

Goddard v. Mowat

F***ing the Facts Fifteen Years Later

It was almost fifteen years ago that John Goddard's infamous exposé of Farley Mowat's compromised truth-telling in his *Saturday Night* article, "A Real Whopper," ignited a flurry of media activity and prompted a large scale re-evaluation of this much-loved national icon and his texts. It seems appropriate, given the passing of a decade and a half and the recent publication of yet another Mowat autobiography, to revisit this issue and ask, what exactly happened here? When we pause to take stock of the fallout we might be surprised to find that on this front there is little to say: on a national level, Mowat's brush with scandal and his rallying cry "fuck the facts" might continue to feature as an interesting sidebar in media representations, but internationally the news barely registered and *Never Cry Wolf* continues to be a best-seller and to speak with authority. Perhaps only in academic circles has Goddard's article made any kind of lasting impact: while Mowat and his texts had long been consigned to the annals of the middlebrow and treated accordingly—that is to say, either not at all or with a raised eyebrow, "A Real Whopper" has seemingly put him beyond the pale. There seems to be a palpable resistance to teaching Mowat or taking him up in our research: with the exception of a few articles on *Never Cry Wolf* and eco-critical interest in Mowat's "green subjectivity" (Lousley 135), there is a noticeable dearth of critical inquiry into what must be our longest-lived literary celebrity and his forty-odd texts. While the Mowat-Goddard scandal cannot claim sole responsibility for this critical hesitation, it does furnish us with an excellent opportunity to redress this oversight: this paper seeks to unpack the scandal—its roots, its effects and the issues it raises—in

order to suggest possible avenues for taking Mowat, his celebrity, and his texts seriously. An investigation of the issues and assumptions embedded in Goddard's piece and the subsequent responses from the media and public suggests that what is at stake here is not a disagreement about the truth-telling conventions of autobiography, but how the private is constructed to be the ultimate site of truth-telling for celebrities. Both Goddard and Mowat rely heavily on the ideological assumption that the private lives of celebrities constitute a "site of knowledge and truth" (de Cordova 98), but their competing constructions of the private reveal the fallacy of both the public self/private self dichotomy and our continuing investment in the private self as a source of the "real." As we will see, when it is no longer necessary to peel away the public to reveal the private and when we can acknowledge both as constructions neither of which has more truth-telling power, then all performances of self are not only equally worthy of our attention but are all potential sites of truth. It becomes possible, within such a framework, to reconsider Mowat's texts not as the products of or as referring to an interior, real, unconstructed self but rather as the products and the active producers of a performed, crafted, and constructed "Farley Mowat." And when we unpack who and what that "Farley Mowat" is, its ability to accommodate a few "whoppers" is not only unsurprising, it should probably be expected.

John Goddard's "A Real Whopper" was the feature article in the May 1998 edition of the now-defunct *Saturday Night* magazine. Since 1887, the magazine had been a vehicle for the promotion of a national culture and had claimed to represent the interests of Canadians; it is within these traditions that Goddard positions himself. Farley Mowat and his narratives, Goddard reminds us, are not only famous but also foundational to our national constructions of the North, of the environment, and, perhaps, even of ourselves as a rough-and-tumble, quirky-humoured kind of people. Thus when he makes a convincing argument for significant discrepancies between Mowat's autobiographies and other resources such as Mowat's private journals and government documents, Goddard presumes not only that we will care but also that such revelations really do matter. He opens by reminding us of Mowat's national importance, his distinguished peers, and his impressive sales, but quickly turns his attention to the autobiographical works that launched Mowat's fame, *People of the Deer* (1952), its sequel, *The Desperate People* (1959), and *Never Cry Wolf* (1963). Drawing on resources in the McMaster University Archives and the National Archives of Canada and interviews with Mowat, Goddard systematically refutes the claims made

by these texts and posits in their place a biographical counter-narrative. Not only does the article re-story Mowat's Arctic years, but it also suggests that all three texts explicitly posit a careful research ethic that is at odds with the evidence Goddard has gathered. Direct quotations frame Mowat as careless, even irreverent about facts: he is quoted as saying, "outrageously": "I never let the facts get in the way of the truth" (48) and in his personal journals as having written: "on occasion when facts have particularly infuriated me, [my motto has been] Fuck the Facts!" (48). Goddard closes his article by noting that Mowat is fully aware that his texts are full of "factual errors" (64) and, moreover, that he is unrepentant about having invented material in order to draw attention to his causes. This, Goddard implies, is troubling:

