

Review Article

Renegade in Archives: Peter C. Newman and the Writing of Canadian Popular History

by LYLE DICK

Company of Adventurers. PETER C. NEWMAN. Markham, Ont.: Viking Books, 1985, xxiii, 413 p. ISBN 0-670-80379-0 \$25.00 cl.

Peter C. Newman, best known for his chronicles of the Canadian corporate establishment, has turned his hand to the history of this country's oldest continuously operating business concern, the Hudson's Bay Company. In this "epic" account Newman focuses on the establishment of the HBC's imperial presence in North America. The imperial theme is indicated in the titles of the book's four parts: "Dreams of Empire," "Assumption of Empire," "Anchoring of Empire," and "March of Empire." Within these sections he has provided a largely anecdotal narrative extending from the company's origins to roughly 1800. Two more books of this "highly unauthorized" history are to follow. The book is already one of the all time best sellers in Canadian historical writing.

In the course of his enterprise Newman has discovered archives. Last fall, when launching *Company of Adventurers* from the deck of the *Nonsuch* replica in Winnipeg, he drew the public's attention to the existence of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives and its value for Canadian historical research. He has underscored the importance of this discovery in the acknowledgements to his book, which impress on the reader the full weight of sixty-eight tons and six-thousand linear feet of HBCA documents — "probably the best-documented institution in the world, next to the Vatican."

Unleashing Newman in the archives was evidently something like turning a kid loose in a candy store. He relates the "exhilarating moment" of reading James Isham's complaint in the 1730s of "how the swarms of mosquitoes 'have visited the plague of Egypt upon us' — and then finding a mosquito carcass, bloated with English blood, squashed right onto the page." (p. xii) And in the foreword, "Each document I examined, even if it was mottled with age, was as new to me as if it had still been exuding the faint smell of fresh ink." (p. x) Since Newman spent very little time in the company archives, and his

endnotes include few references to original documents that were not borrowed from other authors' footnotes, these revelatory pleasures must have been few and far between. Fortunately, the exhilaration of a publisher's advance of \$500,000 and royalties from a fur trade production to be carried by the CBC, BBC, and an American cable network should help compensate for this lack of archival jouissance.

Company of Adventurers raises many important issues of considerable concern to Canadian archivists and historians. These include questions of propriety in the use of archival documents, particularly archival quotations appearing in secondary works, and indeed the proper use of other historians' synthesized material as well. The book's publication also raises questions about the role of "popular history," the genre with which Newman and other popularizers have been associated for many years, and its relationship to archives. Since Newman has himself acknowledged that this genre straddles journalism and fiction,¹ it would also be helpful to specify what literary models have animated his particular vision of history.

In a review article in *Archivaria* 20, David Jones discusses the relative merits of academic and popular history. Contrasting the popular historian's penchant for the sensational and the extraordinary with the academic's eye for the typical and common, Jones sides with the popular approach. He asks rhetorically, "What is the scholar's responsibility to the masses? To what extent should he incorporate the skills and techniques of novelists and raconteurs in his work?" Jones is clearly fed up with the prosaic writings of many academic historians who display "a mulish renunciation of half the techniques and usages of the English language from metaphor to symbolism to exclamation points." Much of Jones's rationale for a more popular — or populist — history is grounded in his observation that the general public has for too long been excluded from its own history. The general reader has been relegated to the sidelines by pedants with styles "as jejeune as the Sahara."²

There is no doubt that historical colour and details, heightened by an approach allowing historical events to be treated through individual people rather than impersonal forces, can go far to enlist the reader's identification with the text. This approach formed the basis of Sir Walter Scott's novels, and the sense of immediacy he evoked was a quality much admired, not only by the public but also the prominent "realist" historians Augustin Thierry and Leopold von Ranke.³ Moreover, as the American historian Hayden White has demonstrated, even conventional historians tend to structure their narratives according to literary conventions, either in the form of emplotment (comedy, romance, tragedy, or satire) or in the application of particular tropes or figures of speech (metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, irony).⁴

However, when evaluating the approaches of historians in literary terms, it must be asked to what degree the chosen form constitutes in itself an interpretation or ideological position. The same question must be asked of the tropes employed, such as metaphor, and even of the individual words used, which often resonate with far more connotative

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- 1 Ab Kent, "Newman Hopes to Stir Nationalism in Students," *The Times Colonist*, Victoria, 27 November 1985.
 - 2 David Jones, "Toward a New Form in the Writing of Canadian History," *Archivaria* 20 (Summer 1985), p. 168.
 - 3 See Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (London, 1962), p. 61; and Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (translated by Timothy Bahti) (Minneapolis, 1982), p. 55.
 - 4 Hayden White, *Metahistory* (Baltimore, 1973).

meaning than is denoted on the surface. It therefore behooves the historical critic to examine texts carefully for plot, tropes, and rhetorical words in order to fully comprehend the meaning of a work.

With Newman's *Company of Adventurers* this debt to literature is particularly great. As will shortly be demonstrated in some detail, the dominant paradigm is pastiche, defined as a literary work created by assembling bits and pieces from other works. Newman's book is an amalgam of several models, most notably the historical romance, burlesque, and the picaresque novel. Moreover, Newman's use of source materials also suggests a kind of pastiche, as he broadly involves the voices of other authors throughout his book.

