EAST LOOKS WEST AND SOUTH

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Opening Remarks:

It will be apparent as I read this prepared paper that it was written on the basis of some assumptions that I had expected would be generally held here. I'm not so sure now that they are generally held, and I'd like to explain them before l begin. The main one is that it is both necessary and possible to do something – almost certainly something financial – to help Canadian publishing, and that the whole question is what sort of thing. Since in talking to a number of people here, and in listening to the previous papers, it seems to me some attempt is being made to turn the clock back three or four years, to a time before the necessity to help publishing became apparent, it might be useful to summarize the most important reasons why public assistance in some form to the publishing industry is obviously necessary.

The resources can perhaps best be stated like this. Suppose Canada, as a nation, spoke Canadian and not English (I'm leaving French out of consideration for a moment – partly because France doesn't pose much of a cultural and economic threat to Canada). If we did, we would automatically be isolated from the competition of the alien culture below the border. We would develop our own literature, based on a different situation and so, therefore, not directly comparable with that of the U.S. We would not need continually to compete with the U.S. on terms they set. We would not need CRTC quotas on Canadian content on the air, and we would not need to call for quotas on Canadian content on our paperback racks and newsstands (a policy, I should make clear, that I would be strongly in favour of).

But that, of course, is visionary. We do, most of us, speak English and so our culture tends to be absorbed and destroyed by the culture of a nation ten times as big and many more times as wealthy. If it isn't clear why this competition is an unfair one, think of it this way. If ten buffaloes and a beaver voted on the qualities most desirable in an animal, how do you suppose wide, flat tails would rank? One other point before I go on to my prepared paper. It is often argued that government subsidies are, first, an unnatural interference and, second, don't work. Well, first, governments are, finally, the executive arms of society. If we wish to legislate inoculations against smallpox, we can – why not against the diseases that infest our culture? And, second, such measures can be effective, as the existence of such entities as the CBC, the National Film Board, and the Canadian Film Distribution Corporation prove – and as the success of the CRTC quota, I think, also proved.

The paper:

It seems to me that a good way to begin would be to tell you why it is that an English professor whose connections with the publishing industry are as tenuous as mine thinks he has anything to say that might be of value to a gathering like this. In order to do that, let me describe to you exactly what my experience in publishing is – other than the fact that I am an inveterate consumer of published material. In the summer of 1969 I became involved in the inception of a magazine which ultimately came to be known as *The Mysterious East.* Over the period of the next three years, I found myself occupying various positions in a publishing company – the Rubber Duck Press – and performing various functions in connection with the publication of journalism. Some of these functions were jobs that I hadn't even known existed before I became involved in *The Mysterious East*. And some of them were the kinds of jobs that, had I known they existed, would have kept me out of the whole thing altogether. One of

those, incidentally, was selling advertising, and one of the worst things about selling advertising was dealing with publishers.

By and large, publishers – as you probably already know – don't answer their mail. They have also, just last week, committed their advertising budget for the next decade. And most of all they know that there is no point in advertising their books in the Maritimes because nobody buys books here. On the other hand, they tend to be (theoretically, of course) very enthusiastic about the idea of starting a new magazine as a medium for advertising books.

At any rate, over the course of the next three years all of us involved in *The Mysterious East* – were to learn a lot. Mostly, we learned things about the practice of journalism and the importance of a certain kind of journalism; we learned things about the economics of publishing and the mechanics of survival; we learned things about the limits on what people will do without some clear economic reward. All of these things seem to me to have a bearing on the problem of the present state of publishing in Canada – especially Eastern Canada – and the reasons why we might be concerned about its future.

Let me explain what some of those things we learned are. I should warn you that many of them are no doubt commonplace among people professionally engaged in the publishing industry. I intend to mention them anyway because I think the way we learned them, and the context we learned them in, may shed some new light on the problems we're all concerned with.

One of the things we learned through putting out the magazine – one of the things I in particular had to learn – was how important research journalism can be. It's important not only to the political and economic climate – we all know that – but to the culture itself. The kind of journalism which reaches out and stirs up an issue which otherwise would be totally ignored, and does something about it, is far more important than I would have imagined, and it is important for a reason I wouldn't have thought of. Of course it’s important because it solves specific problems, casts light on specific areas, moves governments and institutions in certain directions. That seems to me self-evident and obvious; even someone as dumb about journalism as I was when we began the magazine knows that. What I think I've discovered is that journalism is also important – perhaps more important – because it sets a tone, creates a precedent, leads people to think in certain directions. The journalist himself becomes proof that it is possible to sort through the tangled jungle of a corporate structure, or trace the course of a decision through the uncharted wastes of a government bureaucracy, or figure out what a proposed law really says. Given the right kind of journalism, people can be helped to see that problems can be made into issues, that it is I possible to reach out, grab your environment, and change it in important ways.

