

“The Valour and the Horror” Continued: Do We Still Want Our History on Television?

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Controversies involving the past usually come and go fleetingly. Past misdeeds of public officials or scandalous revelations about prominent personalities do enchant the media and the public, but prolonged attention to the past is rare. Widespread public debate about historical interpretation, moreover, is almost non-existent. Those of us devoting our professional careers to the past often deplore this unfortunate fact, believing that society would be enriched if an understanding and appreciation of the past were higher on the public agenda.

“The Valour and the Horror,” the CBC broadcast of a three-part documentary on selected themes from World War II,¹ has neither come nor gone quietly. Its interpretation of Canadian involvement in World War II has prompted unprecedented public reaction and discussion. The intensity of emotions, and the range of views expressed, have been so profound that no one participating in the discussion has emerged unaffected. Moreover, the political, journalistic and broadcasting implications of this controversy will undoubtedly reverberate throughout Canadian society for a long time to come.

What is happening here? What sense can archivists make of all this furore about understanding the past?

Media critics tended to praise the series warmly² and audiences watched in large numbers.³ The National Film Board has had a constant demand for its rental and viewing. Some 2,200 copies have been sold for home video or school use.⁴ However, veterans and their organizations were profoundly offended and soon mounted a well-organized and successful campaign. Columnists such as Charles Lynch, Peter Worthington, George Bain, Lubor Zink, Claire Hoy, Douglas Fisher and others, many of whom are veterans themselves, took up the campaign against the CBC and the documentary. Dozens of veterans wrote individually to newspapers, to their Member of Parliament, and to the CBC and the NFB, to argue that the series was unfair and inaccurate and denigrated their role in World War II. They deplored the public resources spent on the series, the concurrently published book based on the television series, and the fact that “The Valour and the Horror” was available on video cassette to schools.

Criticisms of the Series

“The Valour and the Horror” assumed that viewers understood why the war was fought and did not recapitulate the evils of German or Japanese aggression. The series examined British and Canadian political and military leadership in the conduct of the war rather than how and why Canada became involved in the war. The series was openly, and unequivocally, critical of that leadership on tactical and moral grounds. The documentary took on the perspective of the ordinary Canadian soldier and airman, through both dramatized sequences and veterans shown on camera reflecting on their wartime experiences. The series was conspicuously ill-disposed towards the military leadership, building a strong case against their incompetence, their misleading the Canadian public and soldiers and the immorality of their decisions. It focused on civilian and prisoner-of-war suffering and deaths caused by Canadians rather than on atrocities on the part of the Japanese and Germans. Many felt that this approach lacked context and balance, and so they were offended by it.

“The Valour and the Horror” displayed the aura and energy of “investigative journalism” turned loose on history with all the wisdom — self-righteousness, some would say — of hindsight. The veterans angry with the series considered such revisionism to be most despicable. They insisted that the evils of Nazi aggression should have been documented, and that such misdeeds justified whatever measures were taken in order to defeat the Germans. The documentary-makers, just as passionately, believed that society should now be asking hard and critical questions of Canada’s World War II experience. Their agenda was candidly expressed: “Let us celebrate the valour. But let us speak the evil and the horror. People will be torn by these two things. But let them know what war is really about. Because without knowing, we’ll fall into it again.”⁵ Many veterans perceived this probing and critical attitude towards World War II, and Brian McKenna’s unmistakable desire to avoid further wars, as implicitly condemning their own involvement in World War II. The veterans protesting the series deeply believed that their personal experience provided a more reliable and higher order of evidence than the research undertaken for “The Valour and the Horror.” They believed that later generations should defer to the insight and experience of those who had themselves been in the war. Brian McKenna, the producer of the series, was not about to default on this, or indeed any other issue, and his vigorous debating style certainly inflamed the controversy.

Countless individual airmen, for example, insisted that their orders had always been to bomb only industrial and military targets in Germany. The evidence that historians or the documentary-makers used to demonstrate that such bombing of German civilians was part of the British grand strategy, albeit an always controversial part, was often discounted. Others argued that the bombing of civilians was justified in order to bring the war to an end; that the Germans had initiated a comparable bombing of British civilians; and that any questioning of the allied bombing was itself unethical. The tactical arguments raised by “The Valour and the Horror” about the actual contribution of such bombing to the war effort were largely ignored.

Historical inaccuracies were abundantly pointed out by veterans and historians, and just as energetically rebutted by the documentary-makers.⁶ Unless one is familiar with military records, however, it is difficult to comment on these debates. To archivists, these debates sound much like the usual arguments about historical interpretation. Certainly one suspects that a parallel scrutiny of most published histories would reveal a

similar range of "inaccuracies" if the same rigour and attention were applied.

