

PEACE & JOY, LTD.

DEMOCRACY IS WONDERFUL. It's also, I sometimes think, a Protestant invention: a way of giving us all the power of individual choice and then making us don a hairshirt *pro tem.* as we live for awhile with the bird we've chosen to represent us. We're perhaps never satisfied, for all the individual reasons that make us claim democracy in the first place. But every now and then we manage collectively to choose a booby to be our representative, and then, faced with few acceptable options, we wait, and wait, and wait some more, daily suffering him out. Protesting, perhaps; actively. Or passively; awaiting regeneration. Or even undertaking to while away the time by classifying the forms of life about us, as a kind of unaligned education against the future.

A booby, for example, is a kind of beaver with wings: teeth in the air, eyes on the log in front of him, tail flapping furiously, but wings functionless, the imagination not strong enough to carry him far into the future. You can recognize the creature in three ways: by clawmarks, crow, and plumage. He (or she: they hatch in both sexes) seems to learn to walk and strut at the same time, has a permanent poll at the back of the neck, and can regale you with homespun (off the record) when not in dress uniform. He likes to be seen, but does not see; he likes to say, but does not listen; he likes to be quoted, but not for what he's said. He speaks in phrases, till they come to sound like Axioms of Our Time, but seldom finishes sentences except those he passes on others. He likes the camera, but acts in secret; he thinks of himself as gentle, but is quick to adopt a defensive posture, and can hurt. You know where he's been by the scratches. And despite, perhaps, his best intentions, he particularly scratches those with least power (or least apparent power) or no voice (or no apparent effective voice). Women and Children First is his motto. He lives for the moment. He lives for appearance. He likes fudge.

I am, of course, speaking of no one person here. I am speaking of a mindset. And I'm speaking of a mindset that possesses criticism as much as it possesses public policy and the parish auxiliary. It does little credit anywhere it appears, but it is particularly dangerous in society as a whole when it begins to sacrifice

the values of cultural individuality to the perceived efficiencies of a short-term bookkeeping system. Warner Troyer made the point not long ago, on a radio editorial: as a society we do not — and in the name of civilized behaviour cannot — ask that every activity in the country “pay for itself.” There are some things that we value as a culture, some things that we value enough, in fact, that we ask our tax monies to help support them. Agriculture; medicine; education; communication. There are only half a dozen people in the country who could afford to finance in real dollars the cost of recuperating from a medical disability, let alone a particularly debilitating accident, a rare disease. And there are not that many more who could pay for everything — *everything*, mind you: the equipment, the space, the people, the time (perhaps the time most of all) — involved in their own education. We must not retreat to a defensive posture, faced with this reality (“pay as you go, that’s all we can afford”), but realize that, whatever the conditions, we can’t afford *not* to afford health and proper training. Saying we can’t afford to school our children properly (or more insidiously, that “we can’t provide a Cadillac education when a Ford will do”) begs the question: when have we ever offered a public “Cadillac” education? We’ve always underspent on quality. It is not just that any society willing to sacrifice an entire generation is shortsightedly guaranteeing its own decline — or that one that is willing to sacrifice the general level of health of its citizens is barbaric. It is also a question of simple competitive survival. When we go abroad and try to market our products, we are also marketing ourselves, our image as a people. We are presenting ourselves to Asian and European societies for whom health and education — the availability of access to food and literacy — are the hallmarks of civilization. We may sell raw products as much as we like, but if we sell ourselves short in the process, if we deny training to the talented in the name of some cost-accounting efficiency, we will be heading for mediocrity and cutting off any competitive edge we might ever have in those other things we can do well. We will also show ourselves to be boobies.

As a society we support education, health, and the life of the local culture because they benefit us. It is not altruistic to do so, nor a commercial waste, nor a charity, nor dismissible as a drain on those who apply themselves, or just a conspicuous display of conscience money. It’s a way of placing faith in continuity, of trusting in the community’s future; it’s a simple investment in peace and joy. That’s not an ignoble ambition. It expresses a commitment to a way of life in which we can and should take delight. But it’s also in recurrent danger of being sacrificed to the gods of the balance sheet. What we must make clear is that it is the life of the spirit, the life of the mind, and the life of the nation that hang in that balance. If we lessen our commitment to the nation’s independent quality of life, the cost will be measured in people, not in dollars. The balance we seek is one between dollars and commonsense.

I use the language of the marketplace here because we are living constantly these days with the rhetoric of the marketplace — we hear of “restraint,” “cutback,” and the location of the “bottom line.” (That it’s more often the rhetoric of the artificial money market than the language of actual commodity exchange is an irony we have not yet faced up to. “Money talks” these days — perhaps all too literally, and more effectively than it should because we fail to challenge the presumptions of the rhetoric.) While we’re all persuaded by the appeal of such phrases as “fiscal responsibility” and all opposed to waste and foolishness, the truth is that none of us can programme people so that every expenditure is commensurately productive. We take chances. And we’re at our best when we place faith in possibilities. We may have to identify talent in order to train it, but we have also to provide first the circumstances in which talent — and I mean ability of all kinds: athletic, scientific, artistic, commercial, verbal, manual — will have the chance to show itself and develop. We have also, therefore, to examine the presumptions that are built into the paradigms by which we currently define investment and profit. The cultural industries in Canada — if that’s the term we must use to reify the activities of the arts — involve more people and make more profit than many another Canadian industry: the athletics industry, for example. They repay investment, even if sometimes at some remove. They repay by means of the tangible product we call entertainment; they repay it by providing information; they repay it when they make a real profit; and in the long run they also repay it by provoking into existence the kind of environment that encourages creativity and encourages others to strive for quality.