Someone – I think it was New Brunswick Senator Charles McEIman-- said during the Davey Committee hearings on the mass media that the real power of the press lies in its power to decide what will become a public issue. I think that's precisely accurate, and I think that the primary virtue of really good journalism is that it demonstrates that it's possible for one man to take what has been merely a problem and make it into an issue. Once people get used to the idea that governments, social agencies, fish plant managers and pulp mill owners might be responsible to somebody, perhaps even the people themselves, there's no telling where it'll all stop Without journalism of the kind I'm talking about, society is subject to the manipulation of anybody who can control the media just enough to prevent problems from becoming issues – and such control is not hard to establish and exercise, as the Irving domination of public information in New Brunswick in the fifties and sixties shows. But even more important than the possibility of manipulating society for financial advantage – after all, that's only money – is the effect on society of the widespread feeling that nothing can be done, that nothing can even be understood. Such a situation leads not only to political and social apathy but to bad literature,

bad art, bad music and bad coffee. Perhaps I should stop here and define the kind of writing I'm talking about, because a lot depends on my contention that it is an important form of writing, that it is at least as important in maintaining our culture and helping it to grow and develop and survive as novels and poems and plays and pop music are, and my belief that it is a form of writing that is not only ignored, but actively discouraged by the present economic situation of the Canadian publishing industry. First, then, let me explain what I'm not talking about. I'm not talking about reportage, in the sense of newspaper and newsmagazine reporting. And I'm not talking about the sort of popular history that Pierre Berton specializes in. Nor am I necessarily talking about the sort of autobiographical extravaganza practices by people like Tom Wolfe or Norman Mailer, or the journalistic novel – or novelistic journalism – of Brian Moore and Truman Capote.

What I am talking about is the sort of article or book based on long, hard, original research and written in terms that even I can understand, that can discover a problem and make it into an issue in one motion. I'm talking about the kind of book that takes a year or more to research and wears that research so easily that you'd never notice it until you started trying to practice that kind of writing yourself. I'm talking about books like Richard Harris' *Decision*, the account of Richard Nixon's attempt to pack the U.S. Supreme Court with strict constructionist mediocrities. I'm talking about Ian Adams' *The Poverty Wal*l, Frances Fitzgerald's *Fire in the Lake*, Alfred McCoy's *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*. And I'm talking about a form of writing coming out of a tradition running as far back as Daniel Defoe and Jonathan Swift, a tradition that includes Mark Twain and George Orwell, James Agee and Edmund Wilson.

We learned a lot about that kind of journalism over the three years following the beginning of *The Mysterious East*. One thing we learned is that such journalism is time-consuming and soul-draining, takes five times as much research as you would ever expect it to, and depends for its effect on not letting anybody see how much work it is. The research I did myself for a short article on the Digby, Nova Scotia, school system far exceeded what I would usually put forth for a scholarly article. The book Bob Campbell and I have written on the Irving business empire took as much research skill, time and sweat and agony as my Ph.D. dissertation on seventeenth-century drama. I would suggest, in fact, that although good research journalism may require a lower order of talent than being a good novelist, that it requires a far higher investment of time and energy. It is much harder to do good research journalism in your spare time than it is to write a novel – that's assuming, of course, that you have the level of native ability required to do either. I don't, incidentally, mean to argue that because it takes more time and energy to write it that research journalism is more important than fiction; I only mean to suggest something about the conditions under which such writing can be produced.

Let me go on with my list of things we learned that I think will prove to be relevant to the question of the future of publishing. We learned that the sort of research journalism I'm talking about is a print form. It can't be translated into the electronic media. Its effect is dependent on its being presented in permanent or quasi-permanent form, in a book or a "respectable" – I'll come back to that term in a moment – a "respectable" periodical. It is nonsense – it's trendy nonsense, but it's nonsense all the same – to talk about the electronic media replacing print.

