

SARAH BINKS AND EDNA JAQUES

Parody, Gender, and the Construction of Literary Value

Carole Gerson

BEFORE CONSIDERING THE REPUTATIONS of the fictional Canadian prairie poet, Sarah Binks, and Edna Jaques, the real woman whose verse Sarah's approximates, we need to examine the institutional context which has allowed one (Binks) to be received into the canon while the other (Jaques) remains the butt of critical disdain.¹ Sarah Binks was formally introduced in Paul Hiebert's 1947 book, *Sarah Binks*; coincidentally, Edna Jaques, Canada's most popular poet through the middle decades of this century, had published nine volumes of verse between 1934 and 1946. One might speculate whether the creation of Binks was inspired by Jaques—a possibility enhanced by the similar sounds and identical rhythms of their names. However, the purpose of this essay is not to dwell only on a specific instance of possible parody, but to consider as well some of the larger questions this case implies, with regard to the gender- and class-based premises underlying the processes of literary canonization in English-speaking Canada that have prevailed since the modernist 1930s and 1940s.

The feminist critique of modernism currently mounted by British and American critics has not yet inspired many Canadian critics to re-examine the Canadian past.² The projects of Gillian Hanscombe and Virginia Smyers, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Shari Benstock, and Bonnie Scott Kime include the recuperation of modernist women poets and novelists marginalized because, as Benstock charitably puts it, "Modernism as we were taught it at mid-century . . . was unconsciously gendered masculine."³ While the work of these scholars significantly advances the recovery of many female literary authors, it has yet to address the gendered aspects of the split between elite and popular writing that contribute to the modernist process of "edging women out."⁴ In Canada, the gendered bias of modernist critical practice becomes particularly interesting when we compare the reputations of male and female popular poets.

During the modernist era, as high culture established its intellectual and artistic separation from popular culture,⁵ folk poets became an easy target—perhaps

even more so in Canada than elsewhere in the English-speaking world because the general insecurity of our high-brow cultural arbiters sharpened their implicit hostility towards low-brow local versifiers. During the nineteenth century, in Canada as in the United States, the division between literary and popular poetry had been less distinct; dialect verse, intended for oral recitation, was a favoured genre that flowed from the pens of many authors, including Alexander McLachlan, Isabella Valancy Crawford, and even Sara Jeannette Duncan.⁶ Although McLachlan and other Scottish-Canadian poets⁷ poeticized their own more or less authentic speech patterns (with Burns as their mentor), the only vestige of dialect verse to be formally accepted by the Canadian academic modernists of the 1930s and 1940s was William Henry Drummond's turn-of-the-century "French Canadian" poetry, which the modernists viewed as an authentic expression of the ethos of Canada. Drummond remained in all three editions of A. J. M. Smith's influential *Book of Canadian Poetry* (1943, 1948, 1957), an anthology of seminal importance in the shaping of the Canadian poetic canon, as well as in his *Oxford Book of Canadian Verse* (1960).⁸

An Irish-born medical doctor, Drummond scarcely resembled the Québécois peasants whose voices he appropriated. I would suggest that the continuing acceptance of his pseudo-folk verse by the Anglo-Canadian literary establishment originated, in part, in its unarticulated socio-political subtext. When the middle-class Drummond condescended to the appearance of replicating the speech and experience of a repressed agrarian and working-class community, he inadvertently forestalled the possibility of that community speaking to English Canada on its own terms. As well, his verse put French Canada in its place by stereotyping it as a society of happy *habitants*, expressing in broken English their contentment with their cultural and material impoverishment by the very forces that Drummond represented.⁹

Towards more authentic forms of popular poetry, the literary taste-makers of modern English-speaking Canada have been much less charitable. In 1927, W. A. Deacon's book, *The Four Jameses*, poked unforgettable fun at the pretensions and productions of four naive male versifiers who are, as a result, regarded as our "great bad poets." The establishment treats their unintentional comedy with a combination of derision and affection, in particular James MacIntyre's "Ode on the Mammoth Cheese." The "best" of their poems because it is the "worst," it remains in the public eye, reproduced in James Reaney's play, *Colours in the Dark* (1969), as well as in several American anthologies of "the best bad poems in English."¹⁰

The majority of Deacon's real-life "bad" folk poets are men, as are the vast majority of the contributors to *The Stuffed Owl*, the 1930 anthology of bad verse (mostly by British authors) compiled by Wyndham Lewis and Charles Lee. The

illustration composed by these modernist editors to explain their distinction between “good Bad Verse” and “bad Bad Verse” is clearly gender-specific:

