely to be American English. Students learning English in Norway, Poland, Japan, and most other nations speak to one another in accents which resemble Ohio or Ontario more than Surrey and Oxford. Along with the choice of accent, other linguistic features of American English inevitably get exported too, and as a result some of the features which the Victorian critics condemned have now become features of the English language wherever it is spoken.

One of these is the word *donation*, meaning a *present* or *gift*. To Geikie, this latinate word simply seemed otiose: "The language stands in need of no such expression as long as we have our old Saxon *gift*," he said. No doubt Geikie's displeasure with the word arose from his clerical vocation, when his poor Upper Canadian congregation brought offerings which seemed to him to be unworthy of a grand name, for he adds: "Webster says that *donation* is usually applied to things of more value than *presents*; but while such may be true in the States, I have known it applied here to a basket of musty cakes" (1857, 5). Apart from the value of the offering, the formality of the occasion can also elevate a gift so that it becomes a *donation*, and the word is now used in that sense extensively, and on some occasions invariably, wherever English is spoken.

A similar history of upward mobility characterizes the word *locate* and its derivatives. Geikie says: "A man in Britain buys a house, or farm, and it is said to be in, or more precisely, situated in such a street, or district, or county. Here, nobody or thing is situated anywhere; all are *located*" (1857, 7). And again: "We admire a mansion occupying a healthy, or commanding site, and we are told that 'the location is good'." Nowadays, such uses are so common that Geikie's pique seems inexplicable.

The phrase *down town*, with the meaning *into town*, is still unusual perhaps, but the phrase has become a frozen form which serves as a noun, meaning the heart of a city or town, and as such has become the usual expression in English. Geikie probably had the phrasal construction in mind when he complained about it as a
vulgar innovation, although that is not altogether clear from the conversation he invents to exemplify it: "'Where did you go today?'
--'Down town,' that is, he walked through, or in the city" (1857, 13). At any rate, subsequent developments have removed the unusual sense of down as a preposition meaning into the heart of, and down town, as a noun, has come to serve a useful purpose in the global urbanization that has occurred since Geikie's time.

Probably the most surprising locution to find itself in respectable company now is the use of the verb guess as a member of the small set of verbs including 'think, believe, suppose' which introduce and mildly qualify a following clause. Few 'innovations' aroused Geikie's ire so much as this one, and it obviously affected Susanna Moodie in the same way, because she used the clause 'I guess' to preface the remarks of her Canadian characters practically every time one of them spoke. Examples like the following are abundant (1852, 103, 68, 93):

"'I guess you can give me a piece of silk for a hood,' said she, 'the weather is growing considerable cold.'"

"'I guess,' quoth our Yankee driver, 'that at the bottom of this 'ere swell, you'll find yourself to hum.'"

"'How did the change agree with him?'--'I guess better than could have been expected.'"

So common a device is this in the dialogue of Moodie that a reader today might be led to believe that it is a failing of Moodie's style. However, Geikie's harsh comment on this usage shows that it was a highly stigmatized form at the time, and in this light Moodie's excessive use of it was designed to draw the attention of her British audience to the origins of her characters. Geikie says: "The ordinary American use of this word justly subjects its users to ridicule, unless the precision which our English tongue once boasted of is no longer a feature worth preserving" (1857, 12).

It is a little hard to imagine the use of prefatory 'I guess' as a source of ridicule, as Geikie says it was and Moodie exploits it as. The prefatory use of the other, accepted verbs in this
position--'think, believe, suppose,' and the others--has little or nothing to do with their actual meanings, but is typically a device to express politeness. What is conveyed is something that might be paraphrased as 'I don't insist upon the following assertion'. Thus, in the first of the examples from Moodie cited above, the woman has come to buy some silk but instead of merely ordering it or demanding it, she softens the transaction by qualifying it. A verb like guess, with its connotation of uncertainty, seems no less well suited to this function than are the other verbs in the set, or other, comparable paraphrases using words like 'perhaps', 'please', or 'would you be so kind...?' It has today become fully accepted into that set of terms.

Actually, its acceptance into current English really represents a reinstatement, for the verb guess was commonly used to introduce a clause, with the illocutionary force of 'think' and the other verbs, in the written English of the early modern period, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (OED). Its use in this sense apparently disappeared from standard written British English in the following centuries, and by Victorian times it was unknown. However, it must have been perpetuated regionally in English speech, and it must have been exported to the New World in a regional dialect. From there, it has made its way back into the mainstream of modern English.

