

Book Review

A look at Canadian television displays short sightedness

by ALEX BARRIS

Given the Canadian appetite for the kind of navel-contemplation that sometimes passes for social history, it was probably inevitable that somebody would do a book about the first 15 years of television in Canada.

The someone turns out to be a University of Toronto history professor, and the book is called *When Television Was Young: Primetime Canada 1952-1967*, by Paul Rutherford (University of Toronto Press, hardcover, 637 pages, illustrated, \$65).

Prof. Rutherford's background, in this case, is germane to any appraisal of his work. Born in 1944, he was 14 when his family bought its first TV set, in 1958. The 15-year period covered in the book was already one-third gone. Still, assuming the youth applied himself assiduously for the next decade, he could surely have seen a good many of the Canadian pro-

grams available.

But apparently not. By his own admission, he was at least as much interested in the various American programs on the air as in Canadian shows. (He was certainly not alone in this preference, but he is, after all, the one who wrote this book.)

WASN'T NECESSARY

So, if he didn't watch that many Canadian programs when they were on from 1952 to 1967, he must have had to do a lot of catching up when he began to "research" this volume, right? Wrong again. "Watching thousands of hours of programs just wasn't necessary," Prof. Rutherford blithely tells us.

The author gratefully acknowledges the "goodwill and support" of two deans of arts and sciences at the University of Toronto who were generous enough to grant him "an allotment of monies" to aid his research efforts in each of his five years as chairman of the department of

history. These monies were supplemented by grants from a handful of other magnanimous arts organizations.

Much of this research money, he informs us, "went into hiring a bevy of research assistants." He even lists the names of these "talented souls who worked very hard to uncover research material of one kind or another."

But they, like him, seem not to have bothered much with watching many of the programs in question. Why waste time looking at a Rembrandt when you can read what some of his contemporaries thought of his work? Why bother listening to Beethoven when you can have someone describe the music?

Instead, Rutherford and his bevy of talented souls uncovered research material "of one kind or another". At one point, he denigrates television criticism in the press, citing Sandra Gwynn (not otherwise identified) as saying that all too often the television beat was "regarded as a kind of graveyard, somewhere between

the obituary column and the service clubs" and decrying the dearth of "intelligent criticism". Yet, in the course of his book, he quotes some dozen or so of these same critics for a total of more than 120 times.

Generously sprinkled throughout this weighty tome are words like "highbrow" and "culture" always sneered in the way that far-right American conservatives sneer the word "liberal".

It is also Rutherford's view that television never had any Golden Age, but that this is a myth "rooted in nostalgia." Perhaps, if he and his diligent researchers had not been so busy tracking down research material, they might have taken the trouble to look at a few memorable programs, as for example:

The Discoverers, by George Salverson (1956); Socrates, written by Lister Sinclair, produced by Marlo Prizek (1958); The Crucible, by Arthur Miller, directed by Harvey Hart (1959); The Prisoner, directed by Leo Orenstein (1962); The Black Bonspiel of Willie Mac-

Crimmon, by W. O. Mitchell (1962); The Brass Pounder From Illinois, by Tommy Tweed (1962); The Hill, written and produced by Paul Almond (1956); Galileo, adapted by Lister Sinclair from the Bertold Brecht play (1965), and Mother Courage, by Brecht, directed by George McGown (1965).

No one of these programs is even mentioned anywhere in Rutherford's lengthy book.

To be sure, he gives us a "focus" on a handful of programs, including *Front Page Challenge*, *Wojek*, *This Hour Has Seven Days* and *Tabloid*.

Heaven help us, he even gives us a "focus" on a 1962 *Wayne and Shuster Hour*, complete with samples of dialogue accompanied by references to a number of camera shots - as if this kind of arid analysis could hope to capture the soul of comedy. (And he gratuitously includes the claim - nowhere substantiated - that the CBC was about to cancel *Wayne and Shuster* when their big break came along on the *Ed Sullivan Show*).

Beneath the Veneer women in public service

Treasury Board of Canada, in cooperation with the Canadian Government Publishing Centre, presents the publication titled *Beneath the Veneer*.

This series of 4 volumes is the result of a study undertaken by the Task Force, which was appointed to tackle the issue of women in the public service.

The Task Force, created in 1988 by the Honourable Pat Carney, then President of the Treasury Board, was commissioned to identify and rank the barriers to the advancement of women in the federal public service, to pay particular attention to the professional groups, to examine the experience of pioneers and to report to the President of the Treasury Board on their findings.

The Task Force members received a great deal of help from many departments and organizations in order to carry out their study. They met women of all organizational levels and in all parts of the country. They interviewed 70 pioneers and 223 women of the public service. They undertook 15 case studies, compiled 12,044 questionnaires filled out by public servants and received briefs from departments, public service unions and private organizations. In short, they conducted an exhaustive inquiry into the subject.

Beneath the veneer is the result of this major inquiry. It describes the real place of women in the 1990's federal public service. Consequently, the women's message is clear: barriers to advancement must be broken down, fair and equitable policies must be established, attitudes must change and equality of opportunities must be made available.