Bad Bad Verse is a strong but inexperienced female child doggedly attacking Debussy's *Fêtes* in a remote provincial suburb on a hire-pay pianoforte from the Swiftsure Furnishing Stores. Good Bad Verse is Rummel or Lamond executing *Warblings at Eve* on a Bechstein concert-grand.¹¹

Hence it is scarcely surprising that when critics have presented examples of inadequate poetry, they have tended to prefer verse written by women. One such instance occurs in Chapter Seven of *The Literary History of Canada* (“The Maritime Provinces, 1815-1880”), where the author cites male poets as examples of “point and polish,” good style, “dignified expression,” and “clarity.” The only woman to be named is summoned to represent “sentimentality”¹² — a quality more often ascribed to women than to men, and of course utterly unacceptable to the modernist ethic of virility, austerity and restraint that has governed the academic approach to Canadian letters since the late 1920s. As objects of burlesque or parody, the androcentric literary establishment seems to prefer “bad” authors who are female; even the term “poetess” in this century invariably carries pejorative connotations. Deacon's book suggests that in Canada, comically naive male poets outnumbered (or at least outperformed) their female counterparts. But when the literary world burlesques its lower levels, it reserves a disproportionate quantity of contempt for its female practitioners. Mark Twain's melancholy Emmeline Grangerford, who appears in Chapter 17 of *Huckleberry Finn* (1884), is one memorable prototype.

IN CANADIAN LITERATURE, THE figure of the comical poetess has been memorialized in two well-known incarnations. The earlier appears in Frank Scott's “The Canadian Authors Meet,” a nasty poem by an otherwise progressive poet. First published in 1927, it is included in almost every teaching anthology in use now and during the past two decades. This poem mounts a stinging attack on what Scott regarded as the conservatism of the Canadian Authors' Association, which had been founded in 1921 to promote the professional interests of Canadian writers. The poem's modernist wit and iconoclasm guarantee its position in the Canadian canon; less frequently noted is the way that Scott's disagreement with the Association's literary views shifts to an attack on the members whose gender was becoming dominant,¹³ caricatured as “Virgins of sixty who still write of passion.”

Likewise enshrined in the Canadian canon is Sarah Binks, “the Sweet Songstress of Saskatchewan, the Poet's Poetess”¹⁴ unveiled by chemistry professor Paul Hiebert nearly half a century ago and still a going concern. Simply put, Sarah Binks

is to Canadian poetry what P.D.Q. Bach is to classical music. Hiebert's mock critical biography of this "simple country girl [who] captured in her net of poesy the flatness of that great province [of Saskatchewan]" (xviii) is still in print, at last count (1977) selling 2,000 copies a year.¹⁵

While the continuing popularity of this book contradicts the notion that Canadians lack humour, an analysis of what we find funny may quench some of our laughter. While researching this paper I happened to pick up a program for an academic conference on Canadian writing held in May, 1990, where the entertainment included a male actor impersonating Sarah Binks. This is not a new idea; in 1981 actor Eric Donkin costumed himself as Rosalind Drool, one of Sarah's fictional biographers in Hiebert's book, and "mounted a one-man stage adaptation of some of the book's scenes" which toured the country.¹⁶

The gender-based humour of this cross-dressing deserves some attention. Within *Sarah Binks*, much of Hiebert's satire targets trivial academic research. This almost amounts to self-parody, as the chemistry professor caricatures his artsy colleagues by concocting hilarious footnotes and blundering investigators such as "Horace P. Marrowfat, B.A., Professor Emeritus of English and Swimming of St. Midget's College," Dr. Termite of Toronto, and Rev. Beckus Puddy. However Rosalind Drool, Sarah's only female biographer, is not a professor. Rather, Hiebert echoes Frank Scott's "virgins of sixty who still write of passion" in describing Miss Drool's "natural proclivity to take a vicarious and Freudian delight in incidents and experiences which she has not been privileged to enjoy" (88). In other words, the men are funny because of their misguided professional zeal, but the women are funny because they are constructed according to the stereotype of the frustrated spinster. Drag performances of Sarah Binks accentuate the way Hiebert's book is often read as poking fun not at academic research, or at naive poetry *per se*, but at women poets in particular. In their most recent analysis of modernism, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar point out that male cross-dressing, parodying the outward appearance of femininity without relinquishing the masculinity of the male body, serves to assert male power, especially during a historical period of gender disorder.¹⁷ When the parodic object is a popular female poet, the implication can only be that, while the establishment finds inherently funny all poets it categorizes as naive or "bad" (or popular or folk or whatever term one may choose), the women are even more ridiculous because they are incomplete: real women don't write poetry; or, to turn it around, women don't write real poetry.

