

GUNS AND GANGS: A DEADLY DUO

LRC

Literary Review of Canada

\$6.50

Vol. 15, No. 6 • July/August 2007



Christopher Moore
When a copy is not a copy

Mark Proudman
**The intrinsic boredom of
Canadian history**

Farouk Jiwa
**Our foreign policy
needs more voices**

Geoff Pevere
**Digitization:
The destruction of Hollywood?**

Katherine Fierlbeck
**Canadian roots are
more liberal than Tory**

David Silcox
**Ignoring Native art:
neglect or racism?**



+ William Weintraub revisits that summer in Paris + Harriet Friedmann cuts a swath through farm-control legislation + Marian Botsford Fraser gazes at the father-daughter relationship + Zeba Crook takes on George Jonas + Hugh Graham reconnoitres the War of 1812 + fiction reviews by Robert McGill and Allan Weiss + poetry by Susan Musgrave, Andreas Gripp and Jason Ranon Uri Rotstein + responses by Thomas Homer-Dixon and responses to Shiraz Dossa



LRC

Literary Review of Canada

Vol. 15, No. 6 • July/August 2007

3 Teenage Mutant Supreme Court Judges

An essay
Christopher Moore

6 Canada: More Liberal Than Tory?

A review of *The Canadian Founding: John Locke and Parliament*, by Janet Aizenstat
Katherine Fierbeck

8 That Decade in Paris

A review of Robert McAlmon's *The Nightinghous of Paris*
William Weintraub

10 Minority Views

A review of *Canada Among Nations 2006: Minorities and Priorities*, edited by Andrew F. Cooper and Dane Rowlands
Farouk Shamas Jiwa

12 Our Toxic Harvest

A review of Elizabeth Brubaker's *Greener Pastures: Decentralizing the Regulation of Agricultural Pollution*,
Harriet Friedmann

14 Why Canadian History Is Boring

A review of *The Penguin History of Canada*, by Robert Bothwell
Mark F. Proudman

16 Seven from Sangan River Meditations

Poetry
Susan Musgrave

17 My Cat Is Half-Greek, or Zeus Left The Acropolis Open Again

A poem
Andreas Gripp

17 Before & After

A poem
Jason Ranon Uri Rotstein

18 Realistic to Bizarre

A review of *Optique*, by Clayton Bailey, and *Bang Crunch*, by Neil Smith
Allan Weiss

19 Don't Try This at Home

A review of Michael Ondaatje's *Divisadero*
Robert McGill

20 Guns and Gangs: A Deadly Duo

A review of *Enter the Babylon System: Unpacking Gun Culture from Samuel Colt to 50 Cent*, by Rodrigo Bascuñán and Christian Pearce, and *Young Thugs: Inside the Dangerous World of Canadian Street Gangs*, by Michael C. Chettleburgh
Paul McKenna

22 Brave, But Mostly Wrong

A review of *Reflections on Islam: Ideas, Opinions, Arguments*, by George Jonas
Zeba A. Crook

23 The Post-Celluloid Era

A review of *The Decline of the Hollywood Empire*, by Hervé Fischer
Geoff Pevere

25 The Daughter's Dilemma

A review of Sandra Martin's *The First Man in My Life: Daughters Write About Their Fathers*
Marian Botsford Fraser

26 A Miserable War

A review of *For Honour's Sake: The War of 1812 and the Brokering of an Uneasy Peace*, by Mark Zuehlke
Hugh Graham

28 A Rich Heritage Ignored

A review of Leslie Dawn's *National Visions, National Blindness: Canadian Art and Identities in the 1920s*
David Silcox

30 Letters and Responses

Thomas Homer-Dixon, Sean E. Riley, Micheline Mallory, Ian Thal, Ken Stange, Bryan Townsend, Tarek Fatah, Sarah Ramer, Leslie Smith

