

JAMES MAVOR: CULTURAL AMBASSADOR AND AESTHETIC EDUCATOR TO TORONTO'S ELITE

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Social progress may take a direction quite different from that imagined by either of them [Ruskin and Morris]; but none the less, the society of the future will owe much to their idealism. (Mavor, *Windows*, 195)

From the time of his arrival in Toronto in 1892 until his death in 1925, James Mavor (b. 1854) was a critical disseminator of cultural knowledge on the social-aesthetic philosophies and practices of the British Arts and Crafts Movement. Although Mavor was not solely responsible for introducing these ideas in Toronto, his intimate knowledge of the movement's aesthetic ideals, its historical lineage, and particularly his self-described friendship with the Movement's figure-head William Morris, were critical to the movement's wider recognition in Toronto. Following Morris's death in England in 1896, Mavor's first-hand knowledge made him a celebrated authority on the Movement and its key participants. With the publication of his memoirs in 1923 in which he devoted entire chapters to Morris, to Ruskin, and to the literary and artistic movements of the 1880s, Mavor became widely acknowledged by Toronto's elite as the pre-eminent embodiment of the British Arts and Crafts movement, solidifying his reputation as the man who knew William Morris.

Although Mavor came to Toronto to assume the chair of Political Economy at the University of Toronto, the state of capital "C" culture in Canada was always foremost in his mind. Mavor's lacklustre perception of Toronto's genteel activities and institutions is evident in his journals in which he recorded that "Culture seems a kind of craze in Canada. What they mean by it is perhaps hazy even to themselves; but they undoubtedly have a yearning for something which is not specie [money]" (Journals). Capitalizing on this "cultural yearning," in addition to his academic and professional responsibilities, over the next two decades Mavor fashioned himself as an aesthetic theorist, art historian, connoisseur, and a patron of the arts (including literature and drama).¹ He became involved in every aspect of Toronto's cultural and educational edification including the founding of the Art