What Mowat may not realize is that by selling fiction as non-fiction, he has broken trust with his public. By treating facts as arbitrary and subject to whim, he has not so much served a high purpose as muddied public debate on Inuit and wildlife issues for decades. Ultimately, the Keewatin books say less about the Canadian north than they do about Mowat himself. (64)

When Goddard suggests that Mowat has "broken trust with his public," the trust he refers to is not that between an autobiographer and his reader (Goddard acknowledges that the texts are "about Mowat himself") but between a national icon and his nation. There are, he implies, particular obligations and duties for individuals of national renown and while he does not clarify what these may be, it is clear that the discovery of Mowat's casual disregard for the sanctity of facts constitutes a breaking of that undefined but implicit bond. What is at stake, for Goddard, is not whether Mowat lied (clearly he did) but that his celebrity and his national significance have been built upon a false foundation: his audience deserves to know that they've been "had" and Mowat owes them an apology. The irony Goddard misses is that he has "caught" Mowat exactly true to form—careless, flippant, and "outrageous." The other delightful irony of Goddard's article comes from the conditions of its production. Mowat clearly co-operated with what he had assumed was to be "an article which would amount to a general assessment of my writing career" ("Mowat Replies"). At least two interviews were granted, the first of which was in Mowat's Port Hope home. He also sat for the magazine's cover page portrait, a handsome headshot digitally altered to give Mowat a ridiculous Pinocchio proboscis. All parties involved admitted that Mowat was not informed about the changes they were going to make to his image or the content of Goddard's article. These circumstances are not marshalled in order to elicit sympathy for Mowat but, rather to suggest that

Goddard and *Saturday Night* unwittingly committed the same moral crimes of which they accuse Mowat: the cover page, both amusing and satiric, offers up a truth by liberally distorting the “facts,” and the text, in posing as one thing but providing something quite different, constitutes a betrayal of “trust.” If Goddard can generate a sense of outrage in his audience at having been so deceived by Mowat, then Mowat’s own furious response to these tactics could constitute a kind of fitting retribution: Mowat will have been subject to the same deception that he has subjected his readers to. But Goddard’s attempt to muster an impassioned response from the public does not work as he had anticipated, and instead of putting Mowat on the “hotseat,” he finds himself there.

If editorials can be trusted to represent a useful cross-section of public sentiment, then the public response to “A Real Whopper” might be described as overwhelmingly in support of Mowat:

“[Goddard’s article is an] uncharitable piece.” (Robert Everett-Green, May 6, 1996).

“Saturday Night is practicing Canada’s favourite pastime, bashing great Canadians.” (Gary T. Gallon, President, Canadian Institute for Business and the Environment, May 7, 1996).

“The only reputation likely to be damaged by such a transparently desperate piece of muckraking is what little remains of Saturday Night’s good name since it was colonized by Conrad Black.” (Ronald Wright, May 7, 1996).

“[Mowat] did in deed make a seven course meal out of a light lunch. But then you’ll also know that Mowat admits it and has admitted it for the last 40 years . . . [Mowat is a] victim of a national hero-bashing habit” (Connie Woodward, May 11, 1996).

“It’s not like he faked Hitler’s diaries . . . ” (“The LAST Word,” May 12, 1996).

“If you’ve ever heard or seen Farley Mowat in full flight, John Goddard’s cover story in the current Saturday Night won’t surprise or shock.” (“Tonight in T.O.” May 13, 1996).