In a 1975 interview, Hiebert explained the genesis of Sarah Binks in terms that reinforce my point. Sarah's poems originated as amusing ditties that Paul Hiebert and his brother composed as children. When he first gathered them, he attributed them to "some country bumpkin by the name of Henry Hayfoot. But that didn't get me anywhere; and then it suddenly occurred to me that if these had been written by a girl they would be a bit more fascinating." Hiebert goes on to describe

how Sarah Binks was conceived in order to bait a female audience, whose naïveté is constructed to suit his own agenda:

[I]n the universities, when they used to hold social gatherings or conversazioni, as they called them, the women of the faculty, in order to keep up their intellectual end, would discuss the latest literary sensation or the latest book. . . . So I used to quote them these poems and say: "Have you heard this?" And they would remark: "That's a very nice thing; who wrote that?" . . . and I'd say: "This was written by that Saskatchewan poetess, a newcomer in the literary field of Western Canada, and she's attracting quite a bit of attention."¹⁸

Sarah Binks' continuing popularity with the Canadian academic literary establishment — primarily male by gender and by values — derives from a subtext similar to the one I outlined earlier concerning English Canada's eager acceptance of W. H. Drummond. In both cases, power is maintained by subordinating the other (defined by gender or by language) in humorous writing purporting to represent the other, but penned by a member of the power establishment. While recent sensitivity to the cultural dignity of French Canada has encouraged several critics to reconsider Drummond,¹⁹ the only inkling of critical discomfort with Hiebert appears in Louis MacKendrick's passing comment (in his 1988 *DLB* entry) that Hiebert's humour relies on "numerous stereotypes of region, gender, and ethnicity."²⁰

WHEN WE COMPARE THE reputation of Sarah Binks with that of Edna Jaques, Canada's most successful real-life folk poet, we arrive at an interesting intersection of high culture with popular culture. Whereas high culture often appropriates folk poetry for parodic purposes, popular poetry operates in its own self-sufficiency, with little concern for approval from the élite. In 1952, Jaques claimed (legitimately, I believe) to be Canada's best-selling poet, with annual sales of 5,000 volumes and annual profits of \$1,000. She was born in Ontario in 1891, and as a small child was taken to Saskatchewan by her family who gave up the comforts of a settled town for the crude life of a prairie homestead. Most of her education occurred directly on the farm; her grade 8 schooling was extended only by secretarial training taken when she had to support her daughter after the collapse of her marriage. While still a child she began to publish poems in the local newspaper (the *Moose Jaw Times*); in 1932, as the Depression intensified, she collected some of her work into two booklets priced at 25 cents each, of which she sold 20,000 copies. She later decided that "the secret of their success was their size. They were small enough to fit into an ordinary envelope, and hundreds of women bought them as little gifts for friends, instead of greeting cards."²¹ From this early success there was no turning back. Over the next two decades ten sub-

stantial volumes followed, all of which went into many reprints, along with several editions of *The Best of Edna Jaques* (1966, 1967, 1974) and a final posthumous collection in 1979, *Prairie Born, Prairie Bred, Poetic Reflections of a Pioneer*. Her autobiography, *Uphill all the Way*, was published in 1977, the year before her death at the age of 87.

Edna Jaques was a genuinely populist poet. Unlike Nellie McClung, who was a personal friend and who also wrote heart-warming, optimistic words to cheer the hard lives of women, Jaques did not speak down from a middle-class perspective but directly to her peers in the kitchens of the country. She regarded her pieces as “common, ordinary poems, telling about life in Canada and especially on the prairies” (*Uphill* 79). When asked about a possible “humorous parallel” with Sarah Binks, Jaques replied that she hadn’t read Hiebert’s book, and “likely wouldn’t see any cleverness in it.”²²