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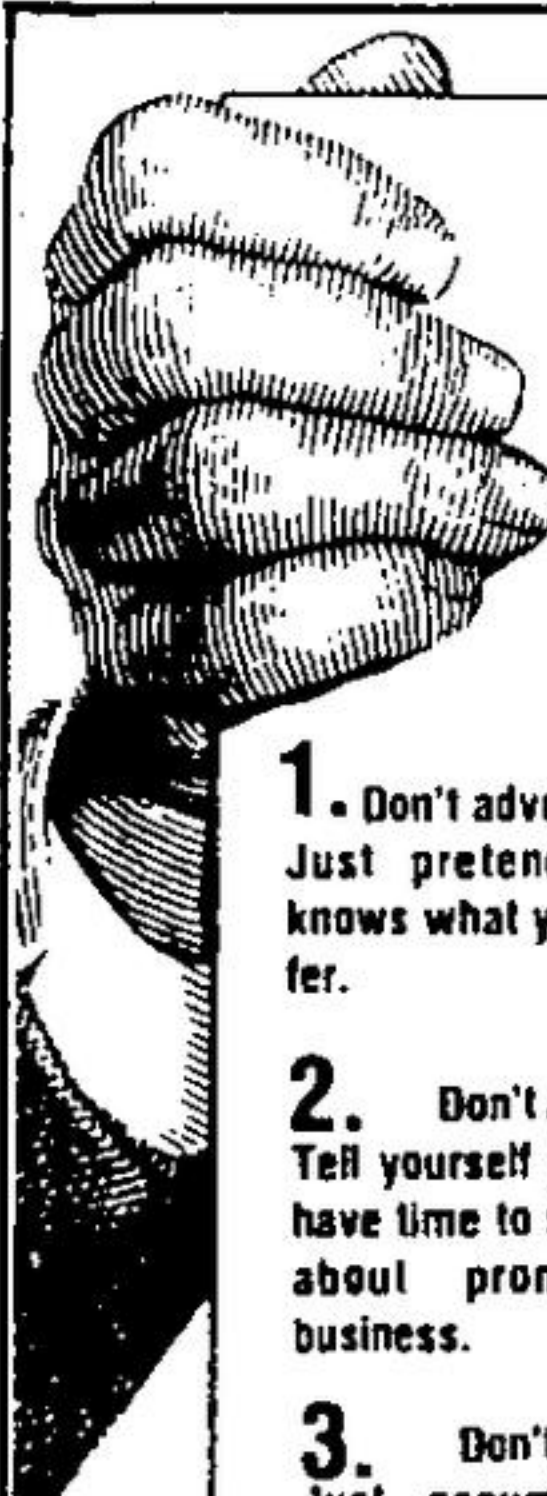
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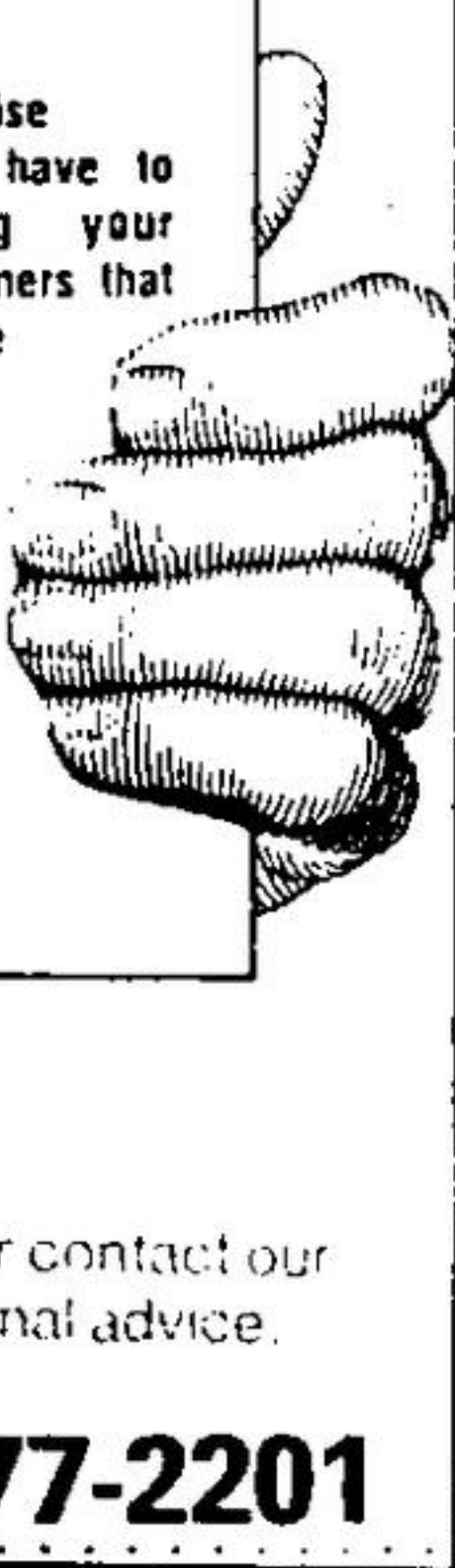
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