



OPINION

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The great Canadian goulash

Recently I was re-reading portions of one of my favourite books, *The Great American Novel* by noted American novelist, Phillip Roth.

It is a book of absolute genius, at once historical, hysterical, inventive and academic, with turns both serious and comic. It re-invents reality.

A novel itself, it tells the story of people searching for, and arguing about the definitive piece of American literature. Eventually the narrator decides to write the work, the Great American Novel, himself.

So while the discussion on the basic defining element of American literary culture might be purely academic, it is still a fascinating thing to think about.

As Canadians we can pose the same question. What is the Great Canadian Novel? I would argue that it is in large part Roth's book. The novel revolves around cultural introspection which is a curiously Canadian trait. The fact that Roth is an American is perhaps the greatest irony.

Roth's novel traces the story of a fictional third major baseball league, the attempts of organized baseball to cover-up the sordid dealings of the league, which operated prior to World War II, and of a communist plot to bring down the American institution of baseball by introducing scandal to this, the weakest of the major leagues.

Of course, as a truly Canadian novel one would have to substitute hockey for baseball, a third major league for a French-only professional league and mingle in a massive cultural introspection as part of the story rather than the underlying cause of the novel. However, is it necessary to be a book about Canada, and be written by a Canadian to be The Great Canadian Novel?

Perhaps Roth's book would be most aptly termed *The Great North American Novel*, due to the subject matter of the book within the book. We could've hit on something like this

REAUME WITH A VIEW

with BRAD REAUME



ourselves but that wouldn't be right. As Canadians we prefer others to comment on us, feeling that only outsiders can have a clear picture of the way we are. Under this definition no Canadian could possibly write the Great Canadian Novel.

So I'm not even going to try. (A huge sigh of relief.) But I might, if I capture the mood correctly, try to write *The Great Hungarian Novel*, because, as a Canadian and as an outsider, I have a particularly good platform from which to comment on all things Hungarian. I also have the conviction that this is right and proper.

"Pass the goulash."

"We don't have any goulash and we don't have any borscht. Beats me why we don't have it anymore."

"It's Stalin. He's been dead for 40 years. That's why we don't have borscht."

"But what about goulash?"

This is a section of my work in progress, *Waiting For Duck Soup* about several generations of Hungarian gypsies, related to Samuel Beckett, who live and die during the swirling political maelstrom of 20th century Europe, a time of romance, a time of danger, a time of one-liners.

It is perhaps the perfect expression of all things not Canadian, as seen by a lonely band of Hungarians, which, except for the obvious and intentionally unintended Canadian point-of-view, impossible to run out of the blood of the author, makes it a definitive piece of Canadian expression.



Teens don't turn bad overnight

There is a serious problem in our high schools. A growing number of kids are defiant and abusive to adults and authority figures; they lie, cheat and steal as easily and automatically as breathing; and some are getting involved in gangs or cults.

And it's going to get worse. Demographics suggest more and more of the baby boomer children will be hitting the high schools over the next 5-10 years.

Being a school psychologist, parents and teachers want me to fix them, as if I have some magic potion to apply. They want me to find out why he feels such rage, why he needs to feel superior, why he's so mean and taken with violent, gory fantasies, as if understanding him (or caring) will make him a different person. It rarely will.

The fact is, this kind of behaviour doesn't start overnight, it builds over many years. The notion that psychologists or anyone else can in a couple of hours per week compete with years of learning from, a peer group of skinheads he sees six hours a day, an unhappy family situation that has long ago lost control, is unrealistic.

Sometimes we have some success. It's usually when the child is crying out for help — wants to have (new) friends or to stop the fights with his parents. But we can't be fooled



PSYCHOLOGY IN THE '90s

with DR. ARNOLD RINCOVER

by these few successes. It's the exception rather than the rule. Most of these children don't want help, and don't think they need any — they're not motivated to change and they're not receptive to our suggestions. Talking with them for a few hours each week is not usually effective.

Intervention must include the parents. These children are usually lacking in morals, and that must start in the home. This is not to blame the parents, rather it is to focus on where intervention must start.