To be sure, there is journalism – good, useful journalism – appearing on television and on radio, especially CBC radio, which is in some ways the last bastion in Canada of committed, contentious, nasty electronic journalism. But the electronic media can't do the sort of thing I'm talking about, for a couple of reasons. One reason that it can't is its transitory nature. I'm sure you have had the experience of trying to tell a friend about the damning interview with the Minister of the Environment you heard at 8:00 in the morning, or the exciting programme on the James Bay project that had been on the evening

before. You can't do it, can you? If it were a book or a magazine article, you could hand it to somebody, read passages from it, keep it around for reference. But – unless you're a lot quicker than I usually am with a tape recorder – once that radio or television programme is over, it's over. Its impact is immediate. It can't possibly snowball over an extended period of time, the way Ralph Nader's *Unsafe at Any Speed* did.

Another reason that the electronic media can't handle the sort of journalism that l'm talking about is that they are temporal media and thus can't be organized in very complicated ways or deal with really complicated subjects. Also, they simply haven't the time to be as long-winded as an article or book writer can be. In an hour's worth of television time, there is room - presuming someone is talking every minute - for about forty pages of prose. That's not much room for developing the kind of case that the usual research journalism project requires.

And the only electronic medium which in fact does present forty pages of prose at a crack operates under the crippling disadvantage that there's nobody listening. It's a sad but true fact that no one listens to the CBC. In Fredericton, for instance, the local CBC outlet does very well for a CBC station. At ten minutes to eight in the morning it commands a towering twenty-five percent of the listening audience. The competition that so thoroughly dominates the market? One private country-and-western, soft-core-top-forty-pop station. In other cities, where the competition is a bit stiffer, I'm told that the percentage of people listening to the exciting journalism being broadcast on CBC radio is so low as to defy measurement. If you want to change things in Canada, you don't count on using CBC radio as your main instrument.

Let me return for a moment to the question of print format. Everyone knows, I suspect, what happens when you present an article in an underground newspaper printed by offset from a master made on a typewriter, with primitive graphics and a layout that looks as though it were designed by an orangutan trained to use a ruler. You can make Edmund Wilson look like a sloppy sensationalist simply by presenting him in such a format. In an obvious case like that, we're immediately aware of the tremendous effect format and presentation can have on what's being presented. The medium clearly obliterates the message. But I think we tend to forget that *any* presentation has an equally powerful effect. We don't often notice, for instance, that it is almost impossible to present journalism in a newspaper format. Surely, some newspapers do try – the *Globe and Mail*, for instance. But the demands of the narrow column, the context of hard news and advertisements, and the clear message that whatever may be included in the paper is for today only and will be replaced tomorrow – all these things militate against any possibility that your story, representing six months' research into the working conditions of fruit pickers in the Niagara peninsula, will get the attention it deserves. That this is so, is one of the reasons the *Globe* magazine existed; it is also a reason for lamenting its passing.

What's the conclusion of all this talk about format? Just this: there are really only two places where the kind of writing l'm talking about can be published effectively – in books and in more or less established and certainly conventional-appearing (at least “respectable“) magazines. One immediate and obvious implication óf that is that there are a distinctly limited number of outlets for such writing in Canada. IIII come back to that question later. Another implication concerns the amount of work involved in the publishing of writing in some reasonably acceptable format: That was perhaps the most astonishing lesson I learned from *The Mysterious East*. Just as I had never properly appreciated how much difference layout on the page, type face, and such considerations make, so I had not understood how much sheer hard work such amenities demand. Proofreading, for instance, is well known as an onerous task and I had had some experience with it working on the Melville Project at Northwestern University. But I had never had the experience of correcting typographical errors on a page being prepared for

offset, a task which can involve cutting individual letters out on squares of paper measuring perhaps one-thirty-second by one-sixteenth of an inch and gluing them in place – properly lined up – in the middle of a word. Over and over. For hours. Nor had I ever had the experience of watching a not-especially- well-organized article be transformed into a model of clear presentation simply by laying it out on a page properly.

Now *The Mysterious East* was very lucky in finding people who were not only more than competent at that kind of work, but who liked doing it well enough to do it for nothing. But this leads me to explain something else we all learned. It is possible to do research journalism on an amateur basis, and it is possible to do magazine layout and graphic on an amateur basis, and it is even possible to sell advertising on an amateur basis. I suppose it's even possible to publish books on an amateur basis as various people across the country have done and are doing now.