The selection and use of appropriate source materials is crucial to the outcome of any history, whether popular or academic. Archival research is not always essential to the production of a popularized account but it usually is necessary to the development of new perspectives on a topic, as opposed to treading old turf. Since Newman and his publisher have implied that they are presenting the real inside story of the fur trade with his "totally unauthorized" history,⁵ they understandably feel a need to accommodate heightened public expectations with at least the impression of major new research. Hence, Newman's references to the gross tonnage of HBCA documents and the suggestion of an enormous archival undertaking in his acknowledgements: "My gratitude to the original authors of these documents and their conscientious keepers is beyond measure." (p. xii)

In addition to Newman's own brief sojourn in archives, he hired two research assistants who "mined for me in part" the HBCA and "scouted" the Public Archives of Canada. With such able assistance it is somewhat puzzling to note that only seven of over three hundred endnotes in *Company of Adventurers* cite unpublished documents without also citing a secondary source from which the information was apparently appropriated. In other words, nearly all of Newman's documentary references appear to have been derived second hand. Perhaps his original research is intended for the second volume. Some of the seven direct references also appear to have been borrowed from the other authors, but in these cases, Newman has taken the efficient route of obtaining the archival reference from his counterparts' footnotes and omitting reference to the secondary source altogether. One begins to realize that the book represents very little archival research indeed.

What Newman and company have "mined" are block quotations in the published works of fur trade scholars.⁶ The reproduction of archival quotations without checking the original is not normally practised in Canadian historical scholarship and certainly is unorthodox in fur trade writing as writers have traditionally observed the courtesy of asking the Hudson's Bay Company Archives to check their usage for accuracy. Experienced historians are aware of the pitfalls of taking isolated quotations out of context and then claiming that these excerpts are representative or typical. However, Newman has not merely been content to borrow these archival quotations; he has

5 Peter C. Newman, *Company of Adventurers* (Markham, Ontario, 1985), p. x.

6 The most striking example is Newman's chapter, entitled "The Arctic Fox," on Captain John Rae, in which numerous quotations appear that were earlier presented in J.M. Wordie and R.T. Cyriax's introduction to E.E. Rich and A.M. Johnson, eds., *John Rae's Correspondence with the Hudson's Bay Company on Arctic Exploration, 1844-1855* (London, 1953). Compare the quoted excerpts in Newman, pages 298-99, with the earlier published quotations in *John Rae's Correspondence*, pp. xiv, xvi, xvii, xviii, and xix. They appear in exactly the same sequence in both works.

frequently seen fit to alter their composition to contribute to his own free-flowing narrative. These changes include alterations in capitalization, spelling, verb form, syntax, and even the omission of phrases without ellipsis points to show where there has been an elision.⁷ Moreover he has not flinched from actually inserting his own words into the text of documentary quotations (without identifying punctuation such as square brackets), thus representing these doctored quotes as the original.⁸

Nor are Newman's "borrowings" limited to lifting archival quotations from secondary works. The book includes more than thirty unindented lengthy quotations, some nearly a page long, from the secondary authors' own texts. Much of Newman's text also appears to be a paraphrase of other writers' work, with only a minority of the references acknowledged in his endnotes. While written with a glib confidence, the paraphrases are not always happy transformations. The author's unfamiliarity with the material has often led him into a confused rehash, with a net *loss* of information from that provided in the secondary source. At other times Newman's text is nearly identical to passages in the earlier published works, save for the addition of an adjective or two, or the inversion of a couple of phrases.⁹

7 See, for example, p. 219, lines 4-8 and p. 159, lines 6 and 7. Compare these documentary quotations with their earlier counterparts in Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur Trade Society, 1670-1870* (Winnipeg, 1980), p. 69, and in Michael Payne, "Prince of Wales's Fort: A Social History, 1717-1782," (Ottawa: Parks Canada Manuscript Report No. 371, 1979), p. 56.

8 Compare, for example, in Rich and Johnson, eds., *John Rae's Correspondence*, the Hudson's Bay Record Society's reproduction of a letter from Rae to Archibald Barclay on 1 September 1854 regarding his discovery of the bodies of several crew members of the Franklin expedition: "From the mutilated state of many of the bodies and the contents of the kettles, it is evident that our wretched Countrymen had been driven to the last dread alternative, as a means of sustaining life." (p. 276) Newman evidently thought that this statement lacked sufficient pizzazz; he has inserted "cannibalism" into Rae's quotation: "From the mutilated state of many of the bodies and the contents of the kettles, it is evident that our wretched countrymen had been driven to the last, dread alternative of cannibalism as a means of sustaining life." (p. 311)