The various histories of the words and phrases singled out by the Victorians for criticism could hardly be more diverse. Some have disappeared, and some have become ubiquitous, and in between these two poles we can find several grades of acceptance. If nothing else, looking at the diversity might remind us of the real value of arbitrary pronouncements on language use. To the Victorian critics, all of the above points of usage (and several others) were equally "vulgar and lawless innovations," but among them we can now distinguish several grades of acceptance. By the users of the language, not by its arbiters, the language is shaped and revitalized.
5. "Immodest prudery" as a factor in lexical change

One aspect of Canadian English which was often noted by the Victorian commentators involves what might be called 'the vocabulary of modesty', which brought about the replacement of many terms referring to body parts, especially certain animal names which had come to refer to body parts, and even extended to a few terms for items of clothing which were associated with those body parts. No other aspect of the English of North America—in fact, few other aspects of North American behaviour in colonial times—better reflects the puritanism of the original settlers. To the Victorians, the evidence of such linguistic puritanism was every bit as odious or hilarious as were the vulgarisms discussed above, and if the vulgarisms represented incursions into the language as a result of what the Victorians saw as a low-minded egalitarianism, then the vocabulary of modesty represented incursions as a result of a high-minded puritanism which was no more praiseworthy. Geikie dismissed the tendency as "immodest prudery."

Susanna Moodie, who was surely as prudish as any of the passengers on the Mayflower, does not comment on the vocabulary of modesty and nowhere indicates that she is aware of it at all, but she does record an instance where she was confused by it (1852, 75-76):

"[An old woman asks her:] 'Do you want to buy a rooster?'

'Now, the sucking-pigs with which we had been regaled every day for three weeks at the tavern, were called roasters; and not understanding the familiar phrases of the country, I thought she had a sucking-pig to sell....

'Bring the roaster up [Moodie replies]; and if I like it, I will buy it, though I must confess that I am not very fond of roast pig.'

'Do you call this a pig?' said my she-merchant, drawing a fine game-cock from under her cloak."

Moodie spares herself the agony of ascertaining the reason behind her neighbours' substituting the word rooster for cock. The reason, of course, was that cock had become established in North America as a term for the penis, as it still is today, and was henceforth
avoided in polite conversation. Geikie certainly understands the reason, but he considers it to be downright silly, as he makes clear in the following anecdote (1857, 10):

He [a blind British naturalist visiting Upper Canada] would, indeed, learn that we have hens; but he would wonder in vain what had become of their mates. That there existed an unknown creature called a rooster, he would early discover, but unless he made a particular enquiry, he might return after a year's residence among us, thoroughly convinced that there were no cocks in the province. Still greater, perhaps, would be his surprise, on making the discovery, to learn that in using the old familiar English name for the hero of the barn-yard, he had been using a very immodest word.

In Canada and throughout North America, a cock is a rooster to this day.

The substitutions for animal names extended further, and had actually taken root in the British Isles around the time of the earlier emigrations to North America. The word cony, sometimes spelled coney and occasionally spelled cummy (which indicates its pronunciation better), developed as the slang term for the pudendum and was gradually replaced both in Britain and in North America by the word rabbit. One of its few remaining traces is in the place name Coney Island, in New York, where it has long since lost any association with either rabbits or pudenda. Geikie and the other Victorians would probably have been surprised to learn that their own ancestors had succumbed to the same impulse for lexical substitution that they now deplored in Upper Canada and elsewhere, but they could quite correctly have argued that the immodest prudery of the New World far exceeded anything known in the Old World. Another substitution of animal names which began in North America and has spread only in recent times as the prestige of American English has risen is donkey for ass, because the latter became the familiar word for the buttocks.

All of these animal names had come to refer to the reproductive or excretory body parts, the 'private' parts on a puritan anatomy chart, and in many cultures these body parts have been subject to
linguistic taboos. In Victorian Canada, however, the taboo was
extended ludicrously, so that it came to include virtually all
parts of the body normally covered by the clothing of the day,
such as legs and arms and knees. A British visitor to New Brunswick
in 1813 recorded his astonishment in his journal (in Temperley
1980, 60):

The ridiculous delicacy of their expressions are [sic] very
diverting. A New Brunswick lady conceives it indecorous to
call a male bird a cock, for which they substitute rooster,
even to a weather rooster; knees they denominate benders, and
so on.