Two major trends emerge in the editorial responses to Goddard’s article: claims of an awareness that Mowat’s narrative tactics involve compromised truth-telling and assertions that that an attack on Mowat is symptomatic of disturbing and unsavoury national behaviour. That Mowat is described as a “national hero” or a “great Canadian” is neither remarkable nor surprising—this is the very foundation that Goddard relies on to make his claim for a betrayal of trust—but the suggestion that Mowat’s celebrity is beyond reproach is worrisome. Noting that “the left has circled the wagons around Farley Mowat,” biographer Michael Coren expressed considerable concern that the Mowat-Goddard feud has demonstrated that in Canada, “certain people are beyond criticism. . . . So here you have a situation where *Saturday Night* is attacked

for telling the truth. . . . It's Orwellian" (Grace). Coren's point is well-taken even if his rhetoric borders on hyperbole—Goddard (and through him, *Saturday Night*) bears the brunt of the criticism, and not just from members of the public but even, occasionally, from media representatives who might have been expected to be more supportive of Goddard's well-researched work. George Galt, a former editor of *Saturday Night*, wrote a scathing response that characterized Goddard as the "truth police" and told him to "lighten up." Framing the article's accusations as little more than revelations of "naughty fibs [Mowat] may have told in books published 40 years ago," Galt not only distances the crime so far in the past as to be irrelevant, but will not even commit to certainty that any crime took place at all: "It appears Mowat *may* have fudged some of his facts in early books" (emphasis added). Although Galt's ferocity is not typical, the volume and nature of the responses from individuals like Galt, Woodward, or Everett-Green have the effect of temporarily transforming John Goddard into both a *persona non grata* and a Canadian literary celebrity himself. Thus the pathologizing and nationalizing of criticism by individuals like Woodward and Gallon is uncannily apt; whether it is Goddard's article "bashing" Mowat or the editorials "bashing" Goddard, it seems that no celebrity is safe from the wrath of Canadians.

The other notable trend in public responses to the article, the claim that there existed, "pre-Whopper," an awareness of what and how Mowat wrote, is a claim made by various media outlets that bears investigating, because the structure of scandal only works if Goddard can highlight a genuine gap in our knowledge. It is, however, a claim that is difficult to substantiate: neither the media nor members of the public published statements to this effect prior to Goddard's article. Moreover, it is unlikely that reporters would have risked jeopardizing their relationship with Mowat by doing so. Hitherto, the media (particularly the newspaper outlets) had more or less worked co-operatively with Mowat, and the production of the "Farley Mowat" persona was a collaborative effort that served all parties rather well: for the media, access to Mowat, his antics, and his controversial statements generated interesting copy authenticated by the very proximity of the reporter to the subject. For Mowat, providing a steady stream of controversial sound bites allowed him to construct and maintain a particular public persona. For the better part of a century (save a few early scuffles), Mowat and the media have worked, if not together, at least in service of very similar goals. In fact, media coverage of Mowat for the last twenty years has been particularly congenial, even chummy: almost all articles about Mowat include a direct quotation from

him and more lengthy pieces are invariably set in his home, open with a description of what Mowat is wearing and drinking, and close with a parting glance at how he moves or operates in his domestic sphere. Goddard's article thus not only breaks with this long-standing co-operative tradition, but inadvertently implicates the media's complicity in representing and extolling the virtues of a man who, Goddard suggests, harbours a dangerous indifference to facts. The media's response was swift and decided: rather than defend either Mowat or Goddard, a significant amount of energy and newsprint was devoted to establishing their position as objective commentators.

It is clear from both the media and the public responses that Goddard did not succeed in generating a community united in condemnation of Mowat. It is possible that a pre-existing awareness of Mowat's narrative tactics may have played a role in shaping this response, but we have no means of knowing how much these groups suspected or knew. *If* such an awareness did exist, we can accurately pinpoint where this information came from, for only one group was actively publishing critical responses to Mowat's work—scholars. A quick survey of “pre-Whopper” academic responses to Mowat's books suggests that “A Real Whopper” actually offers very little new information—government bodies, academics, historians, and scientists had, since the 1960s, taken issue with Mowat's representation of Inuit and animal life in the Arctic and it was from them that he earned the sobriquet “Hardly Know-it” (White). John Moss's 1991 article “Imaging the Arctic,” for example, elucidates the repercussions of taking too much artistic license in representing the North. Claiming that government policy and legislation are often influenced by how authors like Mowat have written about the Arctic, he suggests that these texts “shoulder a burden they were never meant to bear” (33-4). Moss argues that the fault lies not in the authors but in the “naïve reader” who “turn[s] to literature for an accurate and authentic rendering of the real.” “Literature,” he argues, “gets at truth by other means” (34). By invoking what sounds uncannily like Mowat's motto “to never to allow facts to interfere with truth” (NCW vii), and by situating Mowat within a long history of writers who take liberties with representations of the Arctic, Moss' article constitutes one of the early defenses of Mowat and his writing. It also establishes that Mowat was known to have worn “the dangerous guise of authenticity which makes created facts seem true” (34) in the very texts that Goddard focuses on.