9 In addition to the Van Kirk and Payne examples, see Newman's account of disciplinary problems at Moose Factory on pages 163-64 and compare the earlier text of Frits Pannekoek's article "'Corruption' at Moose," *The Beaver*, Outfit 309, No. 4 (Spring 1979), pp. 5-11. Where Pannekoek wrote that factor James Duffield was "pushing the factory servants to anarchy" (p. 9), Newman writes that Duffield "drove the community to anarchy." (p. 163) Pannekoek stated that Duffield carried "a brace of pistols and a stout cane to defend himself" (p. 9), whereas Newman has Duffield "armed with a brace of pistols and a stout cane for self-defence." (p. 163) Writing of Duffield's measures to prevent his men from burning the fort down, Pannekoek stated that "Duffield usually chained trouble-makers to the stove to make sure they would burn before the factory." (p. 10) Newman's version states that Duffield "would lash the most likely troublemaker to the stove so that he would be among the first victims of any conflagration." (p. 164) Regarding a troublemaker's response to Duffield's punishments, Pannekoek wrote:

Then, in another fit of bravado Porto Bello swore to hang himself. Duffield obliged by providing the rope, but Porto Bello complained that the rope was not long enough, whereupon Duffield called all the servants together for the final humiliation of their hero whom he provided with a very long piece of rope indeed. (p. 10)

Newman's account reads:

When a particularly outspoken mutineer with the unlikely name of Porto Bello swore to hang himself unless Duffield relaxed his disciplinary measures, the Factor calmly provided him with a rope and when that produced a meek complaint that it really wasn't long enough, the Factor handed him a longer one. (p. 164)

None of these paraphrases is acknowledged in Newman's endnotes. By limiting his citation of Pannekoek to two documentary quotations Newman gives the impression that he researched the balance of the Moose Factory story, when, in reality, it was probably derived in its entirety from Pannekoek.

A good example of Newman's style of "borrowing" is his treatment of Thanadelthur, the "Slave Woman." Sylvia Van Kirk has previously published two accounts of Thanadelthur's role as guide, interpreter, and peace negotiator for Governor James Knight of York Factory in 1715-16.¹⁰ Newman's narrative follows Van Kirk's so closely that the details and even phraseology are often nearly identical. For example Van Kirk states that Thanadelthur "... stumbled across some tracks which led her to the tent of the Company's goose hunters on Ten Shilling Creek. Knight was immediately impressed with his new informant...."¹¹ Newman's version states that Thanadelthur "... eventually stumbled into a goose hunter's tent at Ten Shilling Creek near York Factory. Knight was impressed with her intelligence...."¹² There are other examples of paraphrases of Van Kirk's narrative and also borrowed documentary quotations from her text. It seems rather unlikely that Newman has derived these quotations independently since he has duplicated Van Kirk's textual interventions such as her ellipsis points and square bracketed insertions in precisely the same locations. Yet, when he has elected to cite a source for documentary references to Thanadelthur, Newman refers directly to the archival document, despite the fact that both the quote and the reference have earlier appeared in Van Kirk's book.

I invite readers to decide for themselves by comparing Newman's account on pages 218-20 with Van Kirk's earlier text in "*Many Tender Ties*," pages 66-71. What is new in the Newman version of the Thanadelthur story is that he has added "black pitch" to Thanadelthur's reported tales of "yellow mettle," thus enabling him to speculate that these were "references to Klondike gold and the Athabaska tar sands." (p. 220) Where Newman derived this alleged statement by Thanadelthur is anybody's guess. But it does make good copy, particularly on the frontispiece that hypes Thanadelthur as "the Slave Woman who whispered the secret of the Klondike a hundred years [*sic*] before the Gold Rush."

Newman's use of Michael Payne's Parks Canada manuscript report "Prince of Wales's Fort: A Social History, 1717-1782," represents an even more extensive example of unacknowledged appropriation. Compare the two passages; first Payne's:

... [Deer] Tongues were considered a delicacy ... The largest, single month's trade at Prince of Wales's Fort mentioned in the journals was that of November 1774 which consisted of 600 made beaver, 9651 pounds of "Deers flesh," a Musk Ox, a small quantity of fat, 800 tongues, and twenty-four hares.¹³

Newman's version is as follows:

... Deer tongues were a particular delicacy ... During the largest single month's business recorded at Prince of Wales's Fort (November 1774), the Indians brought in only six hundred made-beaver, but they also traded 9,651 pounds of deer flesh, eight hundred deer tongues, twenty-four hares and one great shaggy muskox. (p. 158).

Newman might perhaps defend his appropriation on the grounds of using his journalistic expertise to spice up the narrative. He has, after all, added "particular" to modify

10 Van Kirk, "*Many Tender Ties*," pp. 66-71 and "Thanadelthur," *The Beaver* (Spring 1974), pp. 40-45.

11 Van Kirk, "*Many Tender Ties*," p. 66.

12 Newman, *Company of Adventurers*, p. 218.

13 Payne, "Prince of Wales's Fort," p. 50.

“delicacy” and has converted the musk ox to a “great shaggy muskox.” Of course it is equally plausible that it was a small mangy musk ox. We will never know for sure and I am afraid neither will Newman.

Northrop Frye has written that pastiche is sometimes the result of a deliberate plagiarism and at other times the product of inept and confused borrowing.¹⁴ I am inclined to think that Newman’s pastiche is more a case of the latter than the former. By relying heavily on research assistants, Newman perhaps had no clear idea whether the notes presented to him were the product of his employees’ hands, or those of a secondary author’s. This danger is particularly great when the author is a novice historian innocent of both the primary and secondary literature.