The dramatized sequences created for the documentary series provoked the maximum reaction. In particular, the portrayal of notable military figures whom many veterans knew personally elicited negative reaction. Much of this reaction focused on RAF Marshal Sir Arthur ("Bomber") Harris, Commander-in-Chief of Bomber Command, 1942-1945, who remains a controversial figure to this day.⁷ People who knew Harris insisted that the actor portraying him bore no physical resemblance to the Air Marshal. Many viewers did not appreciate the undeniably unkind portrayal of Bomber Harris.

The public money⁸ provided by the CBC and the NFB clearly angered those who did not agree with the interpretation of history offered by this series. If the series had been done by private television, the reaction might well have been less vigorous and less prolonged. Many were angry that public money was spent to research and prepare an interpretation of history that was considered "untruthful" and denigrating. The claim of the series to tell the "truth" about World War II for the first time angered many who did not adhere to this "truth." They insisted that its broadcast by the CBC, without any disclaimer, lent it an authorized status that was unwarranted.

Senate Subcommittee Investigation

The Senate Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs, of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, decided to "investigate" this series amidst growing controversy. The Liberal senators on the Subcommittee refused to participate because they did not consider the regulation of broadcasting to be within their mandate. Even many of those who protested the television series did not support the Senate's investigation.

Nonetheless, the Senate Subcommittee, under the determined chairmanship of Jack Marshall, began its hearings in late June 1992. Marshall himself explained that the purpose of the Senate hearings was to give veterans who felt aggrieved by the television series a chance to be heard. It became clear early on that the senators had no interest in listening to historical arguments and carefully assessing the relative values of various archival records. They had no intention of assembling a balanced cross-section of witnesses. The CBC formally protested, stating, "We believe it will be difficult for fair-minded people to take any notice of findings arrived at in such an obviously biased process and we regret that the Senate has chosen to proceed in this fashion."⁹

CBC Reaction

The growing concern in recent years about media accountability had prompted the CBC to appoint Ombudsmen of Journalistic Practice for the French and English networks in June 1991. The CBC President, therefore, asked the Ombudsman for the English networks, Bill Morgan, to prepare a report on "The Valour and the Horror." Morgan has had long experience with CBC television news and was in charge of English Television Network news and current affairs programming before his appointment as Ombudsman. In carrying out his review, the Ombudsman consulted with five historians, reviewed all correspondence received by the CBC, reviewed the documentation submitted by the documentary-makers in reply to the questions of the Ombudsman, and watched the programmes himself.

This report was released to the public on 10 November 1992 and concluded that the series was "flawed and fails to measure up to CBC's demanding policies and standards." Disputes over historical facts and context were documented, and the conclusion drawn that the documentary-makers were selecting evidence to suit their interpretation. The on-screen dialogue was also compared with transcripts of interviews and other evidence, and judged to be lacking in "context and balance." The documentary-makers replied with an eleven-page response vigorously rebutting each particular accusation. A subsequent fifteen-page rejoinder to the rebuttal by the documentary-makers was circulated to the media without date or attribution, and was later disowned by the CBC President.

The Ombudsman's report took particular issue with the dramatized sequences, referring to CBC's Journalistic Policy, which discourages the use of drama in information programming. The report argued that the dramatized portions were not properly identified and that they could lead to confusion on the part of viewers between re-creation and reality. Many did not appreciate the way that particular personalities and events had been dramatized, but none had complained about confusing dramatic re-creation with actuality footage. The CBC Journalistic Policy covers news and information programming, clearly warns against the use of any dramatizations and insists upon distinguishing between dramatic re-creation and actuality footage.

The CBC then announced that it would not rebroadcast the series until it was amended to conform with its Journalistic Policy Guidelines. The President of the CBC expressed his "sincere regret at any distress the programmes may have caused members of the audience," and promised to undertake a review of management practice in insuring "greater journalistic balance."¹⁰

This announcement prompted another array of editorials, letters to editors, letters to the CBC, open-line shows and follow-up news stories debating the pros and cons of the CBC decision. A petition of 1,000 names was collected within the CBC protesting this decision. The prevailing reaction to the CBC decision was to berate the CBC for not supporting its own programme, and to warn about the implications of this decision for future controversial programming.¹¹ Indeed, public reaction to the CBC acceptance of the Ombudsman's report was every bit as vigorous as had been the initial reaction to the broadcast of "The Valour and the Horror."

CRTC Review

The Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) has a formal complaint procedure for broadcasting which some Canadians find offensive. The CRTC conducted their own review in response to about 100 complaints which had been received about "The Valour and the Horror." This report concluded that "both the supporters and detractors of the series appear to be able to marshal at least an arguable case for their claims," and that in the CRTC view "history cannot be considered as a single immutable truth."

The *Broadcast Act* requires that the Canadian broadcasting system provide a reasonable opportunity for the public to hear differing views on matters of public concern. The Commission observed that this balance is required of broadcasters through their overall programming rather than within a particular programme. They concluded, therefore, that the CBC had met the CRTC requirements by broadcasting a variety

of programmes on World War II from a variety of perspectives over the years.

