

SEX AND THE FREDERICTON GLEANER

'one laughs for a while.... but it isn't really funny'

The following is a talk delivered the May 30, 1969 edition of CBC's Maritime Magazine. The talk was delivered by Prof. Donald Cameron of the English Dept. of UNB. We are presenting this to you, so that you may better understand the workings of our local daily newspaper.

Connoisseurs often debate which is our lousy daily newspapers in the Maritimes is the lousiest. I've always held out for the Halifax Mail-Star myself, the only metropolitan daily I've ever seen which writes up parking tickets as news items. "John Jones, of 1550 Seagull Street, found that the No Parking sign on Bell Road meant just that, when he was fined ten dollars and costs yesterday in magistrate's court." And, like most Maritime dailies, The Mail-Star regards the Buttercup Fair in Toothpick Cove as headline news, while the Biafran War or the test ban treaty are only distant disturbances.

Recently, however, I've been coming to think I was wrong; the Halifax papers are only stupid and incompetent, but the Fredericton *Gleaner* has a kind of evangelical silliness. The *Gleaner* is run by an old British brigadier and it reads as though it were run by an old British brigadier. The CBC, for instance, is anathema to the *Gleaner*: the CBC pours smut and filth into the living rooms of decent Canadians, which is the *Gleaner's* gouty way of saying it doesn't like *Festival*. Don Messer on the other hand, the *Gleaner* does like, and by cancelling the show despite the public protests the CBC has shown itself to be "an autocratic monster". The *Gleaner* is for the police — even the Chicago police — and against water fluoridation. The *Gleaner* is also against student protests, and it must scour North America's newspapers looking for features and editorials hostile to students, the implication being that the four thousand students up at the University of New Brunswick represent barbarian hordes which may sweep down the hill and overwhelm the honest burghers of Fredericton at any time.

This year the *Gleaner's* contribution to an understanding of the complex events at UNB has been to stand four-square behind the University's administration, and simply not to print news items that pointed the other way. One night 500 people on the campus attended a public forum on censure. The consensus of the meeting, reported the Saint John *Telegraph-Journal* the next morning, was that the court injunction barring Dr. Norman Strax from the campus should be dropped. In the *Gleaner* — not a word. As far as the *Gleaner* was concerned, the meeting never took place.

The *Gleaner's* great campaign in the last few months, however, has been a drive against pornography. Its

news features on the skin books available in Fredericton and its editorials have had something of the tone of a revival meeting; and it has collected a display of locally purchased pornography in its offices which it invites the public to thumb through to get some idea of the nature and extent of salacious literature in our city. (At least one of the people who's taken up this invitation is a young girl, a minor, and one cannot resist toying with the idea of finding a charge under which the *Gleaner* could be prosecuted for depraving the morals of our young people.

At the *Gleaner's* urging, the Knights of Columbus have formed what the paper approvingly refers to as an "anti-smut committee" to prosecute sellers of obscene books.

The *Gleaner* announced the formation of this committee with a screaming banner headline, and people delightedly bought ten and twenty copies each to send to friends all over the world; I mean, you don't hardly get that kind no more. But alas: the anti-smut committee's first meeting was complicated by the presence of a number of young people who evidently didn't take the pornography menace seriously, and since then the committee has met in private. And some weeks after that original meeting the *Gleaner* was obliged to run a story revealing that the Attorney-General, as a result of all this hoo-ha had received only about half a dozen complaints, and none of them had offered to lay a charge.

Apathy, moaned the *Gleaner* in an editorial, apathy. It was a far cry from what the paper had earlier referred to, rather delightfully, as an "aroused" public.

Well, perhaps it wasn't entirely apathy. A lot of people in Fredericton just don't feel that pornography is Fredericton's most pressing social issue, and in one way or another they've let the *Gleaner* know it. Here, for instance, is a letter that was sent to the

Gleaner — but never published.