As might be expected with a pastiche, Newman’s historical interpretations run to the eclectic. Rarely are they supported by any evidence. In his first chapter, Newman takes a stab at deriving maximum meaning by crediting the Hudson’s Bay Company with the forging of the Canadian nation. He states that the HBC has been responsible for “the implanting of that special mentality within the Canadian psyche, a combination of creative deference and cautiously progressive pragmatism.” (p. 18) Alternatively, Canada is described as “the Company town writ large,” and in the book’s closing peroration, Newman says, “From among the ranks of the Bay men in the next century would spring a dynasty of merchant princes who gave voice and deed to transforming these first awkward stirrings into the world’s largest commercial empire — and, eventually, into a new nationality.” (p. 318)

Such bold claims are not new in the popular history genre, particularly the histories of large corporate enterprises. Pierre Berton made exactly the same claims for the ultimate significance of the CPR, as did Hugh MacLennan in the foreword to the re-issue of Marjorie Campbell’s book on the North West Company. Providing the Canadian public with “The Answer” to questions of its collective identity is a pastime much indulged in by popular writers, with apparently inexhaustible market demand. Depending on the immediate publishing purpose the subject at hand will be invested with global significance — at least until the next book comes along. Invariably our corporate saviours — and their biographers — have been from the metropolis, bringing civilization and progress to the primitives on the periphery.

A similarly naive and immodest interpretation is Newman’s crediting of the HBC with being “...the ultimate example of corporate Darwinism. It has always managed to adapt itself to successive sets of altered circumstances. The Company has weathered 315 years of war, rebellion, ambush, siege, bumbling bureaucracy and coupon-clipping neglect.” (p. 3) While this Whiggish statement hardly proves the point, it does reveal a great deal about Peter Newman, who chooses to frame his remarks in Spencerian terms. In the world of *The Canadian Establishment*, gross book sales are the measure of an author’s worth, both the sign and the proof of a Darwinian selection of the fittest.

Occasionally Newman presents an interesting idea, such as the application of Northrop Frye’s concept of the “garrison mentality” to interpret life within the fur trade posts — but the application is not original. The “garrison” hypothesis was earlier developed by Greg

14 Northrop Frye, Sheridan Baker, and George Perkins, *The Harper Handbook to Literature* (New York, 1985), p. 339.

Thomas and Ian Clarke in an article in *Prairie Forum*.¹⁵ Typically, Newman has omitted any reference to Thomas and Clarke, but has rather cited Frye directly, thus giving the impression that he originated the idea. The strategy has evidently worked. For this and other appropriated ideas, *The Globe and Mail*'s William French has credited Newman with deep psychological insight.¹⁶

Perhaps the dominant idea permeating both the form and content of the book is the concept of heroism. As a nationalist Newman believes that we need home-bred heroes. As he has said, "We don't have to defer to outside powers. We are celebrating heroes in these books. Let's stop putting ourselves down."¹⁷ In view of his much-touted patriotism, it is a curious anomaly that virtually all of Newman's heroes are British outsiders or interlopers, from Prince Rupert to Samuel Hearne and John Rae. Surprisingly, few critics have commented on Newman's emphasis on heroes. More than 250 years ago Giambattista Vico identified such an approach as indicative of an aristocratic world view, emphasizing divine descent, separating the great men from their ordinary counterparts.¹⁸

The only exceptions to the general pattern of white male Anglo-Saxon heroism are the Indians Thanadelthur and Matonabee. Yet both Indians are chosen precisely because their exploits are considered to have been of great assistance to the white European heroes James Knight and Samuel Hearne. These two natives are prototypical representatives of the long-standing theme of the Noble Savage in North American historiography. In an important essay Hayden White has interpreted the popular view of natives as incorporating a dialectic of two opposing concepts: the Wild Man and the Noble Savage.¹⁹ The Wild Man theme expresses a deep psychological desire for untrammelled freedom with a transference or projection on the subjects of such freedom, in this case, the North American Indian. Yet this image is normally accompanied by a contradictory image of punishment attending the free vent of the libido or other unrepressed passions. This myth has been developed as a counterpoint to the Noble Savage, the image of "man in a natural state of Edenic Utopia." As White has shown, the image is borne of an identification of the natives with natural objects, as dehumanized commodities, to be used or consumed as their conquerors wished.

With Peter C. Newman these myths of Noble Savage and the Wild Man are reproduced with great clarity. Indeed, the former theme is announced in the title of the chapter devoted to natives, "A Savage Commerce." Yet here the innocuous image of the Noble Savage turns nasty as we are presented with several lurid accounts of native barbarism. First there is a charming account of the starving Indian who eats his wife and six children but is so moved when eating his favourite child, that "he had not the strength to break the bones to suck the marrow." (p. 184) Next, sexual license is developed in an extensive quote from Alexander Henry the Younger about a Mandan orgy. (p. 203) And later in the text, Hearne's story about the Copper Indians' massacre of the Inuit at the Coppermine

15 Greg Thomas and Ian Clarke, "The Garrison Mentality and the Canadian West, The British-Canadian Response to Two Landscapes: The Fur Trade Post and the Ontarian Prairie Homestead," *Prairie Forum* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1979), pp. 83-104.