The substitution of benders for knees has not survived, but a
similar substitution of limb for arms and/or legs, which Geikie
also mentions derisively (1857, 9-10), is still occasionally
heard. It was encountered under embarrassing circumstances by
Captain Frederick Maryatt, who inadvertently violated the taboo
and recorded the incident in his Diary for 1839 (in Read 1934,
265):

When at Niagara Falls, I was escorting a young lady with whom
I was on friendly terms. She had been standing on a piece of
rock, the better to view the scene, when she slipped down, and
was evidently hurt by the fall; she had in fact grazed her shin.
As she limped a little in walking home, I said, 'Did you hurt
your leg much?' She turned from me, evidently much shocked, or
much offended; and not being aware that I had committed any very
heinous offence, I begged to know what was the reason of her
displeasure. After some hesitation, she said that as she knew
me well, she would tell me that the word leg was never mentioned
before ladies. I apologized for my want of refinement, which was
attributable to my having been accustomed only to English society,
and added, that as such articles must occasionally be referred
to, even in the most polite circles in America, perhaps she would
inform me by what name I might mention them without shocking the
company. Her reply was, that the word limb was used; 'nay,'
continued she, 'I am not so particular as some people are, for
I know those who always say limb of a table, or limb of a
piano-forte,'

The extension of the taboo to objects which had no connection at all
with body parts, as in weather rooster for weather cock and piano
limb for piano leg, amused the Victorians particularly. Other
extensions took in the anatomical parts of roast fowl, which within
the memories of current residents of the Niagara Peninsula were not
referred to by the body part term. The leg of the Christmas turkey
was called the first joint, and the thigh was the second joint, and
the more jocular term drumstick is still widely used.

Perhaps the most ridiculous extension, for Geikie at least, was
the spread of the taboo to the articles of clothing which covered
the offensive anatomy. Thus Geikie exclaims: "In Canada, such a
garment as trowsers [sic] is unknown. What do we wear? Pantaloons
is the reply; or more familiarly pants, with the feminine elegance
pantalets!" (1857, 10). In most of Canada today, both pants and
trousers are commonly used to refer to this article of clothing for
men, with pants by far the more common and frequent of the two.

Whatever one may think about the Victorians' attitude toward
Canadian English in general, there can be little doubt that their
amusement and bewilderment at the vocabulary of modesty was quite
justified. To the citizens of the New World, such linguistic
innovations no doubt seemed refined and mannerly, but they
really seem to be sources of embarrassment and occasions for
circumlocution instead. Geikie, in his usual paternal manner,
condemns the vocabulary of modesty as consisting of the "familiar
shibboleths of immodest prudery, which belong to no class or country,
but are none the less to be avoided by all who would regulate their
mode of thought and expression by purity and true refinement." His
stentorian tone has never been more appropriate than it is here.

6. Maternalism and independence

As we have seen, the Victorian travelers in Upper Canada found
differences of accent and expression as compared to the speech they
had left behind. It is not at all surprising to find that they
automatically construed those differences to be evidence of
inferiority. In fact, that kind of construal happens all the time,
and is one of the unfortunate adjuncts of ethnic and racial
prejudice. But the Victorians also had a venerable historical
tradition on their side, reinforcing the common linguistic prejudice which affected them no less than it affects people today. Canada was, after all, British North America, the territory which had been founded by their ancestors or won by them from the other founding nations. They were representatives of the mother country, and they apparently had no doubt whatever about the appropriateness of their maternal instincts. At the same time, Canada was speedily approaching puberty in her drive toward nationhood, and with that was beginning to exercise her independence. The tangible evidence of that independence often took a linguistic form. The Victorians' criticisms of the English language as it was spoken in Canada grew out of the tension between maternalism and independence. This fact was most clearly perceived, as were so many other facts, by William Canniff (1869, 363). "The accent of Canadians, and their idioms to-day," he said, "are to a certain extent peculiar, sui generis, which peculiarity is constantly increasing, even as the British American is assuming in appearance a distinct characteristic. Taking all classes of Canadians, it may be said that for a people removed from the source of pure English, that is the Court, they have a very correct mode of speaking, the criticisms of English travelers to the contrary, notwithstanding."

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