Literary Review of Canada
581 Markham Street, Suite 3A
Toronto, Ontario M6G 2L7
e-mail: review@lrcreview.com
reviewcanada.ca
T: 416 531-1483
F: 416 531-1612

EDITOR

Bronwyn Drainie
editor@lrcreview.com

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Alastair Cheng

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Anthony Westell

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Robin Roger

POETRY EDITOR

Molly Peacock

ASSISTANT POETRY EDITOR

Moira MacDougall

COPY EDITOR

Madeline Koch

PROOFREADERS

Ted Brown, Alastair Cheng, Lauryn Drainie, Madeline Koch, Claire Laville

RESEARCH

Claire Laville

PUBLICITY

Kevin Watt
publicity@lrcreview.com

DESIGN

James Harbeck

ADVERTISING/SALES

Michael Wile
Phone: 416-531-1483 • Cell: 416-806-6178
ads@lrcreview.com

PUBLISHERS

Mark Lovewell
lovewell@ryerson.ca
Helen Walsh
helen.walsh@sympatico.ca

ADVISORY COUNCIL

Michael Adams
Ronald G. Atkey, P.C., Q.C.
Alan Broadbent, C.M.
James Gillies, C.M.
Carol Hansell
John Honderich
Sandy Houston
Donald Macdonald, P.C., C.C.
Trina McQueen
Susan Reisler
Grant Reuber, O.C.
Don Rickerd, C.M.
Mark Sarner
Reed Scowen
Anthony Westell

POETRY SUBMISSIONS

The Literary Review of Canada accepts poetry submissions by email from May 1 to October 1 each year, although it solicits poetry year round. Send submissions to poetry@lrcreview.com in a single Word file as an attachment and include the poems in the body of the email as well. The LRC does not review poetry.

FOUNDED IN 1991 BY P.A. DUTIL

The *Literary Review of Canada* is published 10 times a year by the Literary Review of Canada Inc.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Canada \$57; the rest of the world US\$57. Libraries in Canada \$72; elsewhere US\$77. Price includes postage.

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND CIRCULATION

Jon Spencer, Abacus Circulation
P.O. Box 8, Station K
Toronto, ON M4P 2G1
Phone: 416-932-5081
subscriptions@lrcreview.com

©2007 The Literary Review of Canada. All rights, including translation into other languages, are reserved by the publisher in Canada, the United States, Great Britain and all other countries participating in the Universal Copyright Convention, the International Copyright Convention and the Pan-American Copyright Convention. Nothing in this publication may be reproduced without the written permission of the publisher.

ISSN 1188-7494

Canadian Publications Mail Product Sales Agreement No. 1479083.
Postmaster: Please send address changes to the above address. The *Literary Review of Canada* is indexed in the Canadian Literary Periodicals Index and the Canadian Index and is distributed by Disticor and the Canadian Magazine Publishers Association.

Cover art and pictures throughout the issue by Aino Anto.

Aino Anto is a Toronto-based freelance illustrator with interests in editorial illustration and children's books. Her first work, Len Gasparini's *A Christmas for Carol*, was published by Seraphim Editions in 2002. More examples of her work can be seen at www.antostudio.com.

FUNDING ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Magazine Fund towards our editorial and production costs.

We acknowledge the assistance of the OMDC Magazine Fund, an initiative of Ontario Media Development Corporation.



THE CANADA COUNCIL
FOR THE ARTS
SINCE 1957

LE CONSEIL DES ARTS
DU CANADA
DEPUIS 1957

Canada



Ontario
Film and Television
Tax Credits
Ontario Media Development Corporation



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO

Why Canadian History Is Boring

The fault lies in the content, not in the writing.

MARK F. PROUDMAN

The Penguin History of Canada

Robert Bothwell

Penguin

596 pages, hardcover

ISBN 9780670065530

The H-Canada academic mailing list, a part of the well-known H-Net network, features the sort of messages that might be expected of such a list: conference announcements, job listings, enquiries as to the state of scholarship on gender in Manitoba and, periodically, excursive discussions of the state of Canadian studies. The latter revolve around the entwined themes of historical memory, public ignorance of history, how to get students interested in Canadian history and, a while ago, “why Canadian history is so boring,” in exactly those words.