Not surprisingly, the literary establishment has extended greater hospitality to the parody than to the reality. Paul Hiebert and/or Sarah Binks appear in the *Literary History of Canada*, the *Canadian Encyclopaedia*, the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* and the *Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*, none of which mentions Jaques (although they do include Drummond as well as popular male poets like Robert Service, Wilson MacDonald, and Tom MacInnes).²³ Upon publication, *Sarah Binks* was reviewed in such august cultural organs as the *Canadian Forum*, the *Dalhousie Review*, and the *Canadian Poetry Magazine*. While some academic reviewers regarded the book as a parody of literary nationalism and misguided scholarly zeal, several read Hiebert’s target as the object rather than the method, and concurred with Earle Birney’s wish to congratulate Hiebert for having written “the first funny book about Canadian poetry and [supplied] a local habitation and a name for that protean nymph, the Bad Canadian Poetess.” Birney recommended that the book be “required reading for all English professors, reviewers, and members of the Canadian Authors’ Association” (in line with Frank Scott’s earlier attack on the CAA).²⁴

At the same time, established periodicals all but ignored Edna Jaques, whose home turf was the daily and weekly press. With the exception of *The Golden Road* (1953), which was disparagingly noticed by *Saturday Night*, no reviews of her books or her autobiography were picked up by the compilers of the *Canadian Periodical Index* over the four decades of her career. Hence it is nicely ironic that the only sustained serious attention Jaques received was in “Letters in Canada,” the *University of Toronto Quarterly*’s annual review of Canadian literature which was initiated in 1935. During its first few decades its contributors attempted to consider everything of a literary nature written in this country. Here we can observe professors wrestling with popular verse they would have preferred to ignore. In the first issue, E. K. Brown, who presided over the poetry section, gave Jaques short shrift:

The critic need concern himself with mediocre literature only when he has before him a book to which the reading public, or a substantial fraction of it, is disposed to assign a false importance. Mrs. Edna Jaques' *My Kitchen Window* is such a book. . . . Love, patriotism, even religion itself, take on a kind of cosiness in her verses as they, doubtless, do in the minds of a multitude of Canadians. Her verses are an expression of the ordinary self of the Canadian middle class, that is to say, of the immense majority of Canadians. They stir one to fear that an Eddy Guest may be the next phenomenon in Canadian literature.²⁵

Several volumes later, Brown conceded that Jaques

is probably our most genuinely popular writer of verse. But her popularity is not a very consoling fact to anyone who would wish a literature in this country, profound and penetrating and great. She enables us to see what Canadian taste really is.²⁶

In 1950 Brown was succeeded by Northrop Frye. Interested in accounting for all forms of literary endeavour, Frye issued several statements defending popular poetry in theory only to then discredit the results produced by those who actually engaged in the practice — especially if their work reflected female values or experiences. His first discussion of “naive or primitive” verse regretted that the search for “fresh experience” is usually blighted by “self-consciousness and schoolmarmism.” (Is there a masculine counterpart to “schoolmarmism”?) When he came to Edna Jaques, Frye described her as a skilful practitioner of “the doggerel school,” whose “mastery of the central technical device of nostalgic verse” lay in her ability to “flatter the selective memory” with a “smoothly edited and censored transcript of wholesome food, happy children, simple virtues, and, of course, mother dear.”²⁷

Brown and Frye were evidently far more perturbed by Edna Jaques — or at least, by the threat her popularity posed to their academic values and national literary agenda — than she was by them. Her chosen audience was women — in her autobiography she declares that she “always loved women” and “never really liked men” (*Uphill*, 238, 240) — and women of her own class: the small-town and rural women who said to her “You might be my sister”²⁸ and “You speak our language” (*Uphill* 220).

WHAT JAQUES OFFERS ordinary women is a celebration of their strength and experience as mothers and home-makers, and valorization of their daily labour in the home. “My work-bench is a kitchen sink / The table where I mix my bread,” begins a poem in one of her first books.²⁹ At a period when motherhood was the destiny of most Canadian women, Jaques voiced this central factor in their lives:

My future is no longer mine
 For it is bound and sealed and tied
 To this wee girl of half-past four
 Who skips and dances at my side.
 ("The Mother," *MKW*, 20)

