

Mulroney's Shadows: The Many Images of Canada's Eighteenth Prime Minister

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All politicians leave mixed legacies. But among Canadian politicians, Brian Mulroney may stand unique. Other leaders have left contradictory images - John A. MacDonalld as the nation-building alcoholic, or Mackenzie King, the great compromiser who talked to spirits and his dog. Pierre Trudeau stands especially as a compelling and remarkable figure that defies easy summary. But perhaps no leader has left such a marvelously complex, contradictory and still-evolving legacy as Canada's eighteenth prime minister - Brian Mulroney.

The public legacy of Brian Mulroney is truly multifaceted. It spans ideologies and deeply intertwines his own person with his policy accomplishments. Mulroney pleases few and angers many, but for different and at times contradictory reasons. Mulroney has multiple images - among them are a harsh ideologue, a milquetoast pleaser, an obsession with polls, deep indifference to public opinion, a slick operator whose slickness was exposed continually, a statesman and possibly a crook. At the core of all this instability and multiple images is a complex personality and ego that continually surprises and disappoints.

Only Pierre Trudeau comes close to offering the same complexities. Cohen and Granatstein wrote in *Trudeau's Shadow* (1998) that "No other Canadian public figure has ever retained such power to move his country almost fifteen years after leaving office. No one else in office either has ever had his power to galvanize opinion. While he was prime minister, Trudeau was the most loved and most hated of leaders, sometimes simultaneously."¹

Yet there is widespread agreement about Pierre Trudeau's basic character, motivations and personality. What remains are ever-new shadings and hidden facets. In contrast, nothing seems stable about Brian Mulroney and his many images. His personality and motivations remain malleable and ever-changing, and assumptions are constantly undermined and need to be rethought. The very idea of this paper came about in mid-2007, before the latest revelations about Mulroney's dealings with Karl-Heinz Schreiber. Fifteen years after his own departure from office, Brian Mulroney remains very much unfinished business, and it seems will always be so. No matter how much we try to get to the bottom of what Brian Mulroney is about, there always seems to be another level.

Furthermore, there is a deep and unstable intertwining between Mulroney the person and Mulroney as prime minister. Mulroney and his supporters have long tried to shift the focus to his policy accomplishments, rather than his personal popularity, building an image of Mulroney as a bold and decisive nation-builder. In this prism, all that matters is his policy legacy, and it was best captured in his 1993 resignation speech: "I always tried to do what I thought would be right for Canada in the long term, not what would be politically popular in the short term."² In this familiar refrain, all that matters is the long-term public outcomes, not what Canadians think of Brian Mulroney.

Indeed, since the 1990s, there has been a sort of Mulroney rehabilitation project among historians and public policy scholars, trying to assess the policy legacy of the Mulroney government. This project has had some success, considering the depths of his standing in 1993. A 1998 survey of academics ranked Brian Mulroney the eighth most successful prime minister in Canadian history, at the top of the "average category."³ In 2003 *Policy Options*, considering prime ministers since St. Laurent, ranked Mulroney second behind only Lester Pearson.⁴ A 2000 economics study by Velks and Riggs argued that "Mulroney remains the man [sic] to beat" when calculating macroeconomic trends over the same period⁵, and a 2003 study by the Global Insight firm argued that Canadian living standards rose in the Chretien era only because of the major decisions of the Mulroney government, especially free trade, inflation targets, and the GST.⁶ In 2006 Mulroney was ranked "Canada's Greenest Prime Minister" by a corporate social responsibility magazine, at an event featuring prime minister Harper that showed Mulroney was no longer politically radioactive for the Conservative party. And in 2006 a major academic study edited by Raymond Blake discussed and parsed the policy legacy of the Mulroney government, finding both significant successes and failures.⁷

But the project of focusing on the policy legacy of Brian Mulroney cannot be detached from his larger impact of Brian Mulroney on Canadian public policy, Canadian politics, and Canada itself. As anyone teaching an undergraduate class knows, the name of Brian Mulroney can still provoke automatic suspicion even among students who were only infants during his time in power. The legacy of Brian Mulroney as irritating liar remains alive and well, at least in English Canada - best captured in the common implicit comparison to Trudeau that "he bugs us still." In Quebec, Mulroney does not provoke quite the same levels of sheer dislike and revulsion, but still leaves the same multiple images and contradictions. And even if one views Mulroney's policy accomplishments favourably, he leaves a wider personal legacy of mistrust and unease, and the sense of an unsettled and poisonous era in Canadian history. It is impossible to separate the widespread, deep and visceral dislike of Brian Mulroney from the evaluation and consideration of his accomplishments and policies.