Such anxieties do not come from nowhere, so it is not entirely surprising that Robert Bothwell’s *Penguin History of Canada* should bring them back to mind. The problem is real, but the problem is with the subject, in both senses of that term, rather than the work, still less the author.

Professor Bothwell is a prolific authority on many aspects of Canadian history—foreign policy, nuclear power, the lives of Lester Pearson and C.D. Howe—and an experienced writer of textbooks. Along with his past co-authors J.L. Granatstein, John English and David Bercuson, he belongs to a generation of historians that has written much of Canada’s 20th-century history, but that finds itself regarded in today’s academy as old-fashioned, even reactionary, in its focus on political, military and macroeconomic events.

One standard answer to the standard anxiety about the boringness of Canadian history is to say that it includes too many of the now proverbial dead white men and is therefore irrelevant to the concerns of the general or (what is much the same thing) undergraduate population. The solution is invariably to represent more groups—women, minorities, First Nations, workers and so forth, a list usually not excluding the academic specialty of the speaker. A decade ago I had an undergraduate textbook—an edition of a text still widely used—that featured a coloured box describing the experiences of a woman who grew vegetables in a Montreal suburb during the First World War, along with many delicate phrases about the nomads who once inhabited this con-

continent and much else about badly off people, but that did not contain the dates of the governments of Louis St. Laurent.

The problem (obviously) is that Louis St. Laurent was more important than the vegetable woman: he made decisions that influenced the future of the country. History is not a legislature and importance is not a human right. There is something more than a little patronizing (and not in the least egalitarian) in the attempt to create interest through imagined relevance (as though to say, “you will be interested in this; even you can relate to it”). History needs some principle of selection, which is to say of exclusion.

It needs, and necessarily uses in practice, at whatever level of self-awareness, some notion or principle of importance.

Bothwell’s *Penguin History* has such a notion: it selects what has been important to the development of the state based at Ottawa. The Panglossian language of First Nations is largely absent, and the volume’s freedom from the customary attempts to represent everyone of interest to current constituencies is among its virtues. Kings and battles, constitutions and prime ministers—including St. Laurent—predominate, as well they should. It would, for just that reason, make a good first-year textbook.

All the great landmarks are here: a massive but largely empty half-continent, New France, the Conquest, the Loyalists, Responsible Government and Confederation take us through almost the first half of the book. The second is given over to the 20th century, with the focus on Ottawa’s reactions to the world wars, the development of the current brand of Canadian nationalism, and the cultural and economic changes of the post-war period. The treatment of energy-related issues—the pipeline debate of the 1950s, the oil crisis of the 1970s and the Trudeau government’s reactions to it—is particularly thorough.

Confederation and the debates over it are passed through in a couple of quick pages, scanting the role of the imperial government and neglecting the effective counter-example provided by the revolving-door administrations of the united colony of Canada in the 1850s and 1860s. The grant of Responsible Government—the adjective indicating that ministers became responsible to the legislature—is discussed more

fully and its roots in British history explained. Notwithstanding recent attempts to make Responsible Government a Canadian invention, the product of some national genius for democracy, it had been a reality in the mother country since at least the age of Walpole (whose premiership dates to 1722), had been among the demands of the parliamentary party in the civil wars of the 1640s, and was in fact proposed for Canada by the oft-derided Lord Durham.

The development of a conservative imperial nationalism into an often left-leaning anti-American nationalism gets considerable attention in Bothwell’s book.