Whatever tax money supports the arts and communications industries, moreover, is in turn reinvested inside the society. Funding that goes directly into the arts, for example, goes almost immediately into the rest of the economy, to other industries, not into a pocket; it goes to the designers, the fabric manufacturers, the sales agencies, the paint-and-paper merchants, the ticket takers, the haberdashers, the cab drivers — and through all of them to the owners of land and the growers of food. Everything connects. The simple involvement of arts people in community activities means that they are contributing to the economy as a whole: no more and no less than day labourers, farmers, doctors, and tycoons who holiday at home. Which leads to the next paradoxical distinction that is lodged in the current rhetoric: we hear of “cutback” at precisely the same time we hear of “job creation.” The paradox derives not just from the game with numbers that is obscurely being played here, but more directly from the presumption that “cutbacks” can take place without measurable consequence in the supply of education and health care, but that a “job” is something manual, with a tangible commodity at the end of it (a brick, a board, a lump of coal: at its narrowest this definition even finds a book or the skills of a surgical nurse to be abstract and intangible notions). Yet all the data we have indicates that greater

wealth in North America now derives from the service industries than from those industries that mine and process raw resources. This distinction amply does *not* mean that the services are therefore “topheavy,” usurping their place in the “appropriate” scheme of things: the realignment that’s going on is simply the reordering that inevitably follows the skills of the people. As long as we’re an educated people, we’ll be able to offer services to other people that they will want and need — services of advice and talent and training, services that come with expertise, whether legal, medical, verbal, mechanical, economic, technological, or whatever. Services that engender income. If we don’t value excellence we can require ourselves to haul water again, as we once did. But that seems a curious shortsightedness, a self-flagellating stubbornness, when we are a society capable of other dimensions of excellence, a society with excellence to cultivate and excellence to share.

Cultivating excellence does not mean that we have to stop dealing in wood and steel. The wealth that derives from raw materials remains necessary to the economy, and the raw materials themselves remain necessary in order to manufacture some of the products that people need, use, buy, and sell. There are several corollaries which follow; unfortunately there are also several illogical conclusions which are too often presumed to follow this observation. The fact that some “products” derive from the mineral and vegetable wealth of this country, for example, does not mean that all do. All wealth does not therefore derive from one kind of “product.” Further, investment in the “service industries” — the arts included — does not constitute a failure to be productive, but is rather a recognition of another kind of (marketable) productivity. Hence investment in the service industries also constitutes a way — not the *only* way, but *a* way — of enabling currency to be distributed through the economy as a whole, allowing wealth to serve the people rather than to concentrate in limited hands. In the case of the arts, it happens also to be a way of giving currency to ideas, of allowing the nation to thrive as a culture of its own and not just mechanically (if neatly) to exist as someone else’s suburb.

To be a people is to be more than a numerical system. It is to be an embodiment of shared values. We value the public education system because it is a way of providing every generation with equal opportunities, a way of giving universal access to training and knowledge, a way of encouraging the social mobility and the free exchange of perspectives that express our national commitment to humane standards of action. We value public ownership of the CBC because (whatever quarrel we might have with programming) it guarantees for us in our own country the freedom of the airwaves. We value increased support for the Canada Council because it is a worthy institution, an institution by which we commit ourselves to nurturing talent and fostering unfettered enquiry into ideas and experience. These are systems that free us from limitation. They are our

doors out of boobiedom. Celebrate them. Like the space we still enjoy, the water we are trying to preserve, the standards of health we ask for, and the ability to feed ourselves which we too often and too easily take for granted, they are the resources we have in our common command, to claim in the name of intelligence as well as the name of peace and joy.

W.N.

ARABIA DESERTA

Susan Glickman

Bloor Street 10 p.m.

Giving up their search for the lucky
break, cheap apartment, perfect job,
the new bedouins pitch tent for tonight
they sit under stars drinking espresso,
talking about love.

Every café spills onto the street where a few
requisite winos loiter for handouts
or palm cigarettes. It's not
hashish but the rush of tobacco
thrills their lungs, provides a ritual
for nervous hands. The same guy, young,
long hair, greasy lumberjack's shirt,
is there every day: "Got any bus tickets?"
He never goes anywhere, just paces the strip
from Woolworth's to Murray's and back,
north side of Bloor; keeps time
to families trundling groceries, kids on bikes.
At nightfall the families go home.
The kids lick up ice cream and drag their feet,
practising rebellion. The air
is sweet as *tartuffo* but the city's gone tough.
It struts its stuff like a man in black leather,
a man who never meets your eyes.
He stares into the mirror behind you, checking out
his own moves.