When the Second World War called women into Canada's offices and factories, Jaques followed suit in both her life and her verse. Some pieces, like "Munition Worker," acknowledge the physical hardships of factory labour; others commemorate the silent anguish of the "mothers of heroes" who wait for news of sons serving overseas.³⁰ In Jaques' verse, women are significant for their accomplishments, not for their persons. Her poem about her own fortieth birthday (*MKW*, 41) proclaims the value of experience, as does her poem on "The Older Woman" who lacks "glamour" but embodies love (*RinD*, 50-51). Thus the workers and home-makers who buy her books find themselves positively mirrored in verse that accords worth to ordinary women who have "no special gift of anything" and will "never set the world afire."³¹ The celebration of women's friendships and sense of community is another of her consistent themes.³²

In her recent study of folk poetry in Ontario, Pauline Greenhill points out that "unlike an academic poet, a folk poet's words are valued in a community in so far as he or she has roles, values, and worldviews in common with others in it, not in so far as he or she is different."³³ While Greenhill assumes that community is defined by geography (as, to some extent, does Laurie Ricou in his essay on popular prairie poetry³⁴), Jaques' community spans most of Canada, and is defined instead by gender and by class. Her book titles alone suggest her cultural terrain: *Drifting Soil* (1932?), *My Kitchen Window* (1935), *Aunt Hattie's Place* (1941), *Backdoor Neighbors* (1946), *Fireside Poems* (1950). In line with her role as community poet, most of her poetry tends to reinforce rather than challenge prevailing values and conditions. While Jaques wrote several bitter pieces describing the devastation of the dust-bowl years on the prairies,³⁵ the Depression poems that refer to "the poorer sidewalks of our town" (*MKW* 21) more often than not advocate finding happiness in poverty and achieving contentment with one's lot by focussing on "Small Lovely Things" (*MKW* 67). Still, a counter-voice occasionally breaks through that does ask hard questions. In "To the Old Poor" and "Poverty," she demands "WHY?", and in "A Girl-Mother Wonders,"³⁶ she establishes strong sympathy with a young unwed mother who will never know the child she is forced to give up for adoption. "Slums," published in 1946, depicts "A hopeless woman sitting on a stoop / In a bedraggled housecoat soiled and torn, / Watching her children with pathetic eyes." The poem concludes:

How is it, then, in such a land as ours
 Rich beyond words, and still with youth aglow,
 That anyone should live in poverty

And life be cheap and sordid as men go
 Down bitter roads where sin in bright array
 Touches the lips of children as they play?³⁷

If Jaques' verse shows little change over the years, this consistency can be attributed to the stability of her audience and her themes. The women for whom she wrote saw little change in their lives and horizons through the middle years of this century. Today, although a new generation of scholars is establishing the economic and social value of women's traditional work in the home and the family, Canadian anthologies of the poetry of work, such as Tom Wayman's *A Government Job at Last* (1976) and *Going for Coffee* (1981), are slow to recognize unwaged domestic labour as real work. Jaques' strongest appearance in this field occurs in the second volume of Brian Davis's *Poems of the Canadian People, 1900-1950* (1978), where, with four poems, she is the best represented woman poet.

CONTEXTUALIZING A PARODIC FIGURE like Sarah Binks within the shifting grid of literary value shaped by the changing reputations of real, albeit very different, popular writers like Edna Jaques and W. H. Drummond allows us to see in operation some of the biases of class, gender and ethnicity that have been unquestioningly accepted by the profession that constructs literary value, and in many instances still prevail. The Canadian literary academy needs to recognize the extent to which it continues to be shaped by its modernist past, and to acknowledge that its acceptance of the literary representation of others—including women, Native Peoples, French-Canadians, members of the working class, popular poets, non-whites, and various combinations thereof—often occur in texts whose stance or authorship reduces the threat of their otherness. Canonicity, in Canada as elsewhere, cannot be divorced from the problematics of power.

NOTES

- ¹ Research for this paper was supported through the Canada Research Fellowship Program of the SSHRCC.
- ² Gillian Hanscombe and Virginia L. Smyers, *Writing For Their Lives: The Modernist Women, 1910-1940* (London: Women's Press 1987); Sandra Gilbert & Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*, vols. 1, 2 (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1987, 1989); Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900-1940* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1986); Bonnie Scott Kime, *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1990); Carole Gerson, "The Canon Between the Wars: Field-notes of a Feminist Literary Archeologist," in Robert Lecker, ed., *Canadian Canons: Essays in Literary Value* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1991): 46-56.
- ³ Benstock, Introduction, p. 2.