"Editor, The *Gleaner*: Sir, I cannot applaud too highly your current thrust to force sex off our newstands. However, you are being far too timid; you must plunge deeper. I am reliably informed that in many outwardly respectable homes in this city acts of sexual intercourse are performed every night, while nakedness in the bath is rampant. Spiritually, human beings are evidently just one running sore, and it is a comfort to know that the *Gleaner* at least takes all this seriously and proposes to change it. I wonder whether some of the depraved dowagers of this modern Gomorrah could be persuaded to work off their energies (which otherwise might spurt forth in private lewdness) in ever-longer meetings of the IODE? And surely a cold shower and a good hard business meeting of the Canadian Legion would take the drive out of these randy bankers some defences against these even more serious evils."

But the *Gleaner* doesn't give up easily. When the Governor-General's Awards for literature were announced this year, the *Gleaner* ran this editorial:

"Awards for Obscenity

The Governor-General's awards in literature for 1968 have been announced. The winners are Mordecai Richler, for his novel, *Cocksure*, and a collection of essays, *Hunting Tigers Under Glass*; and Leonard Cohen for his *Selected Poems*.

The two authors are remarkable for the obscenity of their works. *Cocksure*, for example, was declared by the W.H. Smith bookstore interests in England to be so obscene that they refused to allow their stores to display the book. We are well aware that a section of opinion in Canada delights in pornographic exposure.

What is surprising is that the Governor-General, whose office might be assumed to guarantee the observance of

decency and restraint in literature as in other phases of life, should appear, by his awards, not only to countenance such obscene matter but to promote it."

That editorial would have been more convincing, perhaps if the following advertisement had not appeared on the page facing the editorial:

"CAPITOL

Now playing at 2 & 8

Beautiful young 'moonlighting' wives rock and shock a city with unprintable scandal

This Group of Beautiful Young Exciting Women Touched Off a Moral Scandal That Stunned Vice-Squad Police Officers... Started and Embarrassed Seasoned Newspaper Reporters

SHATTERED AND SHAMED A WHOLE CITY!

Sorry... We can Not show you scenes from this movie in our ads. We do not want to offend shy or prudish people. NOTHING IS CUT OUT NOTHING IS HUSHED UP NOTHING IS COVERED UP

NOTHING IS LEFT TO YOUR IMAGINATION

This program is recommended for adults

A raw... and jarring motion picture about shameless women

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starring Alex D'Arcy and introducing Barbara Valentine

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DESIRES FOR MATURE

ADULTS"

Evidently sexual titillation doesn't alarm the *Gleaner* quite so much when it represents advertising revenue. After all, business is business.

Have you ever been to Minto, New Brunswick? It's like a trip to the moon. Huge grey slag heaps erupt like boils for miles around. The streets are mean and dirty, like an urban slum set down all by itself in the middle of the forest. The best homes people in Minto can afford are structures which — if animals were kept in them — would draw screams of outrage from the SPCA. And from the *Gleaner*, for that matter; the *Gleaner* is very strong for kindness to animals.

Minto's only about thirty miles from Fredericton, but the *Gleaner* doesn't give us in-depth reporting on conditions in Minto. It doesn't even take up the cudgels to do something about the grinding poverty of Killarney Road, on the outskirts of Fredericton. No, the *Gleaner* worries about pornography. The *Gleaner* wants to bar Stokely Carmichael from Canada; it doesn't want to tell us how people in our city practice racial discrimination, especially against Indians. Thirty towns flush their toilets into the Saint John River, and its fish are dying, but the *Gleaner* doesn't propose to set up a citizen's committee to deal with that. Our schools and universities struggle along with inadequate facilities and underpaid staff, but the *Gleaner* launches no campaigns to improve education. No, no; we ought to expend our energies on sexy books.

One laughs at the *Gleaner* for a while, but finally one realizes that it isn't really very funny. New Brunswick has real problems, important ones, which don't draw nearly enough attention. So a newspaper here with its priorities so badly out of proportion really isn't a joke. It's sick. And when the only newspaper in town is sick, the whole community suffers.

YOU FORGOT

To ask about the Regular Officer Training Plan for Undergraduates.

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189 Prince William Street
P.O. Box 1409
Saint John, N.B.

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