16 William French, "Of Profits, Beavers and a Lasting Legacy," *The Globe and Mail*, 17 October 1985, p. A 11.

17 Ab Kent, "Newman Hopes to Stir Nationalism in Students," *The Times Colonist*, Victoria, 27 November 1985.

18 Hayden White, "The Tropics of History: The Deep Structure of the *New Science*" in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore and London, 1978), p. 211.

19 Hayden White, "The Noble Savage Theme as Fetish" in *Tropics of Discourse*, pp. 183-96.

is related in blood-curdling detail. (pp. 264-65) No matter that Newman has highlighted some of the most sensational anecdotes about native people, with little or no reference to their normal practices and cultural contexts. These tabloid-cover images of the Wild Man perhaps inevitably flow from the journalist's "desire to make sense for himself of the tantalizing moments that gave the history of the HBC its meaning and of the beguiling individuals who gave it excitement." (p. xi)

Accompanying these stories of the Wild Man, which are clearly intended to shock and fascinate, are the images of the Noble Savage as objects of desire and consumption. The reader is presented with an account of "tawny-skinned women willing and proud to express their uninhibited sexuality," and in the book's most controversial passage, "The lure of these 'bits of brown' or 'smoked bacon' — as the women were then crudely called — demurely asking some lonely fur trader to dry his breeches in front of their tepee fire must have been difficult to resist." (p. 205) These prurient passages are intended to appeal to the collective fantasy of white male heterosexual readers for unrestricted consumption of beautiful, available native women, a fantasy that compensates for the lack of such opportunities in reality. Yet even marriages between natives and whites are here debased with the tawdry and malicious comment that these unions provided the HBC traders with "cheap scalp insurance." (p. 202) Hence we have the most recent example of the long-standing tradition of fetishizing natives "by viewing them simultaneously as monstrous forms of humanity and as quintessential objects of desire." As Hayden White has shown, this ambivalent conception explains the alternating "impulse to exterminate and to redeem" native peoples.²⁰

Paradoxically when graphic accounts of Noble Savagery are not required to spice up Newman's narrative, the natives evaporate into apparitions. He describes the Indians as "the ghosts of Canadian history" and as "an offstage Greek chorus supplying an endless abundance of furs." (p. 183) It would be helpful to try to concretize these incorporeal metaphors. In classical Greek drama the chorus serves to comment on the action or antagonists but in this book they are without voice. The chorus also traditionally represents the views of objective bystanders, expressing profound reflection, compassion, and the highest morality of the community. But as we have shown, for Peter Newman the natives assume no such prominent or responsible role. If they are not involved in the most extravagant scenes of cannibalism, violence, or sexual excess Newman's "Greek chorus" quite literally disappears from view.

This approach is most apparent in the author's concluding account of Doctor John Rae's expedition across the Arctic. Noting the "unusualness of Europeans being self-sufficient in the Arctic," he asserts that "Rae's feat was not paralleled during the balance of the nineteenth century." Other explorers and anthropologists "depended for their sustenance on hired Eskimos." Rae's strength lay in "the first use of igloos by any European" and "the first reliance on Arctic peat and reindeer." With these few lines Newman has effectively dismissed thousands of years of Dorset, Thule, and Inuit adaptive ingenuity as of no consequence unless and until their strategies are utilized by European explorers.

In view of the book's unconventional research methodology, unsubstantiated assertions, and often bizarre interpretations, it must be asked whence it derives its vast market appeal. Obviously a well-orchestrated publicity campaign, coupled with Newman's

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

existing reputation as a raconteur par excellence of arcane trivia about the rich and powerful, have contributed significantly to mass sales. But I believe that his success largely stems from his canny assimilation of popular literary forms to establish a close link with his audience.

One of the essential techniques by which this link is solidified is Newman's peopling of his text with representative stock characters that refer to deeply entrenched paradigms in the reader's experience. His method of characterization is to apply as many cardboard clichés as can be squeezed onto the same page. Taking Prince Rupert as an example, we learn in rapid succession that Rupert is "the last of the classic knights errant," a "latter-day Renaissance man," "the dark and handsome prince," "the Bohemian prince," "the handsome young Hotspur," and, my favourite, "An incongruous pastiche of Galahad and Cyrano, the Bohemian prince enlisted his panache in the unpredictable causes of his cousins...." (p. 74) Sad to say, even handsome young princes must lose their looks; by page 101 Rupert has become "the wrinkled, rheumy-eyed prince."