The terms of reference of the CRTC review was the current broadcast legislation and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, rather than the CBC's policies, standards and traditions — as it had been for the CBC Ombudsman. The CRTC report suggested that the standard applied by the CBC Ombudsman was more stringent than that employed by the Commission, and concluded that "The Valour and the Horror" made the distinction between dramatic re-creation and actuality footage clear and unmistakable.¹²

The persistence of this controversy about the interpretation of history as presented in "The Valour and Horror" raises a range of issues for archivists, or indeed anyone concerned with historical understanding. The controversy often ranged far beyond the actual documentary series. Nonetheless, it bears directly on the importance of Canada's past and how Canadians collectively understand it:

- 1) What claims do the participants in events have on their own history? What deference does history owe to the participants in events?
- 2) Is there truth in history?
- 3) Can the popular mass media, and particularly television, fairly understand and represent history?
- 4) Should Parliament debate and can it comprehend history?

Issues — Participants and History

Participants in past events not only have personal knowledge of those events but also a vested interest in how those events are understood. All of society, and archivists particularly, owe those participants respect. Archivists must earn and keep the respect of participants in past events in order for those participants to entrust their records to archives. When that past is as traumatic and horrific as active service in wartime, moreover, some particularly delicate questions can arise from the memories of participants and from the records.

Archival records allow different questions to be asked of the past than those which journalists can pose in the midst of events. The more passage of time also invites different questions from those which were asked as the events were unfolding. Sometimes those questions can be most unsympathetic and embarrassing. Archivists endeavour to maintain a delicate balance between their responsibility to the creators of the records and to the researchers utilizing them.¹³ The wide-ranging controversy and deeply felt emotions touched off by "The Valour and the Horror" simply show how volatile such a situation can become.

It is precisely out of respect for participants in the events, and because of the perception that traditional archival documentation may not be telling the whole story of the past, that oral history was born. It was oral history, moreover, that "The Valour and the Horror" relied upon extensively. Researchers for the series interviewed more than 100 veterans for each episode. The transcripts of these interviews were used to construct the script for the re-creation by actors on screen. The documentary-makers clearly felt a responsibility to reflect honestly the misgivings, cynicism, doubts and anger

that they heard in these interviews. Indeed "The Valour and the Horror" demonstrates both the weaknesses and the strengths of oral history.

The narrative lines of the actors in "The Valour and the Horror" portraying Canadian soldiers, airmen, nurses, prisoners-of-war and military commanders were constructed from the memories and reflections of veterans in the privacy of their living-rooms fifty years after the events, as well as from letters, biographies, official documents and secondary sources. The rank and file were represented as young, energetic, betrayed and angry. These re-enactments thereby posed searching questions about Canadian participation in World War II.

Such 1990s reflections are undeniably genuine and need to be taken seriously if Canadians are to understand fully the nation's wartime experience and its postwar impact. However, these thoughts may be somewhat different from what the soldiers and airmen were thinking during the war. Altering the context of the 1990s oral history interviews, and not making explicit the documents from which the narratives were constructed, may have weakened the credibility of the series in the eyes of those who did not share its point of view.

The dramatic vignettes employed young Canadians in order to emphasize that it was young adults who were in battle; these vignettes proved to be a most provocative visual technique. These portrayals might have been more convincing, however, and less contentious, if the context of their source, be it interviews in the 1990s, a published memoir, private letters or official records, had been shown to the viewer. The moving image equivalent of a footnote would have clarified the context and might have allayed some of the antagonism towards the series.

No one protesting "The Valour and the Horror" took issue with the veterans themselves articulating their memories on screen. Viewers accepted the second thoughts and reflections of the veterans as perfectly legitimate, even if their own perceptions might be different. The experiences and insights of the on-screen veterans were not challenged, although they were as damning of the Canadian war effort as was the voice-over narration or the dramatic re-enactments.

The participants themselves also have a wide variety of personal attitudes and ways of remembering over the years. Researchers for "The Valour and the Horror" undoubtedly sought out the more subjective, introspective and candid veterans who had sober second thoughts about their wartime experience. It is notable that few of those interviewed actually protested that their comments had been taken out of context. One might have expected more protests, or even libel actions, if the interviewed veterans were as offended as those who were publicly protesting.

Some veterans also supported "The Valour and the Horror," welcoming the questions that it posed. These were in the minority,¹⁴ however, and tended to be cautious and careful about expressing their views. Indeed, it was frequently their children or wives who expressed support of the series on their behalf. Quite understandably, it remained painful to agonize in public about the futility of the wartime experience for those veterans who had sober second thoughts.

The dozens of veterans who protested, however, obviously felt very differently; indeed they felt a good deal more strongly, as evidenced by the intensity of their anger.¹⁵

Veterans protesting the documentary had no hesitation about speaking very publicly. Moreover, the various veterans' organizations deployed this outrage effectively in order to enhance their profile. The momentum of this controversy grew and persisted beyond anyone's expectations.