But it is only possible to do these things on an amateur basis for a limited amount of time. Eventually, other things – very often things you're doing to earn a living – come to take precedence. For a couple of years, an enterprise like *The Mysterious East* – can exist on an amateur basis, with people working for no other motive than the love of the job itself and the perhaps partly altruistic motive of wanting to make a difference to society. But in the long run, such enterprises must either become professional or be abandoned. (By the way, I'm using the amateur- professional opposition here with reference not to *quality*, but only to *motive*. Amateurs do it for the love of it; professionals do it for money. Either may do it badly or excellently.)

Over the long pull, then, it's established publishers who are going to have to publish the sort of journalism I'm most interested in, the sort that I think is at least as important as any other kind of writing you can name. And that brings us back to the publishing industry. People are concerned about domination by American conglomerates and American competition, and they're concerned about whether a healthy publishing industry is possible in a country of twenty million people strung out along a belt two hundred miles wide and four thousand miles long. This concern seems to me to be well placed, but I think we have to be clear about the kind of concern it is. It's not, or at any rate it shouldn't be, a concern based on the fact that publishing is an industry and therefore part of an economy. It's rather a concern based on the fact that publishing is concerned with print, literature, and ideas and is therefore part of our culture. There are undoubtedly people in the government who see bailing out McClelland and Stewart as saving an industry and a lot of jobs and economic activity. I don't. I see it as saving a crucial organ – maybe not the heart, but certainly something more important than the spleen – of Canada's cultural organism. Robin Matthews did once say – and he's right – that “you can't lose the economy and keep the culture.” But we have to remember which is means and which is end: we’re mainly concerned with the culture.

Given, then, that what we're saving is worth saving because it's a crucial part of our culture, we have to be concerned about the effects of the methods we use to save it. Pickling the organ in alcohol is not going to be enough; it has to be alive. Curtailing certain functions will not maintain a healthy organism. And it's my contention that the way things are right now, and the way they look to be in the future, a most important function of this organ in our culture life is being eliminated.

I'm teaching a course this term in the kind of journalism I'm talking about. Now a couple of weeks ago I sat down to compile a list of books to suggest to students for term papers. As usual, my intention was to include if possible a majority of Canadian work – if not, at least a sizable minority. Ultimately I produced a list of twenty-five or thirty books, of which only two were Canadian. That seemed shocking to me, and it started me thinking. I at first supposed it possible that the lack of Canadian material was

due entirely to my own ignorance. Now I don't want to underestimate my own ignorance but I suspect that can't be entirely true. Moreover, even if it is true, the fact that there are lots of exciting Canadian research journalism books out there, but someone as interested in the field as I am doesn't know about them, would be pretty significant fact.

In any case, to assure myself that the problem wasn't simply my ignorance, I asked a number of colleagues to suggest books. I did find that I had missed a couple of obvious choices, like Walter Stewart's *Shrug*; but by and large I'm convinced that my first impression, that not much such writing is being done in Canada, was correct. Think about it for a minute: how many books of journalism published in the last couple of years in Canada have had the sort of impact on our society that Richard Harris' book on the Nixon Administration's attempt to pack the U.S. Supreme Court with mediocrities had there? Who here has come even remotely close to producing something with the impact of Nader's *Unsafe at Any Speed*? I think there have not been many such books, and I have an idea why. And I don't think it's because there's no material for such books buried away in the back corners of North America's attic. I think it's because the present situation in Canada poses special and perhaps insuperable obstacles to the practice of research journalism as I have outlined it.

One of these obstacles is the fact that in Canada it is, by and large, impossible for a serious research journalist to make a living from his profession. (I admit that it's probably impossible for a novelist, too, and almost certainly impossible for a poet or a playwright. But, on the other hand, it's also a lot easier to practice such professions on an amateur and part-time basis.) And, for reasons I'll come to in a moment but which you can probably already guess, it's especially impossible if you're a political or social journalist who is likely to produce work that is controversial.