There are numerous other stock characters in the book. Never are these characters fleshed out — that might have required some real research. For example, James II's wife Catherine Sedley is "one of the deadliest blossoms in his bouquet of thistles" and "a lean, ugly sadist," (p. 103) contrasting with Prince Rupert's mistress Margaret Hughes, who is "spirited and beautiful." Where Luke Foxe was "all dash and daring," (p. 37) Sir Stephen Evans "lacked dash and verve." (p. 128) As counterpoint to the Duke of York's "flaccid stewardship" of the HBC, (p. 103) we have Dr. Rae's "virile triumphs." (p. 295) Henry Hudson's crew are "scurvy ridden tars," including a "thug," a "moody troublemaker," a "florid young rogue," and a "dissolute malingerer." (pp. 33-34) *Et cetera.*

The semiologist Umberto Eco, in an analysis of narrative structures in Ian Fleming's James Bond novels, has noted that the use of stock characters "is always dogmatic and intolerant — in short reactionary" since it portrays the world in Manichean terms as a black and white melodrama.²¹ In Newman's book, cardboard characterization extends to stereotypes of whole ethnic and social groups. Arthur Dobbs is a "voluble Irishman," (p. 233) Scots are "tight-lipped" and "sparse of speech but swift in action" (p. 6), and the Danes are "a practical people." (p. 37) The HBC's "hard-bitten Bay men" (p. xi) show "obsessive penny-pinching." (p. 12) "Salty Orcadians" (p. 175) have "natural frugality, adaptability and inbred obedience to authority which made them docile without being servile." (p. 179) The North West Company tripmen are "feisty pedlars." (p. 281) *Et cetera.*

Newman's style suggests an author who is not easily bored with clever words. Indeed, he is fond of repeating them. On page 172 we have a "whimsical derivation," on page 96, a "whimsical theory," and on page 185, a "whimsical example." His use of the word "riposte" is more sophisticated, as it modulates between verb and noun forms. Charles II "riposted," (p. 66) but Prince Rupert responded with a "memorable riposte." (p. 79) Rupert had a "quixotic notion," (p. 77) but Sir Stephen Lake was a "quixotic Governor." (p. 129) These whimsical words do serve a connotative function beyond the denoted meaning. "Riposte" and "quixotic" signify knights and swordplay and evoke nostalgic memories of Dumas's *Three Musketeers* and other swashbuckling epics.

21 Umberto Eco, "Narrative Structures in Fleming," in *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (London, 1979), p. 162.

Among other literary devices, Newman shows a talent for alliteration. He is particularly fond of “p”s. In addition to “pastiche” and “panache” in a sentence on page 74, we have “parsimonious paternalism,” (p. 95) “pettifogging pashas,” (p. 316) Prince Rupert’s “pain under his periwig,” (p. 75) and on page 135, “interlopers were perceived as potential poachers.” The “b”s also command some attention with “brave bowsprits” (p. 23) and “beckoning bay,” (p. 32) The “h”s are not to be overlooked; the *Discovery* is “heeling happily” on page 32. But the prize must go to page 79 where we have “martial magic,” “current compatriots,” “tragic tinge,” and “strategic staple.” Newman’s alternating alliteration, alas, allows altogether too much altiloquence.

Newman is also a master of the anachronistic metaphor. Samuel Hearne is the “eighteenth century’s equivalent of Lawrence of Arabia.” (p. 288) The rivalry between the HBC and the French was “an uneven battle fought with all the passion of a Sicilian vendetta,” (p. 285) while John Rae is “a gargoye on the cathedral of Empire.” (p. 316)

The foregoing discussion of the author’s stock characters, use of metaphor, and connotative aspects of his terminology aids in identifying his larger literary models. As suggested earlier, the most prominent paradigm in Newman’s pastiche is the historical romance. Essentially a popular romance set in the past, this genre emphasizes swordplay and seduction. Since pulp romances make up 45 per cent of paperback sales in the American market, the choice of this literary form is particularly fortuitous for an author anxious to exploit a book’s full market potential, particularly in future paperback editions. Indeed, Newman and Penguin Books have launched a major drive to peddle the book in the huge market of the United States.

The historical romance is by no means an uncommon model in Canadian popular writing, although up to now, these books have been generally classified as historical novels rather than histories. Readers might wish to compare the texts of cover promotional blurbs for Newman’s book and its novelistic counterparts. For example, the cover promotion for the latest installment from Robert E. Wall, author of the multi-volume historical novel *The Canadians*,²² touts “the towering epic of daring men and spirited women challenging a lawless land.” Newman’s frontispiece promotion is virtually interchangeable. “They and many others became Caesars of the wilderness — the men and women who created the Company that became the heart of the nation.” As with Wall (an American expatriate), Newman’s tale emphasizes intrepid Caucasian heroism, adventure, and easy sex with alluring native women on the open frontier.

Northrop Frye has provided a framework for interpreting the romance. Typically this form is an entertainment involving larger than life characters living in a world somewhat removed from reality. With its characteristic search for a golden age, romance exhibits a nostalgic child-like quality. Structurally, popular adventure tales tend to present a sequence of adventures, culminating in a great adventure.²³

So it is with Newman’s *Company of Adventurers*. The author has constructed a world of mythical personalities that does not reflect reality so much as a wish fulfilment of life in an imaginary age. Whether discussing Prince Rupert, Samuel Hearne, or John Rae, the author has presented the reader with larger-than-life heroes to serve as models to be emulated. Each hero participates in a number of dangerous and exciting adventures, and

22 Robert E. Wall, *The Canadians*, Vol. 5, *Inheritors* (Toronto, 1983).

23 Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, 1971), pp. 186-87.

each is described as "handsome." (pp. 73, 285, and 316) That the telling of an adventure story takes precedence over historical logic is well demonstrated by the inclusion of Rae's odyssey of the 1850s in a narrative that was supposed to have closed at the end of the eighteenth century. Yet, having incongruously jumped sixty years into the future to tell the tale of this Great White Explorer, Newman immediately leaps back to the eighteenth century for his peroration. This disregard for historical temporality seems quite confusing until one realizes that it is necessary to maintain the form of white heroism and adventure.