All participants in great or personal events selectively remember their own past so that they can live with it. They thereby create for themselves an oral history which can be as revealing or self-justifying as letters, diaries or memoirs. The contradictions among oral histories recalling the same event can be most uncomfortable and disruptive. Provoking such discomfort is exactly what "The Valour and the Horror" accomplished for those veterans angry with it. This should not diminish oral history; rather it should remind the archivist, interviewer, historian and documentary-maker what they may potentially be dealing with when oral histories are acquired by and held in archives.

The controversy also reminds us that oral history recollections can be as partial, and indeed more "subjective," than conventional archival records. This subjectivity is both the greatest strength and the worst weakness of oral history. The context of oral history interviews is as important as is the context of any other archival document. The selection and use of oral history interviews, moreover, can perhaps be even more problematic than for many other archival documents.¹⁶

Finally, does one's respect for the participants in past events suggest a "statute of limitations"? Should archivists recommend limiting access to the interviews and records of participants if the participants could be embarrassed by the content of the archival record? Archivists may have a special responsibility to those participants who are not members of traditional élites and who may thus have less experience with historical issues or with the power of the media. The widest possible public access to records in archival custody remains a sacred principle for archivists, but the legitimate sensibilities of participants in past events also deserve consideration.

Issues — Truth and History

Many of the people protesting against "The Valour and the Horror" believed that an objective truth about Canada's World War II experience had been violated by this representation. A veteran, speaking on a community cable video produced in response to "The Valour and the Horror,"¹⁷ insisted that World War II was different from all other wars; the Allies knew that they were on the side of truth and justice. The implication for him, as indeed for many others, was that this rationale should still prevail. Any later questioning of Canadian involvement in the war, either on tactical or ethical grounds, was unthinkable and morally reprehensible.

In this vein, Sol Littman, Director of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre for Holocaust Studies, suggested that "The Valour and the Horror" encouraged those who wanted to absolve the Nazis of their crimes.¹⁸ Indeed, one of the senators went so far as to accuse Brian McKenna of denying the Holocaust suffered by Jewish people in Europe.¹⁹ This insistence on a morality or "truth" relative to the past, higher than the intellectual debates about how history can or should be understood, was a common theme among the detractors of "The Valour and the Horror."

The “truth” presented by “The Valour and the Horror” was to praise the courage of individual Canadian servicemen, document the horror of wartime and fundamentally question the tactical and ethical assumptions of the Canadian and British military leadership. The context omitted was the extent and horror of German and Japanese aggression and atrocities. The documentary-makers argued that the reasons for World War II were well enough known and documented in countless previous books, films, television documentaries and personal narratives. They may have been correct in this assertion, but the conventional conception of history and historical debate demands that this context be repeated. Many Canadians were obviously wanting to be reminded again of Nazi atrocities in order to justify the suffering and sacrifice which had been endured.

“The Valour and the Horror” itself provoked this response when it claimed to be revealing the “truth” to the Canadian people for the first time. This was hardly the case, however, and amounted to more than a slight exaggeration. Historians, and those acquainted with historical questions arising out of World War II, were already familiar with the issues raised by “The Valour and the Horror.” Nonetheless, the television series brought these historical issues into the living-rooms of millions of Canadians who might never read the academic texts. That experience proved to be more traumatic than the documentary-makers, or anyone else, ever expected.

“The Valour and the Horror” not only purported to represent the “truth” about World War II; Brian McKenna also chided historians for not having the intellectual courage to tell the “truth” about World War II. Research for the documentary made extensive use of the standard historical accounts, but the documentary-makers did not succeed in recruiting historians for service in the controversy that followed.²⁰ Many historians did not take kindly to McKenna’s accusations. Michael Bliss suggested that McKenna’s “twitting” of Canadian historians was not sufficient cause for his programmes to be condemned. McKenna’s attitude and manner towards academics, however, undoubtedly played a significant role in the controversy.²¹ McKenna may have been arrogant in this respect, but many an historian could be accused of the same sin.

Responding to the persistent challenge and scrutiny endured by “The Valour and the Horror,” Brian McKenna did acknowledge that his films were not perfect.²² He nonetheless insisted that they were accurate, and vigorously presented his evidence in letters to newspapers, on TV and radio programmes and in any other forums allowed him. The distinction between “truth,” which invites constant debate, and empirical historical facts, which can be established, seems to have been lost amidst the emotions of the controversy.

The controversy over truth in history prompted by “The Valour and the Horror” was in some respects a conflict between a popular conception that history ought to yield a single objective reality, and another, more philosophic intellectual idea that truth is an evolving process having many layers of meaning. Archivists are predisposed towards the latter paradigm because they know how many different meanings archival records can offer. However, archivists have to ensure that the records are accessible and understood by a variety of users; they must be exceedingly vigilant so that any user can search for “truth” in archival records.