In a country with a reading public five or ten times the size of Canada's, and a healthy, stable publishing industry, writers are able to find ways to support themselves while working on a project, and live on royalties or magazine payments afterward. Richard Harris, for instance, was supported by the *New Yorker* magazine, in which his work on the Supreme Court nominations was first published, while he did the research for it. I suggest to you that there is presently no magazine in Canada prepared to underwrite a project like that. I also submit that there are only two magazines prepared to pay a considerable amount for *any* article in the field of research journalism, and that there is no way for a serious research journalist to survive on the level of payment they offer, even if all the research he undertook panned out – which, of course, it is not likely to do. Let me propose an example of this economic bind. Suppose you're a journalist and you have a hunch that a lot of the people who are making decisions in your provincial department of the environment have backgrounds in, and active connections with, the resource industry. You have to entertain the possibility that you're wrong, that the fruits of your labours will be the gratifying discovery that everything is on the up-and-up in the environment department. In other words, after perhaps three or four months' worth of digging around the Provincial Secretary's office and the Registrar of Deeds' office, the library and the capital building, you have a stack of unsalable biographies of bureaucrats. What that means – and the eventuality you have to plan for – is that the next project is going to have to pay not only for itself but for the months wasted on a wild goose chase.

It's not likely that a writer is going to be eager to try to support himself entirely by writing in such a situation. Consequently, then, he's going to find that other things than research journalism are going to occupy the majority of his time.

For instance, he has the option of holding down another job. If he's lucky it might involve journalism – he might work for a paper or for the CBC. Or he might teach; that allows some free time for research

and writing. But in either case the journalism becomes clearly a sideline – and the sort of journalism I think is important doesn't take easily to being a sideline. The result is that the writer sticks to small, easily researched articles or items that are reactions to news events. He takes to merely dreaming about the book he'll write some day about how Senators are chosen in Ottawa, or the way poverty feels in Kent County, New Brunswick, or the labour movement in Cape Breton.

An interesting reflection at this point is that for writers in other forms – novelists, for instance – the obvious move, at the point where that book begins to gnaw at you, is to try to get a grant to do it. And in Canada getting that grant has usually been made comparatively easy. It's been made so, I suspect, because governments and grant-giving bodies recognize that the size of the Canadian reading public is too small to make any kind of writing an economically viable profession. But consider that writer who wants to do the article on the way Senators are chosen. How likely is his book to be underwritten with public funds? For obvious reasons, it's not likely at all. And for equally obvious reasons, it would be folly for him to accept such money and then do such a book. A writer has another option. He can try to make it as a freelance writer. But the way things are now this option is just as fatal to research journalism as getting a job with the municipal sanitary department. Two things, by and large, seem to happen. One is that the writer becomes a grantsman, parlaying Canada Council grants, special commissions, government consultation jobs, and speaking engagements into a precarious income. He does this at the expense of not only enormous chunks of time, but also at the expense of the sort of security that allows a man to undertake a long-term project.

The other thing that can happen to someone working as a freelance journalist is that he is forced, in order to sell enough work to survive, to produce short-term, easily written pieces that require no research and little thought, but which depend on his ingenuity as a retailer of commonplaces. A writer who finds himself in this bind can easily wind up spending most of every day scrambling out short, easy pieces of hack work. I won't mention any names here because I have a lot of respect for some writers who are in this position, who are forced by circumstances to do work unworthy of them and who often lavish on such work an excess of talent that's so disproportionate that it's embarrassing to contemplate. And of course the long-run danger of this position is that you're likely no forget that you're producing hack-work and start taking it seriously, thinking it's the best you can do.

There are two other courses of action for the beleaguered research journalist. One is to go down the road, to write about American subjects for American magazines and American publishers. After all, the money is there; there is ten times as large a reading public. But of course that doesn't solve the problems of Canadian journalism. It's not after all, very likely that you're going to sell that article on the choosing of Senators to *Harper's*.

The final, desperate course of action is to be Farley Mowat or Pierre Berton. Then all you have to do is write a few best sellers and make yourself financially independent. There are a couple of drawbacks to this, however; it's open only to a limited number of people and that sort of success seems to have as a consequence a reluctance to do the kind of drudgery I'm talking about, particularly in obscure corners.

In any case, what happens is, by and large, that the really important books don't get written because the authors who could do them are prevented from doing so by a system that promotes other forms of literature than journalism, and actively discourages good journalism. It's the same sort of system that produces those perfume-flavoured tomatoes you find in cellophane tubes at the supermarket. Nobody, at first, thinks they're good tomatoes, but they sure are convenient. They pack well, they keep well, they travel well, and they look a little like tomatoes. It's only after years of buying them that we might notice that we've forgotten what real tomatoes were like.