The subordinate literary modes in Newman's pastiche may be briefly noted. One model followed for its role in moving the action along at a fast clip is the picaresque novel. Traditionally centring on the adventures of a rogue, this novel form presents the action as a series of exciting episodes in a linear structure. An example of this application is the chapter on Radisson and des Groseilliers in which Radisson undergoes torture by the Mohawks, escapes to Albany, ventures to the Lake Superior country with des Groseilliers, returns with a large cargo of furs, enlists the backing of Boston merchants, sets sail for England, is highjacked by Dutch privateers, is set ashore in Spain, and turns up in plague-ridden London in 1665. All of these events may have occurred, but they have been compressed into a dizzying pace of non-stop action.

A suitable companion of the picaresque novel is the paradigm of burlesque. Frye has defined burlesque as "a ridicule ... treating the lofty in low style and absurd episode, or the low in grandiose style." A good example of this application to lofty characters is the portrayal of King James II as "a stiff and stubborn bigot with popping eyes and a tongue too large for his mouth, so that he could hardly drink a glass of wine or water without slobbering all over himself, gulping the liquid down as if he were eating it." (pp. 102-3) James is presented as so "obsessed with the sanctity of the monarchy" that even when alone with his brother Charles he "would spring respectfully to attention whenever affairs of state were being discussed." Charles II, for his part, "balanced his roles as a debauched playboy and as an enlightened statesman." (p. 65) Such gossipy anecdotes about monarchs, even if true, appeal to the average reader's wish to see the upper classes exposed, in all their human frailty. *People* magazine and the television serial "Dallas" fill similar roles in popular culture.

There are, then, a number of operative literary models that provide the book's rhetorical structure. Yet to appreciate more fully the basis for its enormous popular appeal, I believe we are obliged to examine its deeper psychological structures. Both Freud and Jung showed how myth mediates between the unconscious desires of men and the painful awareness that their realization is often unattainable. Through transference the subject invests the myth with the character of a wish fulfilment. This transference operates for both story teller and audience alike. While definitive explanations may be premature, I would tentatively propose that *Company of Adventurers* be read in relation to the basic structures of the folk tale, structures perhaps inculcated in every child's psyche on grandparents' knees as they are read Mother Goose rhymes or Grimm's fairy tales.

Nearly sixty years ago the Russian Formalist critic Vladimir Propp developed a typology of classification for folk tales, based on his analysis of one hundred of them.²⁴ Propp found that these tales comprised two essential components: *roles* that can be filled by various characters and a finite set of *functions* which constitute the plot. He defined a

24 Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folk Tale* (translated by Lawrence Scott) (Austin, 1968).

function as “an act of a *dramatis personae*, which is defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of action of the tale as a whole.” Not all roles and functions will be present in every tale, but every tale will include some functions, and they will always occur in the sequence identified by Propp. For example, most tales will have *dramatis personae* including a hero, a villain, and often a donor, and functions such as the transporting of the hero, a combat between the hero and the villain, punishment of the villain, and so on. A comparison of an outline of the essential functions of Newman’s story with functions fifteen through nineteen in Propp’s *Morphology of the Folk Tale* shows a surprising degree of correspondence:

Propp’s <i>Morphology of the Folktale</i>	Newman’s <i>Company of Adventurers</i>
15. Transference from one place to another (by bird, horse, ship, etc.)	Henry Hudson’s <i>Discovery</i> voyage followed by the sailing of the <i>Nonsuch</i> .
16. Combat between the Hero and the Villain.	The HBC struggles with nature and fights with the French to establish control over Hudson Bay.
17. The Hero is branded or “marked” (usually the branding is a mark on the body, but occasionally it is the gift of a jewel, etc.)	Native women fall over themselves to offer their “tawny skinned” bodies to be “ravished” by the white conquerors.
18. Victory of the Hero, defeat of the Villain.	The “hard-bitten” Bay men conquer climate and geography to march to the Coppermine River, extend HBC dominion over the Arctic, etc.
19. Removal of the misfortune or lack, which had been established in the absence of the Hero.	The HBC establishes its hegemony, vindicates Social Darwinism, brings Indians from the “Stone Age” to the “Iron Age,” civilizes the wilderness, forges a new nationality.

At the heart of Newman’s enterprise, as with other creators of folk tales, is a nostalgic attempt to evoke an imagined past to alleviate a present lack. In an analysis of the burgeoning appearance of pastiche in contemporary culture, Fredric Jameson has shown that this phenomenon represents an attempt to recreate metonymically a sense of the past society associated with the imitated genre.²⁵ Unlike previous revivals which tended to parody earlier forms, these dead forms are now being served up as accurate, hence “true” representations of past reality. Of course, Newman’s *Company of Adventurers* is as much his fantasy about the present (which he imagines to be guided by handsome, virile, omnipotent princes of corporations) as it is his fantasy of the past.