Issues — Television and History

Canadian television has presented history many times before "The Valour and the Horror," though rarely attracting such an extreme reaction. History on television is usually dramatized or re-enacted, and historians regularly point out the factual errors and take issue with the artistic licence taken by the medium. The history is usually distant enough that no participants remain personally to challenge the historical representation. History on television is generally nostalgic or quaint enough that it does not trouble the viewer. History on film or television can either be dull or very effective, but only infrequently does it become contentious.

Film and television dramatization of the past is considered more fiction than fact. Historians rarely take much notice of the past on film or television through reviews or commentaries. Most viewers watch the past or present, on large or small screens, purely for its entertainment value. Audiences are not troubled until their personal histories or attitudes are challenged. Dramatic films such as Oliver Stone's *JFK* or Spike Lee's *Malcolm X* have prompted much more careful scrutiny and criticism. They re-create events and personalities that are still remembered by many viewers. Such representations of the past can never confirm the subjective memories of all their viewers. Consequently, moving-image dramatizations of events in living memory invariably stimulate considerable popular interest and reaction.

Films or television documentaries representing actual events from the past as "history" have developed different techniques, more akin to broadcast journalism, in order to distinguish themselves from fiction. These techniques include showing the interviewees on camera, often in the location of the event; the documentary-maker seen on camera, again on location; showing archival records on camera; and making use of photographs, documentary art, moving-image materials and sound recordings from the actual event.

Canadian documentary-makers are admired throughout the world for their imaginative and courageous development of the film and television documentary. Canadians have made especially notable contributions to the genre of the "docu-drama," in which actual events or personalities are dramatized. Such docu-dramas are often contentious but have become accepted as an integral part of television programming.²³

Film and television documentaries have always made use of archival holdings. Initially, documentary-makers tended to use archival film footage as "stock shot" filler in order to establish the appropriate atmosphere for the narrative. They were sometimes careless about matching sound and visuals to their script, not always taking sufficient care to ensure that the appropriate location or date was shown. The relatively recent growth of archival holdings of sound recordings, moving-image materials, documentary art, and photography have enabled film and television documentaries to represent history in more diverse and imaginative ways.

"The Valour and the Horror" made extensive use of archival holdings and of all the established documentary techniques. It was better than most historical documentaries at respecting the context of the archival record.²⁴ However, the unusually high degree of scrutiny which "The Valour and the Horror" underwent brought to light discrepancies. Both the research and the script could have been more careful and precise. Showing viewers something of the context of the archival record, moreover, would have

strengthened the representation of history. The dramatizations were often not convincing to veterans of World War II.

The CBC Journalistic Policy, against which "The Valour and the Horror" was measured, speaks to news and information programming.²⁵ In all respects, history and journalism should demand the same scrupulousness and fastidiousness about accuracy and context. However, a fundamental difference between journalism and history is that biased or erroneous journalism can conceivably influence the outcome of events. The outcome of history, however, cannot be altered, and a wide latitude in interpreting history is therefore usually welcomed. Only when interpretations of history are deemed to promote hatred or violence has it become acceptable to delimit the interpretation of history.

Although few of its detractors seriously suggested that "The Valour and the Horror" promoted hatred, it was widely perceived to have transgressed the acceptable limits. Its disrespect for military leadership and its focus on Canadian atrocities was considered by some to be inappropriate for television and especially for viewing in schools. Even some historians who might otherwise welcome such revisionism and irreverence in their lecture halls took issue with "The Valour and the Horror" as television. Jack Granatstein, for example, argued that history on television has to be particularly scrupulous regarding historical accuracy, because for millions, such would be the only historical interpretation that they would ever hear.²⁶

Other historians, and most editorial writers, welcomed the "revisionism" of "The Valour and the Horror," arguing that all good historical inquiry has a creative edge or tendency to revise past conventions.²⁷ The question of whether history on television should perhaps be treated and debated differently from history on the printed page was raised during the course of the controversy but never fully explored.

Many observers contended that the standards brought to bear upon "The Valour and the Horror" would make it impossible to present history, or indeed any controversial programming, on television. Michael Bliss and Peter Trueman observed that many of the public affairs documentaries on the CBC over the years could not measure up to such exacting standards.²⁸ Similarly, many media commentators warned against self-censorship and against the curbing of the freedom of expression which might result from this controversy.

The implications for the CBC of "The Valour and the Horror" affair are being monitored very carefully both within and outside the Corporation. Only the fullness of time will determine their extent. The immediate aftermath of "The Valour and the Horror," however, certainly suggests that the public has become bolder in its criticism of television, and of the CBC in particular. Protests of television's handling of public issues were louder than ever before in the weeks following the CBC decision not to rebroadcast "The Valour and the Horror." Moreover, several court rulings limiting the freedom of CBC Television caused widespread concern among media watchers in Canada.²⁹

Many who were most vocal in the protest against "The Valour and the Horror" openly admitted that they had not viewed the series. The controversy also grew much larger than about how Canadians understand their history. It became an opportunity for veterans, and indeed many others, to express their disaffection with the mass media and with the CBC in particular. People generally did not suppose that they had to have seen "The Valour and the Horror" in order legitimately to intervene in the debate.