This paper looks at Mulroney's multiple, simultaneous and contradictory images, drawing from a wide variety of sources. The point is not to eviscerate Mulroney further (nor to rehabilitate him), but to explore why there seems to be no single, "real" image of Brian Mulroney. There are only multiple shadows and images. In turn, these contradictory images may reflect not just Brian Mulroney but Canada itself, and the deep complexities and contradictions of the nation that Mulroney governed.

The Study of Political Leadership

Political science, at least in Canada, does not really study political leadership as it relates to public policy. While there is a substantive body of work on how party leaders are elected and their importance in public opinion and elections, few have tried to build a larger picture of leadership that intertwines personality, governance and public policy together. And indeed, it is very difficult to study how individuals really act as political and government leaders, especially contemporary leaders in complex systems of cabinet government. Information is controlled and spun, and most of the available data is little more than anecdotes. It instead becomes the job of historians to build eventual understandings through archival research and other comprehensive methods.

The most persuasive and solid political science studies of government leadership view it in functional terms - measuring how leaders set and achieve goals, how they relate to and motivate others, etc. Hence we have studies on the centralization and delegation of power (e.g., the work of Donald Savoie), just as we have studies of leaders' public popularity and electability. But connecting these functional dimensions with the larger intangible questions of personality and image is dicey and difficult.

However, when considering Brian Mulroney's legacy as national leader, we have an American precedent: Richard Nixon. The similarities are uncanny. As with Nixon, Mulroney has many sides and images, and both evoke wide revulsion. Their individual personalities seem perennially artificial, contrived and calculated. Both have a history of career deaths and resurrections, ranging from historic election landslides to being under serious criminal investigation, and a constant story of reinvention and retooling that frustrates any quest to find the "real" person. And both left office more or less in disgrace, obsessed with establishing their legacies as bold and decisive men who did the "right thing" rather than the most popular.

David Greenberg argues in the recent *Nixon's Shadow* that "we now live in a culture that's hyperaware of the construction and manipulation of images in politics. Nixon provides a vehicle for tracing the rise of this new hyperawareness, since...he both reflected and contributed to it."⁸ The shadow image, used by Granatstein and Cohen as well in their book on Trudeau, evokes "a semblance of a person as distinct from the person itself" - our impressions of the person, which shape our attitudes and responses. In this paper I talk about images, which are more easily understood as multiple, epheral, and dependent on the eye of the viewer. But whether we talk about shadows or images, the point is that we form impressions of political leaders. And according to Greenberg, "Nixon's shadow haunts our [American] landscape in that he so influenced our thoughts about politics and leaders that ours is, as many observers have called it, an Age of Nixon."

I will not claim we live in the Age of Mulroney, but I will argue that, like Nixon in the United States, Mulroney's images say much about the complexities and contradictions of Canada itself. While he competes with Pierre Trudeau here, Brian Mulroney's many images continue to overshadow Canadian politics today. And, unlike Trudeau, the images of Mulroney remains highly contested and seemingly endless.

Mulroney as Perfection

The image most cultivated by Brian Mulroney himself is one of perfection. In his 1987 biography *Friends in High Places*, Claire Hoy says that “watching Mulroney, one got the feeling that beneath the plastic exterior of the studied politician, there was an impenetrable layer of more plastic.”⁹ There is a longstanding sense of slickness, perfectionism and artificiality about Brian Mulroney, and many have observed this was Mulroney’s choice. Christopher Waddell says that Mulroney’s “sense of how a politician should act in public” was as an artificial creation that showed no flaws. Waddell suggests this “somewhat puffed-up and unnatural” image was learned from John Diefenbaker (and shared by Joe Clark).¹⁰ Many others have noted Mulroney’s obsession with an overblown image; Peter C. Newman says “I realized the unusual significance he placed on prime ministerial toys...those official Cadillacs with the Canadian flag...the red NORAD telephones, back-seat TVs, and self-important police outriders.”¹¹

The image of Mulroney as perfection was extended and perpetuated by Mulroney’s staff and followers. Former chief of staff Stanley Hartt said “[t]he staff was trained to believe that criticism of the prime minister was disloyal no matter how constructive”¹² - a standard lament about many leaders, but particularly intriguing given Hartt’s position and his attribution of this attitude to Mulroney himself. “He actually believed that if you started a system where it was okay to criticize the prime minister...that before long the distinction between creative and constructive criticism and negative and destructive criticism would blur.”