Moving into the 20th century, Bothwell portrays Sir Robert Borden, who drove the First World War effort, as a modest man who found a purpose in war, a more sympathetic treatment than he often gets. Mackenzie King’s foibles are forgiven because he kept Quebec quiet, if not happy. But it is Canada’s evolution to full independence that most interests Bothwell. The development of a conservative imperial nationalism into an often left-leaning anti-American nationalism gets considerable attention. In the post-war period, Canada’s role in United Nations peacekeeping is discussed uncritically, without reference to its function as essentially an alibi excusing Ottawa from more serious commitments to western defence.

There are a very small number of obvious errors: I doubt that Pierre Trudeau was “devoutly Catholic” in the 1960s, and although one page informs us that Louis Riel wanted justice for western settlers, the next says (more accurately) that he hated them. But these quibbles may be editorial problems, and Bothwell is quietly amused by recent attempts to turn Riel, a millenarian who expected to ascend to heaven on the third day after his execution, into a founding father.

Bothwell’s story is that of the development of the state called “Canada,” and it is plain that he thinks that state a good thing. His history is a variety of what some condemn as “Whig” history: history with a happy, or at any rate an acceptable, ending. The most famous, although by no means the first, Whig historian was Macaulay, who really did enthuse about the satisfactory direction of history. We today are not such optimists, and

Mark F. Proudman is editor of <CanadianReview.ca>.

Bothwell is more measured. He is also a good empiricist, and so emphasizes a number of points not in all ways congenial to current sensibilities: the centrality of Christianity to Canadian life, the similarities of American and Canadian culture, ideological differences notwithstanding and, finally, the profound and enduring influence of England. As Bothwell says, British North America was inconceivable without Britain, and the ideology of Britishness persisted for a long time.

This, then, is not a tale dictated by its polemical purposes, as Macaulay's sometimes could be, and as some Canadian accounts of our inherent talent for peaceful compromise can be. It comes to inform rather than to proselytize, but its shape is nevertheless dictated by its premises. Bothwell remarks in passing, in his discussion of the wars of the 18th century, that "British" was a purposefully invented identity. This is true to a sig-



nificant degree of all national identities. It is true, most obviously, of the red maple leaf—waving Canadian identity, whose reinforcement consumes some billions of taxpayer dollars annually: the *LRC*, to take a minor example, acknowledges on its masthead the support of the Ottawa state, and it is plainly that state's intention to promote the idea that Canadian literature is in some inef-fable but important way unique, valuable and (not coincidentally) in need of the Ottawa state. "Canadian" is neither a literary nor an aesthetic quality, but obviously there are state officials who would like it to be. Bothwell is full of examples of ways in which Canadian national identities have been manipulated for political purposes and of the ways in which history was used to give those identities meaning. Historians tend to emphasize the contrived nature of those national identities of which they are suspicious. What is missing here is the suspicion, and that is what makes this, in its own understated way, Whig history.

The Whigs wrote to explain and to justify the English revolution of 1688, the final disposal

of the Stuart dynasty in 1715 and (an associated enterprise) the Scottish union of 1707, which created the state known as the United Kingdom. To this end, they celebrated the achievements of Whig governments of the period. The standard variety of Canadian history, of which Bothwell provides an up-to-date and empirically sound exemplar, records with satisfaction the achievements of the Liberal governments that dominated the century just ended. Chief among these are the placation of Quebec, the preservation of the Ottawa Confederation and its achievement of full international independence. One can certainly argue that that state is a great and good thing—nationalists do so all the time—but to make, as Bothwell does, the survival of the Ottawa federation through the turmoil of the past century synonymous with the survival of a bunch of Anglo-Saxons parked on a rich half-continent is ridiculous: we would have a country whether or not the Ottawa state existed, albeit a different (possibly a better, and probably a richer) country. That of course is a part of what nationalisms and their histories do: they mix up, elide and confuse the interests of states with those of peoples or countries.