No, I think I'm going to have to conclude that the situation as of now is pretty gloomy. We may get a few books written by selfless, devoted amateurs; we may get a few written by people with axes to grind. But unless something changes fairly radically, we're not going to get many books of the quality we need to keep our culture open and vibrant and our politicians and institutions on their toes.

And the kinds of reactions we have normally come up with over the past few years when confronted with crises in the Canadian publishing industry aren't going to help this problem. There are a number of reasons for this, but one of the most important is that this sort of journalism is heavily dependent not only on a healthy book publishing industry, but a healthy magazine publishing situation. Characteristically, the journalist begins being supported by magazines and ends up being supported by book publishers – who in turn are locked back into magazine publishing because of the practice of pulling sections out of books to be published and putting them in the magazines. And the writer's problem is that it's not only Canadian book publishing that's in trouble in the seventies. The magazines are in bad shape too, and their troubles are harder to make sense of and to cope with.

Some of the problems of the magazines are shared with other magazines all over the world. It's harder, for instance, to finance magazines since the advent of television advertising. Mechanical costs have risen faster than advertising revenue. Distribution is an impossibly cumbersome and complicated and expensive business. These are problems common everywhere; *Life* magazine is only the latest in a series of casualties along the road.

There are probèems that are peculiar to the Canadian magazine, though, and that are aggravated by the sort of context they're operating in. In some ways, these problems are problems that *The Mysterious East* had too. *The Mysterious East* had them in little, because it operated within a region of Canada whose relationship to the rest of Canada is a lot like Canada's relation to the United States. l don't mean that facetiously. When K. C. Irving said that “sometimes Upper Canadians are the worst type of foreigners” he was not only speaking for a large segment of Maritime opinion, he was – characteristically – getting at a real truth from the wrong side.

The Maritimes are, in fact, an area that has traditionally been exploited from outside. Our culture, for instance, is filtered through Ontario – or Quebec – publishers and broadcasters and coordinators. Like a Canadian author who has to go to the States to have his book published in such a way that it will sell enough copies to make him a living, the Maritimes writer has to go to Ontario. Our pop artists have to make it in Ontario before we really believe in them, just as Canada's have always had to make it in the States before Canadians would accept them. Our economy, for another instance, is largely controlled from outside. K. C. Irving is an unusual phenomenon precisely because his capital was locally generated and locally expended and locally controlled. And insofar as our politics are effective, they seem to depend on outside help, both financially and morally. When the New Brunswick government has trouble with its Welfare system, when the Nova Scotia economy falters, we tend immediately to turn to Ottawa for help and guidance.

All these factors were handicaps that *The Mysterious East* laboured under, just as national Canadian publications labour under handicaps imposed by the fact that Canada, too, is dominated from outside. Let me suggest some of the concrete ways this is true. First of all, advertising. All the advertising money that would have been appropriate to *The Mysterious East* was in Toronto or Montreal or New York. There are few businesses that are local that want advertising medium that covers the four Atlantic Provinces; Irving and Atlantic Skidoo are the only two that come to mind. Neither ever advertised in *The Mysterious East*. I understand why the first one didn't; I don't understand why the second didn't.

But the point is that for almost every single dollar of advertising we tried to sell, we had to go to Toronto or Montreal or New York. And, of course, since The mysterious eastern part of Canada is already blanketed by *Time*, *Maclean's*, *Saturday Night*, the *New York Review of Books*, *The New Yorker*, Atlantic, *Harper's*, and so forth, our potential advertisers didn't see any reason to duplicate their efforts locally, particularly since they had us not sitting in their office, but at the end of a long-distance phone or beyond a tenuous and unreliable mail link. Just so, the businesses that might support a myriad of Canadian magazines are already supporting a myriad of American ones, and their advertising budget just happens to have already been committed, thank you. And in any case, aren't there obvious reasons why we should advertise in the Canadian editions of *Time* and the *Reader's* bloody *Digest*? It's by this sort of logic that Canada is reduced to one and a half national magazines.

But there are other problems, problems that *The Mysterious East* also shared. We know from the beginning that advertising revenue was not only hopeless, but probably in the long run dangerous because compromising. We never did approach the Irving Oil company for advertising; looking at the *Atlantic Advocate* was evidence enough for us of the dangers of becoming dependent on local business advertising. But there was a problem inherent in relying, as we did, on reader support. We were in many ways tremendously successful; within a few months, we were supporting a press run of 10,000 copies a month. In an area comprising only 2,000,000 people, that was equivalent to a Canada wide circulation of a hundred thousand. The same proportion of Americans would amount to a million. It had never occurred to us to think of doing better than that.