The need for perfection explains Mulroney’s strong reaction against John Sawatsky’s 1991 biography of him, *Mulroney: The Politics of Ambition*.¹³ Neither hagiography (like Ian MacDonald’s *Mulroney: The Making of the Prime Minister*¹⁴) nor muckracker (Hoy’s *Friends in High Places*), Sawatsky’s book is generally fair and open-minded. Yet Mulroney fought its publication and disdained it entirely, seemingly because it made fleeting and dated references to his premarital sex life and drinking habits.¹⁵ For Mulroney it was not merely unflattering or slightly embarrassing to have his life as a young man discussed, but a direct attack to be repelled by all possible means. Nothing could upset the perfect image.

Mulroney’s plastic perfectionism of course perfectly fits with another image that we will explore in detail below - Mulroney as crook. His need to control his entire image means he is inevitably hiding something, and thus large numbers of Canadians are convinced Brian Mulroney is and always was on the take, in the phrase of Stevie Cameron’s 1994 book. We will explore this further later, but here we need only note the yawning gap between the overblown statesman author of *Memoirs* and the former prime minister who is paid in envelopes of cash.

A few other Mulroney loyalists also lament this perfectionism. Sally Armstrong, Mila Mulroney’s sycophantic biographer, says that Mila Mulroney said Mulroney told her early in their relationship that he wanted to be prime minister. But when Armstrong asked him to confirm this, he denied entirely that he had said so, presumably thinking this did not fit his preferred image. Armstrong asks rhetorically, “The problem is, why does he tell stories that are not true? Why does he feel he has to present himself as a perfect person?”¹⁶ Indeed, this has

become part of the Mulroney rehabilitation project - to acknowledge his perfectionist ego, but to argue again that the substance holds up regardless. Other more detached observers hold this up, especially the contrast between the plastic public figure and the gregarious man of many friends. David Peterson said “He is a pathological liar...[but] I’d much rather be marooned on a desert island with him than Trudeau.”¹⁷

As Peterson suggests, another powerful and enduring image is Mulroney as friend. Mulroney has several categories of friends - the acolytes and sycophants of his university years who surrounded him in office; the partisan contacts and loyalists across the country who brought him the party leadership and stood by him; and the Canadian and international elites - led by George H.W. Bush - who seem genuinely charmed by him and enjoy his company. Mulroney’s friendship is deeply masculine - there are few if any women in these categories - but almost certainly genuine, built on his gregariousness and extroversion. (Perhaps the most realistic images of Brian Mulroney are pictures of him talking on the telephone.) Mulroney has rarely been accused of disloyalty to friends, and the greatest villain in Mulroney lore is undoubtedly former friend turned foe Lucien Bouchard. Mulroney’s friendships have become part of the rehabilitation project, excusing the criminal activities of Mulroney associates on the grounds that Mulroney could not cut friends loose, no matter how dubious their activities. Indeed, the idea that Brian Mulroney was an honest man who happened to have dishonest friends held up fairly well until recently.

Another of Mulroney’s self-images is “the boy from Baie Comeau.” In the opening pages of his memoirs, he describes his early years and juxtaposes these modest origins with accounts of meeting the Queen and the Pope. Mulroney often uses working- or lower-middle-class phrases like the need to “earn a living” and “pay the bills” to describe his six-figure salaries and periods of corporate employment in the early 1980s and after 1993. In a 2000 interview with Steve Paikin, he said, “I used to tell the kids at Harrington Lake [the prime minister’s retreat], ‘None of this belongs to us. When Daddy’s finished with this, we’re going back to Montreal and start all over again.’”¹⁸ Upward mobility and achievement are hallmarks of Mulroney’s self-image, and of course require careful polishing. While his origins were indeed modest and obscure, his father was a skilled labourer with steady employment and Mulroney enjoyed sufficient stability and means to attend boarding school away from home and aspire to a university education. His self-made image also downplays his bald strategy of ingratiation, pleasing and impressing older patrons in his upward legal and political rise.

