Jun-2012

Editor's Notebook

Andrew C. Holman

Bridgewater State University, a2holman@bridg.edu

Recommended Citation

Available at: http://vc.bridgew.edu/br_rev/vol31/iss1/4

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.
Editor’s Notebook

Andrew C. Holman

I recently read parts of Canadian writer Hugh Hood’s book *Around the Mountain*, a collection of short stories (love letters, of a sort) set in his adopted hometown, Montreal. Hood originally penned his work in 1967, Canada’s centenary and the year that the city welcomed the world to Expo ’67, a multi-million-dollar production designed to declare how modern the staid and stolid Dominion had become. In 12 monthly tales, Hood created an encyclopedic record of the city to “enshrine an historical moment like the proverbial fly in the amber … to give a kind of fossil-like existence to something that was in the process of being born and simultaneously passing away.” When his publisher decided to reprint the collection in 1994, Hood revisited his stories and was struck both by how much his subject had changed and by how much some things had “remained unmistakably in place.” *Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose.*

In that way, Montreal is like a lot of modern cities, I suppose. So many of its bones have been rebuilt and expanded in the past half century, and, yet, its narrow, its spirit, remains much as it always has been. Last Fall, I had the chance to experience a reckoning of the sort that Hood describes in his book. Seeking a landing place for my sabbatical leave, I accepted a fellowship at the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada. And so my wife, Andrea Doty, and I moved our household to Montreal for four months. For me, it constituted a *retour* of sorts, though nothing like the famous *retours* of Napoleon’s ashes from Saint Helena, for example, or the renowned domestic imposture of French peasant Martin Guerre. Mine was wholly without fanfare (and historical importance). I returned to Montreal as a resident for the first time since I had finished my undergraduate studies there in 1986.

So much had changed; though, for us, much of that transformation probably had to do with perspective. We returned as middle-aged, expatriate, English-speaking tourists to a city that takes its cue from its vibrant youth and that seems to thrive on an edgy energy produced by linguistic duality and rivalry. Since 1977, Quebec has been (officially at least) a unilingual French province, but anglophone Montreal continues to defy that fact. More than ever, perhaps, language is code for two tribes who compete for resources within the city, the ground zero of the language debate in Canada. I didn’t understand that very clearly when I was a student at McGill (and yet it must have been all around me).

For me, so much was also still the same about Montreal (and McGill), both on the surface and below it – the *penchant* for lively chatter in its four daily newspapers and dozens of radio and TV channels, the beautiful profusion of church spires, the appalling “skills” displayed by city motorists, the dazzling array of world cuisine and music, the extraordinary attachment to fashion (even among the city’s most ordinary folk), the confident brilliance of students in a McGill seminar. Perhaps most heartening, though, was this: below the rancor of the public rhetoric about language rights, there remains a palpable desire among most Montrealers to get along, to make it work. This was my experience in the 1980s and again in 2011. Then and now, it was the predominant view in the grocery stores, commuter trains, libraries and archives, restaurants and hockey rinks that we haunted. Even as the Montreal press continues to relate its story-a-week about linguistic discord, our daily reality felt quite the opposite, and there was nowhere we felt unwelcome or strange.

My *retour* to Bridgewater State in Spring 2012 is marked by the great and good fortune of becoming the third holder of the office of Editor of *Bridgewater Review*. It is a tremendous honor and more than a little daunting, especially given the high standards that founding
editor Mike Kryzanek and my predecessor, Bill Levin, set and maintained. In concert with current associate editors Lee Torda and Ellen Scheible, it is my aim to steer this ship along its established tack. So much about Bridgewater Review, our colorful, intellectual magazine that has served us so well for 30 years, will, like Hugh Hood’s Montreal, “remain unmistakably in place.”

And yet, some change is both ineluctable and appropriate. This issue features BR Book Review Editor Charlie Angell’s last contribution to our pages. I wish he wouldn’t retire from BSU, but he insists, and I suppose we all have to respect that, though we will miss his humor and intelligent common sense. As one familiar voice moves on, BR welcomes new voices to its pages and is committed to reflecting the rich variety of scholarly perspectives that now inhabit our campus. We have circulated a Call for Submissions; please consider it a direct and sincere invitation from us to you. Furthermore, we hope to have your opinions and arguments about what you read in Bridgewater Review and, to that end, we will develop a Readers Respond section in our printed magazine and, in future, online. With your help, we will make our modest little faculty magazine as vibrant and interactive as our campus itself. We look forward to hearing from you.

Photograph by Andrea Doty

Andy Holman