I've met many parents, who really love their child and are devastated by what's happening. Sharon was divorced for six years, holding down a job during the day, and could never afford any babysitters or nannies, so the child has come home from school unsupervised since he was eight.

When Sharon got home from work, she was busy making dinner, paying the bills, doing the shopping, and laundry and a million other things, and simply didn't have much time for the child (or his school). Her son has been in constant trouble at school, and now he's getting in trouble with the police. She breaks down in tears every time she talks about it. She feels she has sacrificed so much, and still she has failed.

In some families, dad travels a lot and the whole load falls on mom, who also works and has three children to take care of. Sometimes there's a "blended" family, and mom doesn't feel the other children are hers, or dad doesn't spend much time with mom's children. Sometimes the child has a psychiatric disorder, and it has nothing to do with the parents.

Sometimes, the parents don't seem to care. They spend little time with the children, refuse to follow through on any suggestions and just want to hand the problem over to the schools or a therapist. Even worse, they may deny the problem ("Boys will be boys", "all kids steal a little at this age" or "He never does that at home"), or just hope they'll grow out of it. The future for these children is very bleak.

What can we do? Next week I'll talk about two general strategies. First is prevention, because we know who these children are in elementary school. The second involves a coordinated approach from parents, schools and community agencies, for children who are already teenagers.

Newest family member gets an agreeable name

What's in a name? It prompted a great deal of discussion the other night at the cottage when we had to unanimously agree on a name for the new member of our family.

After the disappearance of Panky the cat in June, hubby took it into his head that having only one cat, Purr-Puss, wasn't enough. So on the first day of his three-week summer vacation, he dropped by the Humane Society and came home with a short-haired, beige male kitten.

At first, the terrified furry ball could barely comprehend the huge human monsters that descended on him with hands outstretched. He adapted quickly enough, though, to the new, albeit boisterous, surroundings.

"How did you choose this one?" I asked hubby.

"He reached out his paw and grabbed me," he replied. I had visions of all the other animals caged and alone — waiting for some miraculous rescue.

It was hubby's idea that we should all agree on the kitten's name. Talk about unrealistic expectations from his family that rarely agrees on anything.

You'd think we were considering naming the heir to the throne. I was concerned that a name



ON THE HOMEFRONT

with ESTHER CALDWELL

we thought appropriate for a kitten might end up being totally unsuitable for a grown-up cat. Some of the meanest cats I've ever met had cutesy names like Fluffy and Boots.

"How about Sandy?" asked hubby.

"No way," I said, "Our friend Sandy wouldn't be impressed. How would it sound if we called out for the cat while she was visiting — here, Sandy, Sandy, Sandy."

I came up with Oscar. No reason, really. Just an easy male name. That didn't meet with everyone's approval.

"How about Panky?" asked the six-year-old. We nixed that one quickly. We had retired that name in memory of our previous pet.

Some of our earlier cats bore cat names, you know, Chatte (French for female cat) and P.C. (Pussycat). I tried Gatto (Italian for size but

the others opposed it. Felix and Cat weren't too popular either.

Then I came up with what I thought was the best idea of all. We would name him D.S.H. Wouldn't that confuse the vet's records if we had a cat called D.S.H. Caldwell who also happened to be a D.S.H. (domestic short-haired) cat?

Then we began to get very silly.

"Why don't we call him Pig?" asked hubby.

"Why not Car?" I countered. "Boy, wouldn't that confuse the neighbours if we stood out in our front yard and called, 'Here, Car, Car, Car.' They would think we had gone stark raving bonkers expecting our vehicle to come rushing up to us."

Oh yes, Shoe came up in the conversation too. And so did Dog and Meow. The teenager thought Ivan or Igor might fit but the two younger kids had difficulty remembering how to pronounce them for some reason.

Finally, after all our agonizing, we agreed on Maximilian — Max for short. Our newly named kitten didn't feel a thing as we looked over at him curled up asleep in the armchair, wrapped in his security blanket. Whether Max lives up to that name or not, we'll just have to wait to see.