



Dick & Jane and life in America

By ELLIOTT SHIFF

In today's hifalutin world of semiotics and post-structuralism it's encouraging to see a book that probes the depths of society without using words longer than two syllables. Marc Gallant's *Fun With Dick and Jane* consists of a series of 22 enlightening vignettes which bring Dick, Jane, and Sally into the '80s with a vengeance.

When we last left the trio they were North America's role models for young people growing up in the world of white picket fences and milkmen.

Dick, the hero of the family, is now an aspirin munching father, who helps his kids fly kites and drives the family around in a K-car. Jane is an up and coming divorcee who divides her time between the cuisinart and Amway. Sally, now living on the West Coast, is a twice divorced modern day Helen of Troy who has left the sleepy world of Dayton far behind.

Not all of the original characters have survived the last 20 years. Puff

the cat, grandfather, and Zeke, the man who was always raking leaves, are six feet under. Grandmother is still alive and kicking, living in a retirement home just outside of Dayton, where she spends the majority of her time bowling and leading tours to the Holy Land.

Gallant wears his influences on his sleeve as the short, punctual sentences are clearly Hemingwayesque in nature. Some scenes are only one page long with no more than three sentences to a page. A typical example is the return to the farm sequence. Taking a page out of Thomas Wolfe's *You Can't Go Home Again*, Dick hustles his family into the K-car to go search out their roots only to find that the farm has been transformed into a Pharmaceuticals factory. The pathos is clear. Heavy scenes of this nature however are cleverly balanced with lighter ones such as the scene where the newly

reincarnated Spot is taken for a walk, while Dick trails faithfully behind, Pooper-Scooper in hand.

In the confusing world of Macintosh computers and allusions to Mr. T, the story still preaches down-home values, as Dick's wife Susan brings their thirsty children some red kool-aid, something readers of all ages can relate to. It is timeless scenes such as this that will grant this book instant immortality.

While everything seems to be coming up roses for Dick, his sister Jane has had a significantly rougher ride down the turnpike of life. While she is not openly bitter about her failed marriage there is a distinct look of tension on Jane's face as she stands by the cuisinart, measuring-cup in hand. Her youngest daughter Jessica is already at the rebellious stage, dressing up as a punker complete with green hair.

Although the section devoted to

Jane generally drags it is important to stick through this part of the story in order to fully comprehend the social impact of this book. Despite the fact that she has been dealt a tough lot in life Jane still believes in the American dream. When Jane relates to Jessica how she sells Amway products it is downright inspirational. (I almost broke down crying at this point.)

The story picks up as the reader is whisked to the West Coast to be reunited with Sally. Sally is no longer the drooling baby crawling along the rug. In fact it is the reader who is moved to drooling as Sally is revealed as a hot-to-trot twice divorced sexpot, dressed in snug fitting leotards which she stretches to the limit in every conceivable direction.

The scene moves from aerobics to weight lifting but one thing remains constant—Sally has clearly been around the track a few times, in every sense of the term. Sally however is not all cheesecake, as Gallant once again dips into the well of allusion, blatantly characterizing her along the lines of Diotima of Mantinea, Plato's daemon in *The Symposium*. This heavy handed plagiarism is acceptable only for the simple reason that it allows the plot to take a somewhat bizarre turn. Jane's daughters, who are visiting Sally, are encouraged to draw abstract paintings as opposed to the concrete "house" which they are used to constructing back home in Dayton.

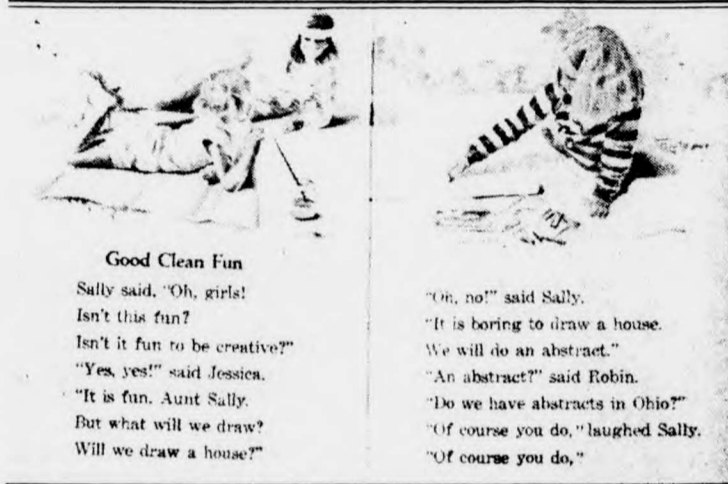
Alas, Sally is a well rounded woman, and following her enlightening drawing session with the girls she slips into a bare back dress for one of

her suitors, a slick dude named Craig, who brings her a flowering cactus. Craig is unabashedly straight forward, evoking every tiresome compliment imaginable Sally's way. He even cries out, "You are such a gourmet." Fortunately Gallant uses better judgment, sparing the reader the inevitable closing page of this scene where the unrequited Craig limps back to his car after a frustrating evening at Sally's.