Mulroney’s upward mobility is commonly linked to insecurity. This insecurity in turn can be linked to his policies and political style, from the recklessness of rolling the dice at Meech Lake to his seeking to please the father image of Ronald Reagan. Moving even further into dubious psychological theories, the relatively early death of Mulroney’s father (when Mulroney was 26), his status as the eldest son, etc., can all provide further shadows and Mulroney images. (It also cannot pass without comment that the one Mulroney offspring to become a public figure, Ben Mulroney, hosts *Canadian Idol*, essentially a musical gameshow, along with the “entertainment news” and celebrity gossip of *e-talk Canada*, and that both shows are spinoffs of American enterprises.)

Of course, Mulroney's personal ego and self-promotion directly contradict his own policy rehabilitation dream. He supposedly wants nothing more than a fair judgement of his policies, yet cannot end his public career. Again, a Trudeau comparison is needed; the coolness of Trudeau only grew through his seeming indifference to his post-office image and his lack of substantive memoirs. In contrast, Mulroney published a truly-phonebook sized memoir of 1100 pages (with endpapers of his own handwriting, to emphasize these were his own words), and as his rehabilitation continued, welcomed more and more publicity. In April 2004 he appeared on the cover of *Report on Business* magazine as part of a major story praising his post-1993 career as a mover and shaker in business.¹⁹ That same month, his 65th birthday party was covered in the society pages of *Women's Wear Daily* in words that surely delighted him:

Everybody who matters in the political, banking and business worlds knows The Right Honourable Brian Mulroney, the personable and handsome former prime minister of Canada. Brian ran his country when Ronald Reagan ran his and Lady Thatcher ran hers. And when they worked together it was as smooth as silk. The powerful trio meshed brilliantly. The Right Honourable is a lucky fellow. He has a beautiful wife, Mila, to whom he has been married for many happy years; a beautiful family...²⁰

Apart from his continuing need for personal publicity, there of course was no political retirement for Brian Mulroney, who maintained a ghostly but very real presence in the Conservative party through its darkest days. Various accounts tell us how Mulroney remained a strong Progressive Conservative partisan in the 1990s, an equally strong proponent of its Alliance merger in 2003, and an occasional advisor to Stephen Harper before and after the 2006 Conservative victory.²¹ All this is beside his obsession with his own policy rehabilitation and his regular citing of its findings.²² In contrast, Pierre Trudeau's few public ventures after 1984 were pointed and substantive interventions on constitutional issues, he did not willingly pose for magazine covers, and any direct influence he had in Liberal party circles was well hidden.

Another personal image is Mulroney as family man. He and Mila Mulroney have carefully controlled access to their family and yet actively promoted the image of Mulroney as warm father and husband. Mulroney's family has always been in the public eye, even in December 2007 when Mulroney brought along his wife and adult children to his testimony to the House of Commons ethics committee. Writing of this, Margaret Wente reports that as a child Nicolas Mulroney was known as "'the prop' for the cute way he'd spontaneously show up to hug his dad around the knees during photo-ops."²³ Mulroney continues to invite exposure of approved intimate family images - in August 2005, a posed picture of Brian, Mila and their newborn granddaughter appeared in the *Globe and Mail* in a picture labeled "Mulroney Family Handout."

The great exception to this polished image is the famous *Frank* magazine feature of September 1991 that crudely invited young Tories to "deflower" Caroline Mulroney. Apart from nearly destroying *Frank's* already marginal reputation, this allowed Mulroney to say - with typical but for once understandable exaggeration - that the magazine had advocated gang-rape and "I wanted to take a gun and go down there and do some serious damage to those people"

(according to Allan Levine, Mulroney was then criticized by gun control groups)²⁴. Less noted was the reason for the tasteless and offensive feature in the first place - Mulroney's bringing the seventeen year old Caroline to that summer's Conservative policy convention and the multiple photos of the pretty young teenager accompanying her unpopular father, in typical Mulroney family choreography. Even this incident is difficult to classify in any discussion of Brian Mulroney.

In the end though, there is at least some broad agreement about Brian Mulroney's public personality - his ego, his need for attention, his self-aggrandizement, and his inability to know when to stop. This spills over into any understanding and evaluation of him and his government. However, in the next section we will move to some of his major policies, and indeed try to focus on issues and accomplishments. But any evaluation of these only adds to our collection of images of Brian Mulroney, and as I said above, it is impossible to somehow separate the Mulroney policy legacy from the other images of Brian Mulroney.