While it would be challenging to quantify exactly what role the media and public response to Goddard's article had on the long-term effects of this

scandal and on the present market for Mowat's autobiographies, it cannot be irrelevant that neither media nor public appeared outraged or betrayed, and that criticism of Mowat was quickly transformed into criticism of Goddard and *Saturday Night*. If a general awareness of Mowat's tendency to "make a seven course meal out of a light lunch" can be attributed to the scholarly research of those working in government and education sectors *and* this awareness played a role in the responses hitherto discussed, then our current fastidiousness in avoiding Mowat and his texts seems strangely out of place. Clearly scholarship on Mowat has played an important role in the reception of his texts and the reception of criticism of his texts. Yet, of all of the factors thus far explored in tracing the short- and long-term effects of and responses to "A Real Whopper," none were as critical to defusing Goddard's potentially career-killing criticism as Mowat's celebrity. This is not to suggest, as Michael Coren does, that Mowat's fame is an effective talisman against criticism, but rather that a particular kind of celebrity has been carefully crafted by Mowat's publishers, the media, and through Mowat's personal appearances, interviews, and texts that can accommodate a few "whoppers." This collaboratively produced celebrity relies heavily on two consistent elements: the Mowat character and the authorization of that character through recourse to Mowat's private life. From his first forays in the life-writing genre in 1952 to his "last hurrah," *Otherwise*, published in 2008, Mowat has consistently made his person the subject of his study and the object of our amusement. Within his dozen autobiographical texts and countless media articles, interviews, and live appearances, Mowat has worked hard to render the illusion that there is nothing about him that we do not know or that would not willingly be offered to us: from the story of his love affair with Claire Wheeler while still married to his first wife (*Bay of Spirits: A Love Story*), to the idiosyncrasies of his toiletry habits (see *Never Cry Wolf* for toilet paper rationing or Sarah Hampson's *Globe and Mail* article for a representation of "vintage Mowat" urinating on trees), the private sphere of Farley Mowat appears to be an open book. In what Richard Dyer would call Mowat's "total star text" (136), the strategy has been consistently, across all media, one of intimacy and openness, and the stability of this portraiture over time suggests that with *this* celebrity there is no private and public self—there is no "unguarded self" to which we do not have access (Marshall "Introduction" 3).

This illusion is buttressed by the nature of the character put into play. The Mowat persona is not a dignified one that will not admit to moral and intellectual failings (or bodily functions) but is built upon and widely

relished for its irreverence and crassness. Mowat is known by reputation for his exploits involving alcohol, nudity, far-flung places, and crude language even amongst those who have never seen him in person or read any of his texts. It is a brand easily mobilized by the markers of identity that have long circulated in relation to this character: vodka, his kilt, and, especially, his bushy beard. A slightly wild and unreliable public subjectivity is a very useful image to cultivate; it can more readily accommodate bad behaviour such as marital infidelity, public drunkenness, and more to the point, lying. If indeed there had been a general awareness of Mowat's narrative strategies for arriving at the "truth," it would only have lent credence to the rebellious persona already in play. However, Mowat's left-leaning, rural iconoclasm not only has the capacity to authorize and thus defuse trouble, but it also quite often invites trouble. In 1985 Mowat was denied entry into the US for his long history of antics and while this could have potentially remained a private affair, both Mowat and his publisher, Jack McClelland, used this incident to buttress Mowat's trouble-making reputation by brewing up a media storm on both sides of the border and producing a highly entertaining account of this scandal in the 1986 autobiography, *My Discovery of America*.