- ⁴ Gaye Tuchman with Nina E. Fortin, *Edging Women Out: Victorian Novelists, Publishers, and Social Change* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1989).
- ⁵ See Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana 1983): 90-91, 136-7, 236-7, where it is clear that the restricted definition of "culture" as "intellectual and especially artistic activity" and therefore to be distinguished from folk and popular elements coincides with the rise of modernism in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century. Alan C. Golding's essay, "American Poetry Anthologies," in Robert von Hallberg, ed., *Canons* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press 1984): 279-308, describes how the modernist shift towards the avant-garde during the early twentieth century eliminated many early popular poets from the American canon, and bequeathed a distinctly anti-popular stance to most subsequent canonizers (see especially 293 ff.).
- ⁶ See Duncan's 'Irish' dialect poem, "My Washerwoman's Story," *The Week* 5 (23 Feb. 1888) 203.
- ⁷ See Daniel Clark, ed., *Selections from Scottish Canadian Poets* (Toronto: Canadian Society, 1900).
- ⁸ For further discussion of the canonical impact of Smith's anthologies, see Carole Gerson, "Anthologies and the Canon of Early Canadian Women Writers," in Lorraine McMullen, ed., *Re(dis)covering Our Foremothers* (Ottawa: Univ. of Ottawa Press, 1990): 55-76.
- ⁹ In his effusive preface to *The Habitant and Other French Canadian Poems* (1987), Louis Fréchette's overstated congratulation of his friend, Dr. Drummond, for avoiding "caricature" "bouffonnerie," "vulgarité," "le grotesque," "bizarrerie" and "burlesque" in his "sympathique et juste" portrayal of "un pauvre illettré . . . comme un type national à part" seems more a defense than an endorsement. Fréchette attributes a positive political value to Drummond's verse "qui ne peuvent que cimenter l'union de coeur et d'esprit qui doit exister entre toutes les fractions qui composent la grande famille canadienne appelée à vivre et à prospérer sous la même drapeau." The experience of being culturally indoctrinated to participate in one's own repression is common to ethnic minorities as well as to women. Even in 1897, Fréchette sensed that to be acceptable in French Canada, Drummond's verse required careful qualification; during the 1960s, its continuing presence in the high school anthology used by the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal (where I first encountered "The Wreck of the Julie Plante") aggravated the tensions that would explode in the Quiet Revolution.
- ¹⁰ "Queen of Cheese" appears in James Camp, X. J. Kennedy, and Keith Waldrop, eds., *Pegasus Descending: A Treasury of the Best Bad Poems in English* (New York: Collier, 1971): 73-74; their source was William Cole, ed., *The Fireside Book of Humorous Poetry* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1959), where it appears in a section headed, "Primitive poems that are so bad they're good."
- ¹¹ Wyndham Lewis and Charles Lee, eds., *The Stuffed Owl: An Anthology of Bad Verse* (London and Toronto: Dent, 1930), ix. Of the 60 contributors, 52 are men, seven are women, and one is unspecified. Even in the realm of Bad Verse, that written by men is more likely to be judged "good" (i.e. worthy of inclusion in an anthology like this one) than that written by women.
- ¹² Fred Cogswell, "The Maritime Provinces, 1815-1880," in Carl F. Klinck, general editor, *Literary History of Canada* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1967): 117, 120, 123, 124, 107.
- ¹³ In 1924, women were 45% of the more than 800 English-speaking members of the CAA; by 1933, this figure had increased to 58%.

