**Kenneth McRoberts – Misconceiving Canada (1997)**

**Thesis:**

The roots of the unity crisis lay with decisions taken by Pierre Trudeau to implant a new Canadian identity. Trudeau's vision for unity assumed that all Canadians must see their country and their place in it in exactly the same way. This was incompatible with the Quebecois vision of a country consisting of dual majorities, which had always been accommodated in various ways prior to Trudeau's reign of terror.

**Main Argument:**

There is continuity in Canada's history with regards to the recognition of a dual compact. This was most evident during the United Province period. Though the BNA Act was anti-federalist in ways and limited Quebec's ability to govern itself, dualism was revived by Henri Bourassa and others, and remained strong in Quebec. In the 1960s, all parties declared their support for a 'two founding peoples' conception of Quebec, and the Pearson government sought to respond to the new nationalism of Quebec by reinforcing dualism within the Canadian political order. Then Trudeau showed up.

Trudeau's flawed national unity strategy was built around three main components. The centrepiece was bilingualism, which proved divisive when it came up against the competing notion of territorial linguistic blocs popular in Quebec. Second was multiculturalism, which sought to limit dualism to language alone. This has also been rejected in Quebec. Third was Trudeau's attempt to reform political institutions and particularly, asserting the role and visibility of the federal government as the 'national' government of all Canadians. He was successful in enacting his vision through the Charter, but this again has been a major source of disunity because it was patriated without the consent of the Quebec's national assembly, etc.

The Meech Lake Accord was an attempt at a modest reform that could bring Quebec into the constitution. However, it violated Trudeau's vision which had taken hold in English Canada and thus became the source of open and acrimonious conflict rather than reconciliation. The Charlottetown Accord was crafted in an effort to be more compatible with Trudeau's vision. The result was something that was not palatable in either Western Canada or Quebec. Both parties could've been satisfied by assymetrical, decentralizing arrangements, but these would have come in direct conflict with Trudeau's vision.

The failure of the national unity strategy is reflected in the close referendum result as well as the simple fact that linguistic segregation is greater than ever. For it to have been successful, it would have had to alter the basic, immovable social reality of two linguistic blocs.

To solve this problem, we need to conceive of Canada not as a single political community but a multinational entity. Federalism should be organized asymmetrically, so that more powers can be extended to Quebec without a major devolution to the other provinces. Language regimes should be organized territorially i.e. the status of languages would depend on where they were being spoken.

**Method/Approach:**

This book could be described in part as historical instuttionalism. It traces the various manifestations of one essentially constant idea throughout Canada's history post-Confederation, then identifies a watershed shift that stimulated crisis. McRoberts' explanation for that shift places almost all of its emphasis on the transformative leadership of an individual. In describing the reason for the failure of Trudeau's vision, McRoberts relies partially on a sociological determinist explanation.

**Contributions**

A seemingly-popular restatement of the conventional Quebec position, with greater attention paid to competing models of management of languages as a fundamental divergence. It is one of the more complete and direct English-language responses to Trudeau's vision of bilingualism.

It is largely a call for traditional dualism, but at the end of the text McRoberts begins to use the language of multinationalism in response to the obvious deficiency of dualism in accounting for Aboriginal peoples. In this respect, following Resnick, it is indicative of the changing theoretical defense of recognition for Quebec.

It has a substantial historical component, but delves less deeply into normative issues than Gagnon and Iacovino and others.