This text is an important piece for contextualizing Mowat's response to Goddard's article because while both incidents were public battles played out in the media, only this earlier one was successfully absorbed and remobilized in service of Mowat's agenda. In responding to "A Real Whopper," Mowat made a critical mistake in handling the accusations, an error that reveals not only the power of the celebrity persona in circulation but also its critical role in managing the public's response. In his official response published on May 6th in *The Globe and Mail*, Mowat does not rally and cry "Fuck the facts" or offer a scathing satirical assessment of Goddard and his article. Instead, he offers a rational and staid complaint, accusing Goddard of not playing "fair" and causing his first wife "considerable anguish" ("Mowat Replies"). This response was widely recognized as "weak" (Hampson, Worthington) and, as Philip Marchand of *The Toronto Star* pointed out, suggests that getting the facts right *is* important. The criticism surrounding Mowat's response does not, interestingly, take issue with Mowat's failure to respond to either Goddard's specific accusations or his discourses of truth-telling. Their trouble with Mowat's self defence appears to stem from its seeming out of character: its style, tone, and content are, indeed, highly unusual, particularly when one considers how Mowat rallied in response to his border-crossing incident.

Shortly after this official response, Mowat returned to more characteristic responses—in a 1997 round table discussion with John Moss and Harold Horwood (later published in *Echoing Silence: Essays on Arctic Narrative*), Mowat showcased exactly how far he could absorb and remobilize criticism and counter-narratives into markers of his authenticity:

. . . I have nothing to say. This has been one of my great strengths as a writer. I am not here as Farley Mowat; I am here in my proper alter-ego: Hardly Knowit, well-known Arctic entrepreneur . . . [Mowat tells a story of being sent an insulting cartoon which suggested that he invents and exaggerates his experiences to make them sound more adventurous]. I was tempted just for about thirty seconds to tear the thing up, wad it into the toilet bowl, and ram it down with my feet. And then I thought no, this is the true accolade; I have become a tradition, a mythic tradition, in my own country. I am now, as Harold was pointing out, the kind of person that the Inuit had lots of, and have lost most of. I have become the same sort of imaginary mythic person to our society and our culture. So I have that to solace me in my older days. (Moss)

Mowat's opening remarks here are funny but they also reveal a carefully calculated strategic intervention into his public subjectivity and post-Whopper reputation. His confession that his writing is as vacuous as his speech is undone by the politically loaded content that follows this anecdote. By declaring that he inhabits the body of his alter-ego, "Hardly Knowit," he invokes a Jekyll-and-Hyde split self that is quite clearly at odds with his long history of openly professing a crass, unpolished private self. It is in his remobilization of the satirical cartoon, however, that Mowat's genius for co-opting counter-narratives and criticism is most readily apparent. His reading of the cartoon moves away from negotiating its content to examining its wider implications and in such a light, the text not only confirms his national importance but the discourse of mythology neatly ties together both his own vexed history with truth-telling and his celebrity status. Farley Mowat is, he claims, a myth who is a myth-maker, validated by a long tradition in both national and Native cultures.

Thus far, we have seen little to contradict that claim: Mowat's careful crafting of a left-leaning privacy-less persona who kicks up his kilt at government bureaucracy, or anything that smacks of mindless authority, has been taken up and disseminated by the media and his publisher, his live appearances, and, of course, his autobiographies. The mythologies spun by this mythical creature called "Farley Mowat" might rouse the ire of John Goddard but, on the whole, they have delighted the nation. Yet Goddard's article is important not only for its willingness to remind us that Mowat's

mythologies are indeed myths, but also for its attempt to posit in its place an alternate mythology which Goddard calls the “real story.” The subtitle of his article, “Farley Mowat shocked the world with his best-selling accounts of life in the North. Now, from the archives, comes the real story,” invokes discourses of truth-telling that weigh “accounts” against “the real story” and “life” versus “the archives.” The archives, he suggests, are the site and repository of the “real story” but, as Derrida reminds us, the archive is a vexed site of truth-telling power—he who controls the archive, controls memory. Although the archive is a construct that represents the forms of power, memory, and truth, legitimated by and legitimizing the dominant powers and their ideologies (5), the implicit belief in its objectivity and truth-telling function allows us to proclaim that documents are true because they have been archived, and the archives are true because they contain real documents. This circular logic helps defuse the conundrum presented by the exact source of the “real story” in the archives—government paperwork and, more significantly, Mowat’s private journals.