- ¹⁴ Paul Hiebert, *Sarah Binks* (1947; rpt. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1964) : 141. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition.
- ¹⁵ Reynold Siemans, "Sarah Binks in Retrospect: A Conversation with Paul Hiebert," *Journal of Canadian Fiction* 19 (1977) : 68.
- ¹⁶ Louis K. MacKendrick, "Paul Hiebert," *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, vol. 68, *Canadian Writers 1920-1959* : 180. The conference whose banquet entertainment featured "Jack Dueck: performance of *Sarah Binks*," was titled "Mennonite/s Writing in Canada," and was held 10-12 May 1990 at Conrad Grebel College, University of Waterloo. A similar (albeit more spontaneous) event occurred at the conference on Scottish influences on Canadian literature in Edinburgh in May 1991, where a group of male Canadian scholars created a comical Canadian poetess for an evening's entertainment.
- ¹⁷ Sandra M. Gilbert & Susan Gubar, *Sexchanges*, vol. 2 of *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, Yale Univ. Press, 1989), 324-36.
- ¹⁸ Siemans, 66.
- ¹⁹ See Gerald Noonan, "Perceptions of Drummond, 'Cet Idrome Batard,' and the French Canadian *Pastorale*" *Essays on Canadian Writing* No. 27 (1983-84) : 35-40; Lee Briscoe Thompson, "The Shelving of a People's Poet," *Journal of American Culture*, 2 : 4 (Winter 1980) : 682-89; Jay Johnson, "The Age of Brass: Drummond, Service, and Canadian 'Local Colour,'" *Canadian Poetry*, No. 23 (1988) : 14-30.
- ²⁰ *DLB* 68 : 181.
- ²¹ Edna Jaques, *Uphill all the Way* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1977) : 80; hereafter identified as *Uphill*.
- ²² Janice Tyrwhitt, "Rhymes in a Ten-cent Scribbler," *Maclean's Magazine* 65 (1 Sept. 1952) : 44.
- ²³ Reynold Siemans and the editorial staff at the *Journal of Canadian Fiction* were so unfamiliar with Jaques that when Hiebert mentioned her name during the interview, they allowed it to be misspelled "Jakes."
- ²⁴ *Canadian Poetry Magazine* 11 (Mar 1948), 42; a similar comment regarding "that bane of the newspaper editor's life — the Bad Canadian Poetess" appeared in the *Ottawa Citizen*, cited in *Canadian Literature* 75 (Winter 1977) : 113. B. K. Sandwell likewise suggested that "'Sarah Binks' should be compulsory reading in all courses on Canadian cultural history." *Saturday Night* 63 (29 Mar 1948) : 17.
- ²⁵ "Letters in Canada," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 5 (1935-36) : 367.
- ²⁶ "Letters in Canada," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, (1939) : 288.
- ²⁷ "Letters in Canada," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, (1950) : 260; (1953) : 263. The critical strategies of Frye and Brown are typical of others who disparage popular verse in that they scorn not just the style, but also the topics and sympathetic readers of folk poetry. See Pauline Greenhill, *True Poetry: Traditional and Popular Verse in Ontario* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1989), 6-7.
- ²⁸ Tyrwhitt, 15.
- ²⁹ Edna Jaques, *My Kitchen Window* (Toronto: Allen, 1935) : 4; hereafter identified as *MKW*.
- ³⁰ "Munition Worker," "Her Son is Missing," "Sons Going Away," *Roses in December* (Toronto: Allen, 1944) ; hereafter referred to as *RinD*.

- ³¹ Edna Jaques, *Dreams in Your Heart* (Toronto: Allen, 1937): 59, 61; hereafter referred to as *Dreams*.
- ³² "Wherever Women Gather" *Fireside Poems* (Toronto: Allen, 1950) p. 61; "Companionship (Between Old Ladies)" *Prairie Born Prairie Bred* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1977): 16.
- ³³ Pauline Greenhill, *True Poetry: Traditional and Popular Verse in Ontario* (McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1989), 37.
- ³⁴ "The Meadowlark Tradition: Popular Verse of the Canadian Prairie," *Essays on Canadian Writing*, No. 18/19 (1980): 161-68.
- ³⁵ "To an Abandoned Farmhouse" *Dreams*, p. 8, "Drought Area" *Beside Still Waters* (Toronto: Allen, 1939): 60.
- ³⁶ "All" *My Kitchen Window* (1935); also, "If My Girl Came," *Wide Horizons* (Moose Jaw: "Times," 1933?).
- ³⁷ Edna Jaques, *Backdoor Neighbors* (Toronto: Allen, 1946): 60.

THE CORN MASK

Tony Cosier

He balanced the Seneca mask
 Back on its hook with care
 Put on his coat and his boots
 And set down the creek past the mill.
 To the gulley buried by cedars
 He hoped was the one at last.

High walls that narrowed to squeeze like a vise said it was.
 A rivulet chuckling at pebbleglut spoke like a tongue
 And agreed. Leaved vines and ferns and moss said this
 Was the ancient ground. He looked for shapes in the cliffs.
 At noon he found a slab of rock that was warm.

He thought of the poet farmer who read aloud in the hall
 Leaning on his cane, how when he reached the proper line
 Set the cane aside and fondled for a cob in his packsack
 And held it high in the air in his tightening bones.

He thought of the soldiers burning the fields in the year of the
 massacre.

And he dreamed of a man in a black hat who loved the mountain
 storms.