Although the story ends rather abruptly, the reader is left with a distinct "feel good" attitude. The unfortunate Craig is left behind quickly as the scene switches to Sally's party, a mixture of networking and fun. For those who criticized the early Dick and Jane books because of the lack of racial representation, your fears will be assuaged. At Sally's party we meet Winston, Sally's black broker, Hisako, her oriental friend from EST, and Daryl, her dandified accountant who glances knowingly at young girls. In two pages, Gallant has made up for 50 years of white middle-class stereotypes, while creating new ones almost instantly.

While one may feel suddenly cut off at the end of the story it certainly leaves an open option for future adventures of Dick, Jane and Sally. Perhaps next time we meet up with them it will be Dick and Jane in Space. But until then treasure your copy of *More Fun With Dick and Jane*. It will rest comfortably in your bookcase next to Sartre and Tolstoy.

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Good Clean Fun

Sally said, "Oh, girls! Isn't this fun? Isn't it fun to be creative?"
"Yes, yes!" said Jessica.
"It is fun. Aunt Sally. But what will we draw? Will we draw a house?"

"Oh, no!" said Sally.
"It is boring to draw a house. We will do an abstract."
"An abstract?" said Robin.
"Do we have abstracts in Ohio?"
"Of course you do," laughed Sally.
"Of course you do."

Pizzagate: Excal hacks uncover mock mozzarella

Resident prince of verbosity R.D. Macpherson and trusty sidekick Gary Blakeley recently made a horrifying discovery in the newly-decorated Winters Dining Hall. So sit down, and if you have a weak stomach . . . beware!

"Although you're grievin' don't think of leavin'. Now that I've got you by my side."

Some rumblings, a basic urge, and the stomach signals its readiness for a slice or two of Winters pizza. Blakeley and I would honor that call willingly, and Winters would always satisfy. Whether one chose the Deluxe or the Vegetarian slice, one was in for a veritable plethora of tastes, textures and toppings. With such anticipation, Blakeley and I made our weekly pilgrimage to pizza

mecca on the first Tuesday of the new term.

Those fresh, lovely hand-made shells (or crusts) were gone. Before us was a machine-made, pre-fabricated, once-frozen hollow reminder of the past glory of the Winters Pizza. The toppings, once garden-fresh, and present in extravagant proportions, were distinctly born of cans and were applied with an unprecedented parsimony. The result? A noticeably depreciated and, in fact, unsatisfactory product. In a few short weeks, Winters' only reason for existing, the very epicurean rock upon which the foundations of the college had been laid, had disappeared.

What heralded the change, the digression, this trend away from fresh to frozen and canned? Blakeley and I wanted the facts before we began drawing conclusions.

First, we sought to corroborate our findings; we surveyed other diners informally and found a consensus of dissatisfaction. One sagacious consumer—who wished to remain unidentified, for she was going to continue ordering the pizza irrespective of its decline and feared "selective-slice retaliation"—illuminated us to the fact that the digression had coincided with a redecoration of the cafeteria. Indeed, new ambient lighting had been surreptitiously installed over the Xmas break.

Simultaneously, the very aesthetic appeal of the pizza-making process had been withdrawn. We were short-changed as the cafeteria withdrew the felicitous performance of dough-kneading, and through cleverly-designed visual barriers, had rendered secret the topping ceremony. The consumer is presently fully alienated from the process: s/he might, if lucky, view only the finished raw product being popped from its packing crate into the oven. What the new counter is, in actuality, hiding is the absence of Pizza's traditional labour-intensive base. With Winters' reluctance to

disclose to the public their contra-humanistic, machine-fabricated product, we might infer thusly that a sense of shame has been felt at the managerial level. No; a measure so pervasive and unethical as this one perpetrated by Winters cannot be solely an economic one, one which could be flimsily concealed by low lights and new staff and justified only by the final balance sheet: there is a larger principle at work here.

Winters cafeteria has saliently shifted to the political right. In an appeal to the changed consumer face at York, it has sought to match the different political/economic ideologies of the customer. The new right

at York, burgeoning and evidenced by the growing popularity of Ayn Rand, are being given the clarion call by Winters. These people appreciate the means over the end. These people prefer the idea of Pizza over its taste, gladly surrendering the old cooperatively-made pizza for the new, mechanized, individual-run pizza parlor.

As disparate as these factors may seem, Blakeley and I could only conclude collusion. Given the continuation of the present pizza-making infrastructure, things will not likely improve. Ayn Rand munches on a McCain frozen pizza and smiles a rare smile.



Ladies warmly welcomed
at
Toronto-Dominion.

October 3, 1968

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