As Goddard’s article substitutes (or attempts to substitute) new markers of authenticity for the old, he fails to recognize that the source of these markers is ultimately the same: Farley Mowat wrote the journals and he also wrote the autobiographies, so why is it assumed that if Mowat lied in his autobiographies, he would not also lie in his journals? This question is never raised in the media frenzy generated by Goddard’s article and the answer is deceptively simple: there is an implicit assumption of truth-telling invested in journals because of their proximity to the private sphere. This invocation of the private sphere as the site of truth and “the real story” creates an interesting dilemma wherein one private sphere is made to testify against another. In the one corner, the journals, in the other, the autobiographies and other narratives offered up by Mowat over the years. Goddard’s privileging of the private sphere as a site of truth can only operate if it is set against that which is less private and thus less truthful; thus in both his title and text he frames the journals as the ultimate site of the private and the archives as the ultimate site of objective record-keeping. Autobiography, in contrast, is transformed into a public representation of self (which it has always been) but as such, is framed as less trustworthy and more artificial. The issue then is not whether Goddard invests truth-telling capacity in life writing, but rather how he invests different measures of truth-telling power in the life writing according to its institutional framing (archives as more legitimate than publishers) and its proximity to the private sphere.

Like Mowat, Goddard is heavily invested in the role of the private sphere to illuminate the truth—his argument that the journals are a viable and reliable resource depends upon it—but where Mowat seeks to offer us a public persona heavily authorized by and thus, seemingly indistinguishable from, the private self, Goddard's discourses of truth-telling suggest that he has illuminated a hidden resource of the private that potentially jeopardizes Mowat's public self. Goddard is not the first to suggest that there is a more truthful, private side to Mowat than we are allowed to see—Margaret Atwood has occasionally suggested that Mowat wears a “public mask” (x). We are cued by these discourses to believe that there is another private self we have not yet seen where we will find the “real” Farley Mowat. These attempts to put a mask on Mowat and establish spheres of public and private behaviour are rhetorically persuasive for they rely on ideological constructs that have long circulated in discourses of celebrity: the belief that there is an inevitable “split between a private self and a public self” in celebrities is foundational to the field of Celebrity Studies (Rojek 11).

In these conversations, it is widely assumed that the public self and private self are not the same: the celebrity's public self is a construct and is produced or configured by the audience, the media, and other institutions and industries. The private self, on the other hand, is perceived to be natural and produced according to one's inherent being and therefore it can be used to explain or debunk “any representation in the public sphere” (Marshall, *Celebrity* 247). Theorists such as Lorraine York, Richard Dyer, and P. David Marshall have offered particularly nuanced readings of the “negotiated terrain” of the celebrity as a public self and how it is produced and configured by various networks through “a form of working hegemony” (*Celebrity* 47, 12). York's work is particularly important for having spearheaded this conversation in a specifically Canadian context, and while *Literary Celebrity in Canada* sadly neglects Mowat, her reading of E. Pauline Johnson and Stephen Leacock does indicate that Mowat's public performances of self borrow from or build upon an established tradition in Canadian letters. Mowat's relationship with the media (not unlike Johnson's and Leacock's), models the very “working hegemony” of which Marshall speaks, although this paper has intentionally given more weight to Mowat's own role in this process than some theorists might.¹ However, these discourses of production and configuration of the public self have the effect of rendering it “untrue,” thus sparking the public's interest in stories purporting to penetrate or peel back the layers of this public self in order to reveal the “real” in the private life.