Many welcomed the critical scepticism about the media prompted by "The Valour and the Horror" controversy, and by the later acceptance of the CBC Ombudsman's report. The observation by a copy-editor at the *Globe and Mail* about the injunction against allowing the broadcast of "The Boys of St. Vincent" well summed up the controversy surrounding "The Valour and the Horror": "The media do a good job at many things, and an appallingly bad job at some things. By far the worst job they do is telling about any action that they fear might limit their power to publish whatever they please, whenever they please, with blithe (if not cynical) disregard for whom they may hurt."³⁰

However one may personally view this controversy, the unavoidable conclusion is that television is increasingly at the centre of public discourse about how Canadian society is evolving. Archivists need to become media-wise and very shrewd in acquiring and appraising the records of television. Not only do such high-profile controversies deserve archival documentation, but also do we daily have more modest issues reflected and shaped by television. The exponentially increasing quantity and variety of television production could easily overwhelm conventional archival acquisition strategies and resources. If archives cannot summon the imagination and resources to acquire and preserve widely representative samples of television programming, then posterity will have only a most limited and distorted view of the accomplishments and travails of our time.

Similarly, archivists have to become media-wise and imaginative in helping television and documentary-makers make optimum use of archival records. We need to communicate our knowledge and understanding of the context of the archival record. Knowing the context will strengthen documentary-makers' insights and thus their programming, and will incidentally also improve their appreciation of archives.

Issues — Parliament and History

Those of us working at preserving, understanding and communicating the documentary heritage of society often bemoan the fact that government and Parliament pay only fleeting attention to history. Public officials and parliamentarians pay lip-service to the past only when it serves a political purpose. Most often, archivists lament that government ignores and underfunds the nation's archives, museums and art galleries.

"The Valour and the Horror" made history very prominent on the public agenda for a full year. The benefits and implications, for archives and archivists, therefore merit assessment. Dozens of questions were put to Minister of Communications Perrin Beatty about "The Valour and the Horror." Beatty insisted that the government would respect the usual arm's-length relationship between cultural agencies and the government and refused to become involved. He cited a similar answer of Hugh Faulkner, Secretary of State in the Liberal Cabinet in 1975, in response to similar concerns expressed by the Progressive Conservative opposition of the day.³¹ Don Blenkarn, Progressive Conservative MP, took up the campaign against "The Valour and the Horror," protesting its availability to schools. He insisted that the National Film Board withdraw the documentary from distribution on video cassette and recall the copies from schools. The assumption of those leading the campaign was that somehow "The Valour and the Horror" was being distributed as the "authorized," and only correct history of World War II and that it would unduly influence schoolchildren. Ironically, this campaign generated a great deal of publicity for the availability of "The Valour and the Horror" on video cassette for rental or purchase.

There has been much controversy about whether a Senate subcommittee, or any parliamentary body, should be investigating a television programme because it was produced using public funds. Archivists have no special expertise in this regard, but might well benefit from a careful reading of the Senate Subcommittee proceedings on "The Valour and the Horror." Rarely has a parliamentary body devoted so much time to historical issues.

The Senate hearings began in late June and then adjourned until November. Organizers succeeded in keeping the veterans' protests against "The Valour and the Horror" in public view over the course of the summer. Brian McKenna was finally invited to appear on the Friday before Remembrance Day. However, the senators did not listen to his evidence but rather called on McKenna to recant his views. Galafilm had apparently tabled hundreds of pages of research documents with the Senate Subcommittee, but none of the questions demonstrated that its members had examined this material. McKenna tried to explain how and why he had used certain evidence and records, but the senators showed no inclination, or capacity, to discuss nuances. The senators instead lectured McKenna harshly and then complained when he did not give them more than two hours of his time.

The "kangaroo court" atmosphere of the Senate proceedings is difficult to imagine unless one had actually attended. The senators are not subject to the usual protocols of decency and defence against libel which we associate with any public inquiry, because of the umbrella of parliamentary privilege. Catcalls and insults from the audience were tolerated by the Chair. Witnesses were repeatedly interrupted if the senators appeared not to like what they were hearing. One naturally anticipates a dignified and impartial proceeding, and does not really want to believe that parliamentarians could behave in such an outrageous fashion.³²

The lesson which archivists might draw from this experience is that Parliament's consideration of history has little use for archival records. Therefore, given its agenda and preconceived notions, it may be just as well that Parliament usually ignores history.

Archival Implications

The controversy surrounding "The Valour and the Horror" has undoubtedly stimulated archival research and oral history interviewing. Already another television programme has been completed ("On the Wings of Valour: In Defense of Bomber Command," for London Community Cable), and a book (*The Morality [sic!] of Bomber Command in World War II* by H. Clifford Chadderton, War Amputations of Canada) has been published in direct response to "The Valour and the Horror"; other works may be in preparation. The first issue of the new academic journal, *Canadian Military History*, published in the autumn of 1992, included an article by Terry Copp on the Normandy Campaign, and the report by General Guy Simonds on Operation "Spring," which was the focus of the third episode of "The Valour and the Horror."