But that was simply not enough to establish the magazine on a professional basis. There was no way the magazine could pay an editor enough to live on, much less what he might be worth, much less pay an editorial board. There was no way to pay a graphics department what its services might be worth. In other words, having succeeded as far as it could possibly have been expected to succeed, the magazine was still, in economic terms, a marginal enterprise. And so it remained an amateur production. I don't mean to imply that we planned on or hoped for more – we didn't. But even though we were perfectly happy with having the magazine do no more than pay its own bills, the economic situation remains the same. An area with a population of two million is not in a position to support a publication specializing in research journalism on a professional level.

I think Canada as a whole is faced with the same problem. As a purely economic venture, we cannot directly support magazines of the kind that a population of five or ten times as large as ours can. Many people have bemoaned Canada's lack of a national book reviewing journal. They have even blamed part of the publishing crisis on the lack of such a magazine. (Val Cleary's *Books in Canada* is a valiant attempt to remedy this – but, as yet, it's not really national. And in fact, even *The Mysterious East* itself attempted to solve the problem in 1970, by putting out a national book supplement.) But the reason why Canada has no *New York Review of Books*, no *TLS*, not even a *New York Times* book review section, is obvious: one-tenth of the readership of the *New York Review* would not support the *New York Review* – and, given the fact that Canada's population is one-tenth that of the U.S., we can hardly count on much more. Any specialized publication depends on a total potential audience of sufficient size to allow the magazine to select out of it a particular constituency large enough to support the magazine.

So any potential national magazine in Canada has some hard choices to make. It can generalize its appeal so as to appeal to a larger proportion of the potential audience – but, as many people have pointed out, that tends to alienate both fringes of your readership and to vitiate the quality of the magazine. It can depend on other ventures to support the magazines – as, in large measure, *Macleans* does. Or it can be an amateur production, held together by mammoth expenditures of spirit, energy, and

commitment – as, in some measure, *Saturday Night* is. Or it can depend on some organization's support, as most of our other national magazines do – and in that case it had better stay away from the massive underwriting of research journalism. Political subsidies are obviously dangerous. Even the Canada Council will be pretty leery of financing such work – and the prudent journalist would be leery of accepting a Canada Council grant to do a job of research journalism on the government which provides the Canada Council's funds.

In short, any donated funds are likely to compromise an aggressive magazine – if not in fact, in reputation, and that is the same thing. Who steals my purse steals trash – but who fills my purse steals my good name. Look what happened to *Encounter* after it was learned that the CIA had been financing it. Look what happened to the Irving press after people discovered it WAS the Irving press. So, again, innocuous journalism and arts and letters are on an inside track. For obvious reasons, the government, the foundations, the charitable institutions would rather finance the *Journal of Canadian Fiction* than *The Mysterious East*. Indeed, this fact is so obvious a condition of survival in the magazine field, so clear a condition of existence in publishing generally, that we hardly ever think of it. But when you start thinking, as I am doing after having spent three years with *The Mysterious East*, about the importance of research journalism to our culture, it can make you think the whole process through again. And when you do think it through, it's a bit frightening. If you wanted to set up a mechanism to eliminate the whole genre you couldn't do it more neatly. You take the only media in which the genre can effectively appear and you make it impossible for them to support the writers of that genre themselves and also impossible for anybody else to support them. No wonder there are so many potentially exciting journalists writing hack work, working for the government, or otherwise prostituting themselves.

Okay, then what can be done about the situation? Clearly I must think something can be done or I wouldn't have built up to this point.

One thing that clearly cannot be done is to propose, as many people concerned about the publishing crisis in more general terms have proposed, a government agency to distribute low-interest loans, loan guarantees, grants, and other forms of pork-barrel largesse among the populace – particularly the part of the populace engaged in the publishing industry. I can't very well argue that this kind of subsidy is necessarily politically corrupting – after all, my publisher, McClelland and Stewart, has recently been the recipient of just that sort of largesse. But l think I can argue that in the long run, even for a stable organization like a book publisher, such gifts *tend* to corrupt. Could New Press really have published *Shrug* with money acquired through the Trudeau government? Well, maybe. But I submit that no matter how pure you are such a situation makes you consider things when deciding about publishing that have nothing at all to do with the merits of the manuscript. And whatever the facts, people will *think* that you considered such things.