While it is a useful paradigm for framing a celebrity, the dichotomy of a private and public life and a private and public self is, of course, itself a construction: as far as the public is concerned, there is no real practical difference between the two—as soon as the so-called “private” is made public, it ceases to be private. Moreover, celebrity theorists often discuss the “private self” as if it were an accessible entity but the private self is not the same thing as the private *sphere*: the private self, that is, the selfhood of the celebrity (or any person for that matter), as conceived of by autobiography studies is unrepresentable—it cannot be rendered. When that selfhood is performed, the “I” is born or, rather, manufactured and one accesses, produces, and consumes a mediation of selfhood. Thus performances and representations of the self are arguably *all* within the realm of the public because they are done in the company of others for the benefit of others. It is difficult, in light of the theoretical possibilities that Autobiography Studies brings to Celebrity Studies, to maintain an uncritical investment in the private sphere and private self as a privileged site of truth-telling, which both Mowat and Goddard do. However, rather than use the constructed nature of the public self as a guarantor of its insincerity (by which logic the constructed nature of the private is also implicated), we might try to divest ourselves of any attempt to link construction, production, and configuration with truth-telling. If all selves are constructs and the notion of a public or a private is also an ideological construct, then we might legitimately look to all selves performed by celebrities as potentially truth-telling. In such a light, Goddard and Mowat’s argument about where the private, and thus the truth, lies becomes entirely redundant: when we reimagine the celebrity self as not a surface layer that must be penetrated, but rather one of the many legitimate selves a celebrity might mobilize, celebrities like Farley Mowat can provide us with truth-telling texts issued from and authorized by that well-known celebrity character. Rather than shying away from texts like *Never Cry Wolf* and all the trouble they invite, we might pursue them for that very reason—*Never Cry Wolf* is a fascinating example of a work that creates and solidifies in the public’s imagination the rebellious, alcohol-sodden maverick persona that simultaneously authorizes it.

Even if Goddard’s article was only able to confirm and prove that which had long been suspected (and I find this highly improbable), it is nevertheless an important text. Not only did it permanently disrupt an uncritical and problematic tradition in media representations of Mowat, but it has fashioned a new tradition wherein this disruption must be acknowledged.

As Sarah Hampson notes in an article written some ten years after “A Real Whopper,” “most mentions of Mowat include an acknowledgment of the criticism. It is a burden his legacy will always carry.” Goddard, it seems, was right when he claimed that “this will become part of the Canadian literary record. This won’t go away” (White). Yet, what exactly is this “burden,” this mark on the “record”? Does it simply mark the place of a well-publicized disagreement between two writers or has it materially altered the production and reception of Mowat’s texts and his celebrity? Mowat may not be quite so famous today as he was in the 1980s—a whole generation of students are now entering university without any idea of who Farley Mowat is—but how much of this is due to our reluctance to teach him? We must also give due consideration to the fact that Mowat’s politics on the environment and the Inuit now appear to be quaint forerunners of contemporary attitudes rather than controversial and trouble-making manifestos. Mowat, who will be 90 next year, has of late seemed to retire from active trouble-making. The star-power of the likes of Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje, and David Suzuki has long eclipsed Mowat in the media, but Mowat’s post-Whopper career contains just as many autobiographies as ever before and they still sell consistently well. Despite the hue and cry “A Real Whopper” temporarily inspired, Mowat *still* relies on discourses of the private to buttress his career and his celebrity, and it would, in fact, seem odd for him to change his *modus operandi* after all this time. While we cannot deny that discourses of the private and the ideological investment in them as sites and sources of truth continue to wield considerable power, it is critical that we remain aware that these constructs limit how and what we think of celebrity selves. If we can dismantle the assumption that the celebrity self as performed in public spheres is a shell that lacks authenticity or authority and, instead, begin to invest some truth-telling power in this widely disseminated and, often, heavily-produced self, we will be well on our way to taking celebrity autobiographies seriously. Moreover, we will have one means by which to recover Mowat as a legitimate site of scholarly inquiry. There are *dozens* of Mowat’s texts that have never been taken up by scholars and, as this paper has sought to demonstrate, there seems to be little reason not to pursue the challenges his texts make to conventional constructions of truth-telling, selfhood, and discourses of the private and public—after all, it is not as though we’ve never heard of him.

NOTE

- 1 As I have argued elsewhere, I disagree with how much agency and autonomy critics like Dyer and Marshall give to the celebrity within this process. Celebrity criticism encourages reading practices that suggest the celebrity plays little or no role in the production of their celebrity selves or their texts, a position that is clearly contradicted by Mowat's active production and dissemination of his celebrity.

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