Brian McKenna intended to do a subsequent series of documentary programmes on the postwar effects of Canada's involvement in World War II. The controversy generated by "The Valour and the Horror" may make it difficult for McKenna to summon the resiliency to take on such a project. However, that notoriety may also attract the necessary resources to make such a project feasible. Undoubtedly, the controversy has

guaranteed that the rebroadcast of "The Valour and the Horror," to be followed by appropriate panel discussions and now scheduled for early 1993, could well have a larger audience than the original broadcast in January 1992. Similarly, the next high-profile documentary on World War II telecast by the CBC will be monitored very closely and should also gain a large audience. Therefore, a documentary-maker will likely be commissioned to undertake such a project.

Historians have been heard and seen in abundance, in all media, commenting on the Canadian experience in World War II. However, a surprising number joined in the protests against "The Valour and the Horror," despite similar criticisms of the Canadian war effort in their own books and articles.³³ It is to be hoped that historians will invite Brian McKenna and other documentary-makers into their midst in order to debate with them how history is best understood and communicated on television. Such an exchange of views should be mutually beneficial, although perhaps also potentially acrimonious for both parties.

Access to archival records only briefly became an issue in this controversy when Brian McKenna alleged that the Directorate of History at the Department of National Defence had participated in suppressing a report on the disastrous Canadian operation at Verrières Ridge in 1944. A note on this report by C.P. Stacey, former head of the Directorate of History to the then head, Sydney Wise, explained that Stacey had salvaged a single copy of this report despite orders to have it destroyed. Stacey further advised Wise not to show this report to H.H. Griffin, brother of the Black Watch regimental commander who had died so tragically, if Griffin enquired. Apparently H.H. Griffin never did enquire at the Directorate of History; the report in question has long been available to researchers. Unfortunately this tendency of Brian McKenna's to jump to contentious conclusions, rather than weighing all the evidence, fuelled many of the protests against "The Valour and the Horror." Generally speaking, however, this controversy about historical interpretation touched surprisingly briefly on archival records.

Conclusion

The endurance of this controversy about historical understanding, and the depth of the emotions aroused by it, lead to several conclusions:

- 1) History on television can be very evocative. Many people in our society care deeply about history and how it is understood, even if they read few history books and never visit archives. History on television can be every bit as dull and tedious as it is in some textbooks, but the documentary-makers who gave us "The Valour and the Horror" have found an exciting and compelling way to make history come alive. Archivists should therefore welcome documentary-makers into the archives despite the onerous and irksome demands they may sometimes impose on us. Archivists should understand the medium of television so that we can better contribute to the process of researching a television documentary. We should try to accommodate the deadlines of the documentary-makers and not expect them to have the time or patience of the graduate student or the serious genealogist. We should work together with documentary-makers because the history which they construct from archival records may have a lasting impact on our society.

- 2) Canadians are watching television for more than its entertainment value. The CBC was pilloried likewise for broadcasting "The Valour and the Horror" and then withdrawing it because how history is presented on television matters deeply. "The Valour and the Horror" became an occasion for Canadians to express their resentment and anger about television. The controversy may well mark a turning-point in the perception and attitudes of Canadians towards television, though only time will tell its real significance. For archives the controversy certainly means that television programming has to be preserved because it is there that public issues are addressed and debated, if not altogether resolved. The disaffection about television may be growing precisely because it is becoming more important as the chief, if not the only forum for public discourse. However, public disaffection and the limitations of television only make it more essential that the television heritage is preserved in archives.
- 3) "The Valour and the Horror" articulated a profound "truth" for Canadian society. Otherwise, it would have been quickly ignored, as have so many previous historical controversies. It may have omitted context in not reiterating the causes of World War II. It certainly selected those historical facts which best supported its argument. It may have been too recent to the events for many participants to be comfortable with the questions it posed. It may also have been somewhat counterproductive, in that much of the public controversy became too heated to be illuminating and constructive. However, "The Valour and the Horror" undeniably brought important questions about how Canadians understand and remember the World War II experience into the living-rooms of millions of Canadians. Archivists should be alert to historical evidence in archival records that could be equally sensitive. We should neither exploit nor evade potential controversies, but should instead find ways to ensure that the provenancial contexts of archival records are known and understood.