The 19th-century imperialist edition of the Ottawa state was primarily a creation of the British Colonial Office and of Sir John A. Macdonald's Liberal Conservatives, and it served the interests of both admirably. The fiscally redistributive, multiculturalist and quasi-neutral Ottawa state of the present is primarily the creation of the Liberal Party, from King forward. It would risk confusion to call Bothwell a "Liberal" historian—he is in the centre of the Canadian spectrum, and has some respectful words for Stephen Harper—but he, like the Whigs of old, does not see a tenable alternative to the state of which he writes. And, like the Whigs of old, he is concerned

to provide a national identity of (very) recent creation with an ancient and respectable pedigree, and consequently to draw lines of continuity from where we happen to be now back to a very different past. But major parts of our current national identity are recent contrivances, as Bothwell knows: Mackenzie King, never mind Diefenbaker, would have been incredulous if not horrified at the current practice of multiculturalism. The red maple leaf itself is only some 40-odd years old. It and what it symbolizes would have been unrecognizable if not repulsive to our ancestors.

The problem is not that the state of which Bothwell writes, and whose survival he equates with our survival, should not be explained. One can certainly write the history of how the Ottawa state got to be what it is, just as one can write the history of Ontario, describing how it got to be how it is—as indeed Bothwell has. But such histories become almost inevitably, indeed almost unconsciously, focused upon how things were and upon how Canadians (or Ontarians) reacted to events. The problem is that all the main

events—war and peace, boom and bust—are exogenous: their origins are literally outside the central chosen subject. The story is therefore one of reactions rather than of causes: it becomes merely descriptive rather than explanatory.

This is the key difference between the old Whiggery and our local version: in describing the rise of constitutionalism in England, Macaulay was explaining an event of global importance, and that really is interesting. Canadian history can explain the creation of medicare or the fall of Diefenbaker, but there it has to stop. The focus turns inward, and the recent attempt to reinject interest by making the story more immediate, more relevant to everyday people and current concerns only makes it more ordinary, more prosaic and therefore more boring because it is less explanatory. It makes history merely descriptive, even existential, rather than etiological; it is a turn in precisely the wrong direction. Interesting history is not history from below, but history from above: the view is better.

One can ask how industrial capitalism or the world wars, or any other major phenomenon, influenced Canada or Canadians, but the other obvious question—what effect did Canada have?—does not provide a very satisfying answer, at least to the nationalist. We end by avoiding the question and attributing, or feigning, importance where it is needed, insisting upon the agency and autonomy of (according to ideological taste) vegetable women or Ottawa functionaries. Fundamental causes and important decisions—real agency—drop out of the story, and with them much of its interest.

There were a very few historical moments when Canada really was important: in the spring of 1918, as allied forces reeled and often broke under the Kaiser's final offensive, the Canadian corps was the strongest remaining coherent allied fighting force. Sir Robert Borden, whose single-minded devotion to the maintenance of four high-quality front-line divisions now commands such scorn from nationalist historians, can be argued to have won a world war. This would make him the most important and hence the most interesting Canadian in history. From the nationalist point of view, the problem is that Canada was most important—and most interesting—only when it was a part of a larger enterprise. That is the great unmentionable of Canadian history, arguably its central fact, but it is almost necessarily passed over here, subsumed beneath a focus upon internal politics, as is the necessary custom in national(ist) histories.

The *Penguin History's* short paragraphs, frequent contractions and casual metaphors have more in common with *The Globe and Mail* than with Macaulay's elaborate antitheses, but the decline of historical writing is hardly uniquely Canadian. The endnotes are informative and contain useful references to relevant scholarship, but would be easier to use were they footnotes, although the book is not designed as an authoritative reference; it will be read as a brief popular introduction and is serviceable enough within its premises for that purpose.

Like its predecessor, *The Pelican History* of Kenneth McNaught, to whom Bothwell dedicates this volume, *The Penguin History* tells a familiar story. Like McNaught, it will sit on many shelves, often as a token of pious, patriotic interest in the national story, but also often unread. It is not the author's fault that it is less than explanatory and so less than gripping; the fault is in the subject. □