

TORONTO – DESTINATION IMAGE, LITERATURE AND FILM

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ABSTRACT

Toronto is a cosmopolitan city with one hundred and fifty languages being spoken by residents. For many visitors, two iconic buildings create an instant image of Toronto, namely, the Rogers Centre (opened 1989; name changed from the more apposite SkyDome in 2005) and the CN Tower (opened 1976).

The literature confirming the influence of destination image upon tourist behaviour is extensive. However, in tourism research, the key question is, of course, how is destination image created? Furthermore, there are different forms of destination image. The organic image is created by non-commercial sources of information; importantly, it is information which is not controlled by destination promoters per se. Potential contributions to the organic image of Toronto are examined. In recent years, the image of this city has been influenced by the large (and small) screen and its depiction in works of fiction. A number of novels and films are examined for their portrayal of locations within Toronto. Then, there is the fact that much literature is transformed into productions for both the small and large screen with concomitant influences on organic destination image creation. Ubiquitous issues of authenticity further complicate representations of Toronto; for example, due to production costs, the movie Chicago was filmed in the city; indeed, Toronto was the location for films representing places in twenty-eight U.S. states. To illustrate the scale of activity, over \$791 million was spent on production costs in 2007.

KEYWORDS

Literary tourism; Film tourism; Destination image.

INTRODUCTION

Toronto is a global city on virtually any basis, whether in Sassen's (1991) terms or by dint of its cosmopolitan nature with one hundred and fifty languages being spoken by residents (City of Toronto 2009). For many around the world, two iconic buildings create an instant image of Toronto, namely, the Rogers Centre (opened 1989; name changed from the more apposite SkyDome in 2005) and the CN Tower (opened 1976). These buildings provide an iconic skyline, particularly from the Toronto Islands, to a far greater extent than the historic Royal York Hotel or the Union Station or, indeed, Fort York – all close by. Demolition of the grain silos and some of the rail tracks, in the 1970s, resulted in a modern harbour-front with hotels, condominiums and marinas; there was also government finance for “seat-of-the-pants arts activity” (Bradbury 1996:306); arguably, Toronto had come of age as a cultural city.

Having mentioned Fort York, it needs to be emphasised that Toronto is, to all intents and purposes, a comparatively young city; this becomes all the more significant when one stops to consider what exactly influences representations of any given settlement; nearly all European cities have many centuries of heritage and this produces multiple representations based on both tangible and intangible heritage. Toronto has little in the way of built heritage which is more than one hundred and twenty years old; similarly, the intangible heritage is ‘young’ and, principally, based on the cultures and traditions of in-migrants. In other words, whilst the city is not a ‘blank canvas’, it is argued that literature and film can significantly influence representations, particularly given the absence of substantial built and intangible heritage. This article reviews a number of works of fiction and movies in order to highlight those which might influence perception of the city – and how this might occur.

DESTINATION IMAGE

The literature confirming the influence of destination image upon tourist behaviour is extensive (Ateljevic 2000; Chen and Tsai 2007; MacKay and Fesenmaier 1997; Pike 2004; Tasci, Gartner & Tamer Cavusgil 2007; Therkelsen 2003; Yüksel and Akgül 2007 to cite but a few papers). In tourism research, the key question is, of course, how is destination image created? Developing the concept from the work of Gunn and Gartner, Ateljevic (2000) suggests that the images upon which destination choices are based can be classified as: the organic, the induced, and the complex.

The organic image is created by informal, non-commercial sources of information which may include word-of-mouth testimony; importantly, it is information which is not controlled by destination promoters. The induced image is the result of marketing professionals; however, as Tasci & Gartner (2007:414) point out, “mutual exclusivity” between the two forms of image is almost non-existent as a result of “skilful media relations” by marketing professionals. For the purposes of this paper, it is the organic image of Toronto which will be examined. In recent years, the image of this Canadian city has, arguably, been influenced by the large (and small) screen and its depiction in works of fiction.

TORONTO IN LITERATURE AND FILM

Gatenby (1996) makes the point that even into the 1960s, Canadian novelists would usually locate their settings elsewhere because of concern about harming sales – a point emphasised by Cooke and Morton (2007:xxiii) in their introduction to Phyllis Brett Young's *The Torontonians* – “the risk of using Toronto as a setting was not insignificant for an author aiming to reach audiences outside Canada. One must remember that this was decades before... Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* or... Atwood's *Cat's Eye*”.

What is surprising is that Gatenby's contribution to Bradbury's *Atlas of Literature* does not cite Young's canon; surprising because she has been called a forerunner of J.K. Rowling today (Cooke and Morton 2007); upon release in hard copy in late October 1960, *The Torontonians* became an instant bestseller and it was estimated that her first three novels reached ten million readers (Cooke and Morton 2007). To instance one example of Young's use of actual, well-known locations: “Afterwards, she and Rick had had coffee at a place across from the Union Station, and later driven up Yonge Street... Karen had always liked Yonge Street, even in the days when it was congested with street-cars. The lights and stir of this main artery never failed to stimulate her...” (Young 2007:12). Destination promotion does not seem to emphasise that Yonge Street is the longest in the world – running all the way to Hudson's Bay.

A number of novels and films have been examined for their portrayal of locations within the Greater Toronto area. As Alistair MacLeod (1999:3) states, in *No Great Mischief*, “Regardless of the route of entrance, the realization of the city of Toronto is always something of a surprise”; in his novel, as in Michael Ondaatje's *In The Skin Of A Lion*, it is the underbelly of the city which is illustrated. Nonetheless, it paints a picture of the city and, it is argued, creates what Rojek (1997:55) terms a ‘pot pourri’, a truly organic image of Toronto, constructed from “representational files”.