Mulroney as American

A key aspect of Brian Mulroney is his view of the United States. As Hillmer and Granatstein say, "his admiration for the United States, its leadership and lifestyle, was ripe for caricature."²⁵ Easily the most memorable visual image here is his odd duet with Ronald Reagan at the 1985 Shamrock Summit, which Jack Granatstein reportedly called "the single most demeaning moment in the entire political history of Canada's relations with the United States." It embodies Mulroney's emphasis on personal friendship with Reagan and later George H.W. Bush, as well as other national leaders.

Did Mulroney's view of America evolve? In 1983 he ridiculed free trade with the U.S. as "like sleeping with an elephant....we'll have none of it."²⁶ But it became a priority of his government, greatly contributing to the unreliability of his word, and typically, Mulroney defended his decision as one of nuance - "I was in favour of free trade, but against unfettered free trade."²⁷ Such semantics are par for the course with Brian Mulroney and many other politicians. But some argue Mulroney's views genuinely changed. Nossal and Michaud note that "[a]s opposition leader, Mulroney articulated a largely unidimensional critique of the Trudeau approach" and that he spoke of the need to "refurbish" the relationship with the US and become "a super ally."²⁸ But, "[o]nce in power, however, Brian Mulroney and the Progressive Conservatives took a different tack...[and] pursued a course in foreign policy that was markedly different from the one that might have been expected given his party's views while in opposition."²⁹

Certainly, key appointments like Joe Clark and Stephen Lewis were unmistakably on the moderate side, and Mulroney pursued a progressive and active foreign policy with emphasis on human rights and multilateral institutions. He avoided the most polarizing American issues like SDI ("Star Wars"). Most notably of course was his disagreement with Margaret Thatcher over the application of sanctions against South Africa, "in the teeth of opposition from his own party, caucus, Cabinet, and civil service" according to Linda Freeman.³⁰ Rather than the image of Mulroney as American wannabe, we have another image of Mulroney as champion of human

rights and progressive international statesman.

Of course, and as with so many other policy areas, Mulroney would be the first to make the above points. Freeman says that “for these initiatives, Mulroney and other Canadian leaders have taken a great deal of credit.” She argues that in fact these policies were limited, and the claims surrounding it excessive.³¹ But again, as with free trade, it is difficult to sort out the nuances and evolution of Mulroney’s actual thinking and policies, especially if we rely on his public statements with their typical hyperbole and vagueness. His very personality and style make it nearly impossible to take any of his own policy statements at face value or trace any sort of intellectual journey. Instead we rely on evidence that can serve different interpretations - for example, Lewis’s appointment can easily be seen as a singular and intentionally symbolic exception to cover other more reactionary decisions.

Mulroney’s continued and highly visible ties with the American elite (see *Women’s Wear Daily* above) make it impossible to shake the image of Mulroney as American wannabe and sycophant. But ultimately we see what we want to see in Mulroney’s foreign policy, and especially in his view of the United States. Thus Michael Hart says that Mulroney displayed “...a refreshing absence of that kind of facile anti-Americanism that has marred, and continues to mar, Canadian policy discussions.”³² Of course an avalanche of other opinion argues that Mulroney was far too sycophantic, trusting, and reliant on his personal friendships with Reagan and Bush. And perhaps a few marginal voices on the right argue that Mulroney was not pro-American enough, though it’s hard to find explicit examples.

Mulroney as Neoconservative

While we have a muddled view of Mulroney’s foreign policy and especially its underlying motivations, we are in even more difficult territory with his domestic policies and his overall ideological outlook. When he governed, the image of Mulroney as slashing neocon enemy of the state held serious weight; even now, after the deeper cuts of the Chretien years, the arrival of the true believers of Reform/Alliance, and the much more zealous examples of Mike Harris and others, the image of Mulroney as neocon still holds - among those on the left who never liked him in the first place. One of the basic contradictions of Brian Mulroney is precisely how someone so vilified for a “corporate” and “neo-conservative” agenda could also precipitate a right-wing revolt in the form of the Reform Party.