And, of course, such pressures would weigh even more heavily on a magazine. The only categorical statement I have ever heard attributed to the Federal OFY people is that they are never, ever again going to have anything to do with anything that's printed and distributed. That sort of statement suggests a hand-burning incident that involved real fire, it also suggests pretty strongly that, on the one hand, the federal government is not likely to get involved in supporting any man's political or social magazine – and that, on the other hand, any man had better be pretty worried about getting into bed with the federal government in a magazine publishing venture.

But money and government interference clearly can go a long way toward solving such problems. It is largely government interference and public money that provides for Canada to have its own literature

and even its own pop music. This is something you might sneer at only if you're in the spiritually bankrupt position of believing that the only way things can be justified is that they be financially viable. I do not propose to sneer at public subsidization of the arts. What l do propose is government subsidization which does not artificially discriminate against one particular art form. The problem lies in the mechanics by which that can be done, and it is not an easy problem.

Our faith that an answer can be found is based on a number of analogous situations. Look, for instance, at the CBC. Bloated and smug as the CBC may be, it has managed, at least in its radio arms, to escape the pressure of government censorship in individual cases. There are people here in Halifax and in Fredericton working for the CBC who *feel* free to say what they want on the air – and, as far as I can find out, they *are* free. Now maybe they're free because the people in Ottawa know very well that no one's listening and they can't do any damage, but somehow I don't think so. Perhaps, then, some sort of semi-autonomous crown corporation to finance research journalism is the answer?

There's another model that's interesting in this connection. In the Davey Committee report on the Mass Media, there is a model for a press council. One of the aims of such a council – and one that seems to have been largely accomplished by the report's method of setting such a council up – is to keep the press from becoming a political football. They did it in part by their suggested method of composing the Council – which was based on a British model, though they pointed out that at least fifty countries have such councils. Their proposal was that it be composed of a leading jurist as chairman, a majority of members elected by associations representing various publications, and representation of publishers, journalists and editors, along with a number of lay members appointed by the Council as a whole. Now l hold no brief for that particular composition, but its existence seems to me to show that it is in fact possible to insulate such a group from direct political pressure. (In this connection, incidentally, it seems to me we would do well to study the proposals of the Ontario Commission on Book Publishing.)

There's another element of the Davey proposal that seems intriguing to me – the notion that while there would be a national press council, there would also be local and regional bodies, so that local problems would be solved locally. Perhaps, then, what I am suggesting is that a semi-autonomous crown corporation could be set up after the model of a press council, funded over a long term, and given the kinds of powers of disbursement that the Canada Council has?

To be perfectly honest, the only disadvantages l can see in such a scheme are mechanical ones, ones that, it seems to me, can be solved by hiring lawyers. The council has to be free of political pressure and responsible to the public only over the long haul. It has to be composed of people who are competent to judge the merits of projects, writers, magazines and publishers, and it has to be composed in such a way as to represent a broad spectrum of the public and the working journalistic community.

It also must have the power to give interest-free loans to publishers – both book and magazine. It must have the power to give outright grants to publishers, and to support the publication of specific items, much as the Canada Council does now. And, most important, it must have the power to award a grant to an individual journalist to support him while he works on the kind of story that *The New Yorker* supported Richard Harris for.

Our publishing industry is already a hothouse flower – and as I have said, I find that hard to object to, given Canada's climate. What I do object to is that the construction of our hothouse leaves out some important plants. If we believe we should subsidize the Canadian historian, I believe we must decide to support the Canadian journalist as well.

One final note. It may be, I suppose, that there is no way to escape the pressures that I am trying to hedge out here, that there is no way to make grants anything other than an invitation to sell out. It may be that the government, its hands burned by OFY community newspapers and the CYC, will be very careful to attach very strong and visible strings to any money it may want to spread around. If this is so, it seems to me that our book publishing industry is already seriously compromised. And if it is so, I'm prepared to make a different plea. Two years ago, a local political figure offered *The Mysterious East* a consideration to cover a story in a certain way. When the editorial board sat down to figure out precisely what had happened, it turned out that we had been offered the princely sum of thirty-seven dollars and fifty cents for our integrity. For the five of us involved, we figured that came out to seven-fifty apiece.

If the government is going to start handing out tainted money, I'd like, just once, to be made a reasonable offer for my integrity. A genuinely tempting one. Just once.