Table 1.
Toronto in literature – a selection

Date of publication	Title	Author
1960	<i>The Torontonians</i>	Phyllis Brett Young
1981	<i>The Rebel Angels</i>	Robertson Davies
1987	<i>In The Skin Of A Lion</i>	Michael Ondaatje
1993	<i>The Robber Bride</i>	Margaret Atwood
1999	<i>No Great Mischief</i>	Alistair MacLeod

The *National Post* article describing the unveiling by Michael Ondaatje can be seen at: <http://network.nationalpost.com/np/blogs/toronto/archive/2009/04/23/kuitenbrouwer-ondaatje-breathes-life-into-city-landmark.aspx> (viewed 29 April 2009). Ondaatje's novel is set during construction of the bridge and whilst the Project Bookmark Canada panel illustrates one excerpt, there are references on other pages:

“Then there was no fear on the bridge. The worst, the incredible had happened. A nun had fallen off the Prince Edward Viaduct before it was even finished (p.33)... Nicholas Temelcoff is famous on the bridge... He is given all the difficult jobs... he descends into the

air with no fear. (p.36)... Below him is the Don River, the Grand Trunk, the CN and CP railway tracks, and Rosedale Valley Road (p.44)".

In the campus novels genre, Robertson Davies' fiction draws on his time at the University of Toronto; indeed, the venerable source Wikipedia has the following to say with regard to *The Rebel Angels*, published in 1981: "Many believe that Davies based the College of St. John and the Holy Ghost (or "Spook" as it is affectionately called in the novel) on Toronto's Trinity College. Evidence for this connection includes numerous similarities between the fictional and the real life college (including architectural style, layout of rooms, age, and religious affiliation); the fact that Davies taught at Trinity College for 20 years and lived across the street from Trinity while master of Massey College; and perhaps most convincingly that a picture of Trinity's central tower is prominently featured on the cover of the novel's first edition" (Wikipedia 2009).

Then, there is the fact that much literature is transformed into productions for both the small and large screen (Busby & Klug 2001; Busby et al 2003; Busby & O'Neill 2006) with concomitant influences on organic destination image creation; video clips on the internet are also relevant – take Margaret Atwood and the Toronto harbour front series viewable on YouTube, for example. Ubiquitous issues of authenticity further complicate representations of Toronto; for example, due to production costs, the movie *Chicago* was filmed in the city; indeed, Toronto was the location for films representing places in twenty-eight U.S. states, New York City being another key representation. To illustrate the scale of activity, over \$791 million was spent on production costs in 2007, 83 per cent of which was on major productions (Toronto Film & Television Office 2009).

Table 2 lists but seven of the many movies filmed in the city; however, despite the subjective nature of the analysis, it is apparent that some are likely to have more impact than others. *Driven*, released in 2001, provides an excellent view of harbour front, particularly of the CN Tower; similarly, *Angel Eyes*, also released in 2001, incorporates clear shots of the Tower. On the other hand, *Man of the Year*, released 2006, provides no unequivocal 'shots' of the iconic Toronto landscape. Nonetheless, movie buffs now have ready access to internet pages such as those of the Toronto Film and Television Office which provides quite some detail of locations used.

Table 2.
Toronto and ‘the silver screen’ – a selection

Date of release	Title	Locations	Locations ‘obvious’?
2000	<i>X-Men</i>	Casa Loma; former Gooderham & Worts Distillery; Roy Thomson Hall; Metro Hall Council Chamber; Central Commerce Collegiate; Union Station	Possibly
2001	<i>Driven</i>	CN Tower	Yes
2001	<i>Angel Eyes</i>	Filmore's - 212 Dundas St E; Queen Street Bridge; St John's Norway Cemetery; Marine Terminal 51; Playter Estates; Varsity Stadium; Silver Dollar; Jilly's; Garden Gate Restaurant; St Matthias Church; CN Tower – skyline	No Yes
2002	<i>Chicago</i>	Osgoode Hall; Queen's Park; former Gooderham & Worts Distillery; Casa Loma; Elgin Theatre; Union Station; Canada Life Building; Danforth Music Hall; Old City Hall	
2002	<i>My Big Fat Greek Wedding</i>	Greektown Ryerson University	Possibly
2006	<i>Man of the Year</i>	CBC Broadcast Centre King's College, Univ. of T. Westin Harbour Castle Massey Hall Humber Regional Hospital	No
2007	<i>Hairspray</i>	Dundas Street West Lord Lansdowne Public School	No

Sources: Toronto Film and Television Office (<http://www.toronto.ca/tfto/index.htm>); Internet Movie Database (<http://www.imdb.com/>); Wikipedia (2009)

CONCLUSION

This paper has reviewed some of the potential determinants of organic destination image. Literature, clearly, leaves much to the imagination: a greater degree of phenomenological interpretation exists than for what is presented on the large, or small, screen. Toronto does not have the 'layers' of history found in many European cities and, therefore, image is much more likely to be constructed from migrant family influences and the media – key amongst media forms are literature and film. What needs to be considered is that 'blockbusters' may only feature but a few minutes of the city – and that these may be interior 'shots'; examples being the interior of Casa Loma and Metro Hall in *X Men* and this raises the issue of who is actually likely to recognise such locations unless they have visited the city – and these sights beforehand. On the other hand, those iconic sights (sites), such as the CN Tower mentioned earlier, appear in movies such as *Driven* and *Angel Eyes* and are argued to be but one example of Rojek's 'representational files', stored away in the memory and brought to the fore much later but as part of the individual's creation of destination image. In particular, it is argued that the CN Tower is so iconic, of Toronto, that movies are but a part of the circuit of representation. Literature may perform a somewhat different function, creating and reinforcing non-visual perceptions of the city – reading of Yonge Street in *The Torontonians* will mean different things to different people.

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