When animated by a true populism, myth can perform the very important role of holding up ideals of behaviour and belief directed toward the attainment of popular objectives such as racial and sexual equality, the liberation of the poor from economic oppression, and so on. Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech falls into this category of myth. The trouble with Newman’s folk tale is that it does not emerge from the

25 Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society” in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend, Washington, 1983), pp. 116-18.

people, nor is it grounded in local research and understanding, nor is it even in basic sympathy with the people whose history it purports to represent. This tale is more in the nature of a graft, a transplant from the great well-spring of heroes, glamour, and individualistic exploits south of the forty-ninth parallel. The tragedy is that Canadian society, lacking almost as much sense of time and place as this Lear jet author, has so readily permitted this colonizing of its own culture.

Newman and his publishers have deftly cashed in on the general public's yearning for a simpler age when it is believed, or at least, earnestly imagined, that men were autonomous agents of their own destinies. Modern readers, whether accountants, nurses, or bank presidents, find themselves hopelessly bored with accelerating bureaucratic control and a mind-numbing imposed conformity in the workplace. They are not really interested in their cultural heritage so much as they want an entertainment "fix." Adventure movies such as *Raiders of the Lost Ark* or *Romancing the Stone* would do as well.

While the Canadian reading public does not have a sophisticated understanding of its own history, it would probably not swallow embellished fairy tales as "true" without a deferential acceptance of the authority of the author. Newman clearly exploits the reader's expectation of definitiveness in presentation. In the foreword he refers to his "objectivity," his "lack of bias," and the need "to illuminate the past, not backlit by hindsight but as it really was." (p. x) Newman's expertise is evinced in his chosen form of narrative voice—the third person omniscient. A common convention among Canadian academic historians, the third person omniscient carries the voice of authority and objectivity. In distancing the narrator from the subject this voice disguises the selection, omission, and manipulation of facts, presenting the facts that are selected as a closed, self-sufficient universe. Peter Newman's fondness for this convention is illustrated by his erudite statement: "Trying to divine the daily lives of the men who endured on the bay during the eighteenth century, the dispassionate observer finds it difficult to escape the conclusion that their main preoccupation was eating and drinking." (p. 154) He supports this authoritative statement with a reference to HBC factors' daily journals documenting the large quantities of food consumed.

In actuality, Newman has probably not examined these journals nor is he a very dispassionate observer. In lifting the grotesque and aberrant examples of food and alcohol consumption from studies by Michael Payne and others (with scant reference to the mitigating data in these reports) Newman has presented a picture of epicurean debauchery rivalling Nero's court. Payne has indicated that gross food consumption figures are misleading since much was likely wasted or traded; the alcohol consumption of ten gallons a year in 1721, when divided by fifty-two weeks, works out to less than two pints a week. Payne also mentions that at Prince of Wales's Fort rates of alcohol purchase by company employees dropped throughout the eighteenth century, a fact curiously at odds with Newman's "dispassionate" observation of a fast growing demand as the century progressed. (p. 162) Nevertheless, Newman conscientiously recognizes the reader's desire for the sensational to have historical certainty and "truth," the rhetorical device of third person omniscience provides such surety.

Having specified the form(ula) of Newman's method, it remains to sum up the ingredients. The following recipe is prescribed for all budding popular history maîtres de cuisine who may require the guidance of a cookbook:

Ragoût d'histoire Newman

Ingredients:

- Sixty-eight tons of photocopies of secondary works
- Extract of archival quotations from above
- One large quantity of stock phrases
- A handful of glib interpretations
- A sprinkling of heroes
- Lurid sequences of lusty white heroes bedding “bits of brown” and native cannibals eating their children
- Dictionary of Alliteration
- Scissors
- Paste

Preparation:

With scissors cut juiciest morsels from photocopies, mix with second-hand archival quotations, and paste. Stir the remaining ingredients together and heat with steamy and swashbuckling adjectives. Combine with the reserved mixture and press into popular adventure mould. Pour over uncritical media glaze and serve before Christmas.

Quantity: Unlimited.

We have presented the basic formula of Peter Newman's genre of popular history, but the reader might reasonably ask what is the alternative. The problem is that there are few competing genres in popular use at this time. Whether written by Newman, Pierre Berton, or others, standard Canadian popular history emphasizes heroes, adventure, the forward march of progress, male domination of nature, male patriarchal domination of women and native people, and the mastery of the metropolis over the hinterland. With few exceptions we have been given a romanticized vision of a mythologized past.

It may be too early to say what form a competing vision in popular history might take, but we can try to identify some features that it might incorporate. A truly popular history might be written from a real immersion in archival and local sources, supplemented by a thorough understanding of secondary works to aid in interpreting the detailed documentary evidence. Such a history might emphasize “little” people (as opposed to the big stars), treating their daily lives as interesting as much in their typicality as in their sensational uniqueness. A truly popular historian of non-European cultures could study their societies through immersion in ethnohistorical analysis to balance the often subjective views presented in Anglo-European sources such as HBC journals. A truly popular historian could use native oral tradition to give voice to his Indian subjects, treating them as worthy participants and witnesses in history, while enabling readers to gain a real understanding of their cultural and economic roles. A truly popular historian might respect his readers enough to help them to challenge some of their existing beliefs and thus avoid the shame that always comes when one has been too easily seduced.