It is hard to make a case for Brian Mulroney as a serious ideologue of any stripe. His social and economic views prior to 1984 were standard and predictable for an opposition politician on the right - less government, generic faith in the free market, more pro-business policies, etc. He called social programs a “sacred trust” as part of a typically incoherent front-runner message that included everything from “jobs, jobs, jobs” to “pink slips and running shoes” for civil servants. Rice and Prince say the “sacred trust...promise reflected his political need to let Canadians know that his government would not become radically conservative” unlike the Reagan and Thatcher governments.³³ By his 1984 victory, Mulroney’s views were thoroughly and suitably blurred, and the best picture of the era is Solange Denis confronting Mulroney on the steps of Parliament Hill in 1985 over pension indexing and his change of mind.

That inarticulate “goodbye Charlie Brown” moment can serve many Mulroney images - as dishonest braggart, as milquetoast pleaser, and as ideological weathervane.

Yet despite Mulroney’s image as a spineless pleaser, nearly everyone agrees that the Mulroney years were times of considerable policy upheavals and changes. Timothy Lewis says that “whether one applauds or condemns it, the Mulroney legacy with respect to Canadian economic orderings continues to be the most important and defining feature in Canadian politics” and Mulroney was a “seminal” figure in economic reform.³⁴ Raymond Blake says Mulroney “presided over one of the most turbulent and challenging eras in Canada’s history...a time of considerable change and uncertainty.”³⁵ This vision of profound change, for better or worse, captures the views of both Mulroney’s supporters and opponents (save those on the right that saw only further stagnation and decline.) But the question of Mulroney’s personal agency is more open.

Analyzing social policy under Mulroney, Rice and Prince argue that “the Mulroney years were characterized by a shift from one social policy regime to another, a shift for which Mulroney was only partly responsible, since external trends in the form of neo-conservative ideas and practices were also partly responsible.”³⁶ Similarly, in fiscal and economic policies, it is not hard to situate Mulroney’s government within much larger global trends of privatization, deregulation, liberalized trade, etc. The question becomes whether Mulroney primarily drove change, or adapted to external trends in Canada and the world. Certainly everything we know about his personality suggests he went with the prevailing winds, and that in an earlier era Mulroney would have been a happy Keynesian or whatever the consensus was at the time.

It’s very tricky to sustain the image of Mulroney as neoconservative/neoliberal ideologue, in conventional terms. But what about Mulroney as agent of “the corporate agenda”, whatever that exactly means? Here unlikely support comes from, of all people, ex-minister John Crosbie:

Mulroney was no right-wing Conservative. He believed in the private sector, as I did, but on social issues he was on the left, as I was. Like me, Mulroney was a red Tory. He supported extending human-rights legislation to protect gays and lesbians, and he was pro-choice on abortion....I’m not sure how pragmatic Mulroney was when it came to the private sector, however. One thing you learn in politics is not to put too much trust in the business community. No matter what you do or what policies you adopt...business people will always fail you when a controversy develops. They won’t back you up.”³⁷

Certainly Mulroney loved and still loves wealthy and successful elites, and presumably whatever ideological winds are blowing among them. (This also explains the anti-Mulroney appeal of the Reform Party, a populist as much as a right-wing movement.) Hence he reflected the trends of his time, but - at least in Crosbie’s view - gained only ephemeral support that could not sustain a political base or movement. Time only further undermines Mulroney’s image as a ideological conservative, but the image of corporate elite pleaser is, safe to say, more enduring.

Mulroney as Crook

Still, regardless of Mulroney's policies, for many Canadians the only image they need of Brian Mulroney is as crook. As noted, the plastic perfectionism of Mulroney leaves him always hiding something, and many conclude that at the core is the use of public funds for private gain. Stevie Cameron wrote in 1994 that "the Mulroneys had left public life in the same fashion in which they had conducted themselves during their years in power; with an unshaken belief in their entitlement to the taxpayer's purse."³⁸

The image of Mulroney as crook has several facets. Early talk focused on personal spending and things that seem almost petty and quaint by later standards, like shoe closets and renovations at 24 Sussex. Ultimately, this image of Mulroney as Gucci shoe horse grafted easily onto his existing plastic image and by itself probably did him little further harm.

