

## Re New Editorials

The two brash rats [in an episode of the television programme *Fraggle Rock*] pronounce in unequivocal conclusion, "The trash heap has spoken." We might remember that, when next our politicians speak. And it's advice to which even editorial writers have to listen. AUTUMN 1983

This is an editorial I would rather not write. Not because the subject is uninteresting, but because I am not an editorial writer. Like WLMK, I would rather not take sides—even though I do want them to take shape. I always want to begin the next sentence *on the other hand*. Like the stereotyped Canadian, my personal inclination is to dodge political debate, to distrust the simplistic positions it often forces you into, or maybe just to fear to be disliked. Challenged to write an editorial (if necessary) my first thought is: *but*, not necessarily an editorial.

This uncertainty about editorializing provides one measure of my admiration for W.H. New. With this issue, the end of his eighteen-year term as editor begins. In July 1995, Dr. New succeeded Dr. Alan Cairns as the Brenda and David McLean Professor of Canadian Studies at UBC, a position through which he will extend his long term commitment to studying Canada through its words, wherever they occur.

His decision to shift some (not all, we hope) of his energies away from making this journal, I would describe as a mid-career adjustment. Hardly the place to try to summarize New's scholarship, or to detail the profound professional and personal debts I owe him. But, faced with trying to follow on some six dozen New editorials, it may be an occasion to salute Bill the editorial writer. Besides, it gives me a subject that is (apparently) apolitical.

Bill New believes that literature exists **in history** and that careful analysis of history must be part of literary study. In 1995, it is impossible to study literature without being aware of its political content, of its evident and con-

cealed ideologies. W.H. New, following the tradition of founding editor George Woodcock, ensured that this journal recognized literature's political position before the current critical fashion. (It's a fitting symmetry that both the first and last number under Bill's editorship editorialized on Woodcock's editorial legacy.) Bill ensured that *Canadian Literature's* readers were aware of how politics was a subject of literature, of how literature refined political positions, of how power politics shaped literary production and reception. The "publishing industry and political involvement in literature," he wrote in his first editorial, were to be an important subject.

Bill New will have much more to write for *Canadian Literature*—articles, reviews, book notes, and more editorials. And, just for good measure, his final issue as editor contained *two* editorials. But while we await those next pieces, I have assembled an interim micro-anthology of the New editorial. And, why not, since Bill has been so long devoted to creating anthologies, a form continuous with his first commitment—the responsibility to teach.

Here is the anthology. And non-editorial. The excerpts encapsulate how Bill himself editorializes, always keeping the conversation open (see his tribute to Woodcock in No. 145), allowing his opinions to round on themselves (sometimes to bite their own tales), and keeping himself slightly uncomfortable.

Regional truths deeply and various affect people's daily lives. But part of every Canadian child's national, federal birthright is that of access to both English and French. Deliberately to deny such access comes close to being an immoral act.  
AUTUMN 1978

The essays [in Mark Spilka ed. *Towards a Poetics of Fiction*, 1977] take such exclusive stances as to end up being positively irritating, and it is refreshing to get to the seventh, by Walter Reed, on the problems raised by the assumption that a single methodology will open all novels to a reader. Indeed, the problem with a lot of writing (and a lot of reviewing) is that it seems to stem from a single preconception about method or value. AUTUMN 1980

Enough of us went through Canadian Schools with American textbooks to remember that the cultural bias of texts designed outside the country will often interfere with education rather than aid it. To take an easy example: think of that question that always appeared as a writing assignment—"Discuss the role of our President." The fact that he wasn't "ours" was only mildly intrusive; and the weak teacher's simple substitution "Discuss the role of our Prime Minister instead" was only mildly irritating. Deep at the heart of the question (and the substitution) was a far more disconcerting problem of attitude: whatever role the President has in the United States, it is neither the same as the Prime Minister's in Canada, *nor do the two functions occupy the same position in each nation's set of cultural priorities.* SUMMER 1980

If the outsiders fasten on the mores and politics of the literature, they often do so with an inexactness that tells more of the culture they themselves come from than of the culture the literature directly portrays. But if they fasten on literary form, they often do so with such a precise focus that they illuminate the suppleness and subtleties of a laconic methodology that within Canada is often ignored—ignored, I think, because the natural cadences of the laconic speaking voice are familiar, therefore seem ordinary, therefore are taken for granted.

SUMMER 1982

[Children] only have one chance a learning *while young*, and the best education we can imagine for them is the one we ought to be trying to provide. That means educating good, critical, demanding readers, among other things: readers who refuse to accept automatically and passively the exaggerations of “*more*” as the norms of civilized culture. WINTER 1989

The Canada I admire is the Canada that places community before irrational unbribed individualism; the Canada that chooses peace and negotiated understanding over the peacock strut of militarism; the Canada that celebrates variety and the possibilities of change rather than the uniformed neatness and emotional smugness of a simple-minded nationalism. SPRING 1991

For anyone to tell *me* that I *cannot* construct a course in Canadian literature, that I *cannot* study the literature written in my own country—with or without reference to its social, verbal, and intercultural contexts—because *their theory does not justify it* would, for example, be an absurd exercise of power. WINTER 1992

*Both/and* (instead of/in addition to) *either/or*. SPRING 1994

Newspapers have editorials; magazines these days, have self-congratulatory editor’s notes; often scholarly journals would prefer not. That *Canadian Literature* over its 145 issues has sustained the genre is, perhaps, most significant as a gesture outside the academy, as a reminder, at the beginning of each issue, that, although the journal belongs to the university and is governed by conventions of scholarly publication, it is always a little uneasy with them. As Bill wrote, or hoped, in his first editorial, the journal “has never been bound by its academic connections. It seeks readers and writers both inside and outside university circles.” L.R.