But as his government lurched along, more and more of Mulroney's friends/associates/supporters (categories easily blurred in his world) became implicated in financial and other patronage scandals. This created the strong sense of a government and party that reflected Mulroney's strong sense of personal bonds and friendship, but lacked a moral compass, and it was easy to conclude this also reflected the true nature of Brian Mulroney. By 1993, it was increasingly held that Brian Mulroney was highly indifferent to the appearance of financial propriety and, even if not personally "on the take" - notwithstanding possibly the most libellous book cover ever published in Canada - certainly bent the rules and pushed the limits, and Cameron and others continued in their zeal to expose Mulroney as a taker of outright bribes.

This image received a rude arrest in the 1995-97 Airbus case, when Mulroney finally turned to the courts with yet another new image of his own making - Mulroney as citizen. "You may like or dislike Brian Mulroney," said one of his lawyers, "you may like or dislike his politics or his policies, but you cannot do this to a Canadian citizen."³⁹ William Kaplan wrote in *Presumed Guilty* (1998) that "we have to care about the Airbus affair, no matter what we think about Brian Mulroney and his place in history. The assault on him was an assault on us all. If the resources of the RCMP and the Department of Justice can be mobilized and turned against a former prime minister, they can also be directed at any one of us."⁴⁰

The Airbus settlement and damages helped curb the Mulroney investigation industry and created stable ground for the policy rehabilitation project. But Mulroney as crook did not go away, and by 2004, Kaplan wrote another book, *A Secret Trial*, that revealed much more about Mulroney's relationship with Karl-Heinz Schreiber. Now it was Kaplan complaining that "Mulroney's unrelenting campaign to persuade me not to publish the story...was brutal, heavy-handed, and extremely wearing."⁴¹ But the exact question of possible Mulroney wrongdoing remains cloudy, vague and arcane, and until recently, largely the interest of those already convinced of his criminality. It took until late 2007, coincidentally or not right after the publication of his memoirs, for new revelations about his Schreiber payments, the rendering of taxes on them, and their precise relationship, to return the image of Mulroney as crook to the public realm. This created new types of crook-images: Mulroney as tax evader and, particularly novel, since Schreiber said Mulroney did nothing for the money and failed to pay it back,

Mulroney as deadbeat.

Conclusion: Mulroney as Comeback

All politicians need a storyline of suitable highs and lows, combining promise, adversity, grit and final triumph. Usually this is tied to elections; Macdonald was almost destroyed by scandal in 1873, King's career seemed finished in 1930, Pearson fell flat in 1958, and Trudeau was humbled in 1972 and apparently washed up in 1979. But Mulroney surpasses all Canadian politicians in his lifetime of lows and comebacks, "a man who's experienced the highest highs and lowest lows of perhaps anyone who's ever entered public life in Canada" as Steve Paikin wrote - back in 2000.⁴²

The image of Brian Mulroney as comeback starts with his loss of the 1976 leadership race and the fallow years of the late 1970s, and his return to winning the leadership in 1983 and his great victory of 1984. Within two years the government was hitting record lows of popularity, but the 1988 reelection was the second great comeback for Mulroney. Then came even deeper unpopularity and his 1993 resignation (allowing to hold forever the great untested myth that he could have won yet again in comeback #3). His 1997 Airbus victory signaled a basic rehabilitation of his personal image, along with the policy rehabilitation project of the 1990s, culminating in the warm reviews of the 2000s, the willingness of Stephen Harper to be seen in public with him, and the title of "greenest prime minister." And yet by late 2007 Brian Mulroney possibly went deeper and lower than ever before; the prime minister who deals in cash for dubious assignments with unscrupulous people, skirting conflicts of interest and tax laws along the way. (Harper's warm remarks about Mulroney at the April 2006 'greenest prime minister' event are not available on the prime ministerial website.)

Brian Mulroney is an unfinished story in Canadian politics. His legal troubles and current political radioactiveness leave opportunity for yet another comeback and public rehabilitation. Of course, many already have a firm and unchangeable image of Brian Mulroney. Yet as we have seen in this paper, those images are many and contradictory, often reflecting the viewer's own prisms and perspectives.

It may be too much to say that Mulroney's contradictions reflect the contradictions and paradoxes of the Canadian nation itself - yet there is a definite connection. Mulroney's insecurities and yearnings and the absence of an obvious core reflect very widespread Canadian values. I am probably not the first to suggest that if Pierre Trudeau represented what many want Canada to be, Brian Mulroney reflects Canada as it really is. The one thing we can truly count on is that there will be more images and comebacks to come, and that Brian Mulroney will continue to both haunt and bug us still.

Endnotes

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