Notes

- * The author wishes to thank his CBC colleagues Joan Gordon, Jeannette Kopak, Bob O'Reilly and Philip Savage for their insights and support in thinking through this article. Nevertheless, the views expressed do not represent their views, nor the views of the CBC, but only the perspective of the author.
- 1 "The Valour and the Horror — Savage Christmas: Hong Kong 1941" / "La Bravoure et le mépris — La Bataille de Hong-Kong," broadcast on CBC French television network, 3 January, on CBC English television network, 12 January, and on CBC *Newsworld*, 21 March 1992; 2 hours.
 "The Valour and the Horror — Death by Moonlight: Bomber Command" / "La Bravoure et le mépris — L'aviation de bombardement," broadcast on CBC French television network, 10 January, on CBC English television network, 19 January, and on CBC *Newsworld*, 28 March 1992; 2 hours.
 "The Valour and the Horror — In Desperate Battle: Normandy 1944" / "La Bravoure et le mépris — La Bataille de Normandie." broadcast on CBC French television network, 17 January, on CBC English television network, 26 January, and on CBC *Newsworld*, 4 April 1992; 2 hours.
- 2 Peter Desbarats, *London Free Press*, 30 May 1992; Mike Boone, *Montreal Gazette*, 10 June 1992, Peter Trueman, *Starweek*, 4 and 18 January and 20 June 1992; John Haslett Cuff, *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 11 January 1992.
- 3 All three episodes of "The Valour and the Horror" were seen, at least in part, by an average of 4,500,000 Canadians. This 18-20 per cent audience share for "The Valour and the Horror" — out of all Canadians watching television — is exceptional for any Canadian programming, let alone historical documentary programming.

- 4 "The Valour and the Horror" is available for viewing or rental from the regional offices of the National Film Board and also for purchase on video cassette.
- 5 Galafilm notes promoting "The Valour and the Horror," January 1992.
- 6 Galafilm estimated that they invested at least \$70,000 in subsequent research, preparation of rebuttals, and personal appearances and interviews defending "The Valour and the Horror." Indeed, the pages of newspaper letters to editors are notable for replies to their critics by Brian McKenna and others associated with the production. This was partly to salvage their reputations and promote the production for subsequent rebroadcast, but it was partly also due to their deeply held commitment to the revisionist interpretation of history which "The Valour and the Horror" represented.
- 7 Harris was the only British wartime commander not subsequently given a seat in the House of Lords, because of the controversy over strategic bombing. Harris, moreover, like the Bomber Command airmen, always regarded it as a slight that no medal for their operations was awarded. Consequently, a statue of Sir Arthur Harris unveiled in London in May 1992 met with considerable protest.
- 8 Total cost of the series was \$2,800,000 — with the NFB covering \$730,000 through direct expenditures and services, and the CBC absorbing almost \$1,000,000 of the grand total.
- 9 CBC News Release, 25 June 1992.
- 10 CBC News Release, 10 November 1992.
- 11 At a public discussion about "The Valour and the Horror" which took place at Toronto's St. Lawrence Centre on 16 December 1992, Tim Kotcheff, CBC Vice-President for News and Current Affairs Programming, announced that the CBC would rebroadcast the series early in 1993.
- 12 Allan J. Darling, Secretary General, CRTC File No. 12225-103, 17 December 1992.
- 13 A most poignant example of unscheduled disclosure is the records of the former East German state security police, which are now open. Germans are discovering that trusted friends and family members informed on them, a revelation which is naturally causing great pain and anguish. In this instance, the unethical behaviour and subsequent dissolution of the creators of these records has resulted in completely uncontrolled public access. Archivists therefore have no ongoing responsibilities to the creators of these records. Nevertheless, some are asking whether this unfettered access is serving the public good in a reunified Germany.
- 14 Examples of comments by veterans supporting the series included: Andrew G. Carswell, Washago, Ontario: "As a veteran, an ex-RCAF Lancaster bomber pilot, and a POW for two years and three months, I thought the film was a very fair depiction of the war.... Nobody even mentioned the women, kids, schools and hospital down there — or thought about them.... It seems to me that veterans like myself, having experienced only a small part of the war, are no more qualified to talk about over all war policies than a GM worker is qualified to talk about company strategy.... I'm glad that there are people like McKenna around who take time to do the extensive historical research necessary to get at the truth of these matters": *Toronto Star*, 21 July 1992; George Evans, Nepean, Ontario: "As a veteran of the RAF Bomber Command campaign against Germany that killed almost half the aircrews taking part in it, I am outraged by the self-appointed representatives of ex-servicemen who are protesting the 'Death by Moonlight' episode of 'The Valour and the Horror'. I watched this episode and was in no way offended, but rather glad that at last the true facts of this campaign were being openly aired": *Ottawa Citizen*, 14 November 1992.
- 15 Typical comments included those of Alida Baczewich, Selkirk, Manitoba: "To start with I should tell you that I am a Dutch war bride and very angry at Terence and Brian McKenna and their series 'The Valour and the Horror'. They forgot to tell about the other side": *Winnipeg Free Press*, 30 November 1992; Robert W. Bennett, Bracebridge, Ontario: "There is nothing nice about war but this ex-service person would like to see my taxes used by the CBC to better portray war as it existed, not by people using tactics which give a wrong impression of the sacrifices made by my fallen comrades": *Toronto Star*, 20 November 1992; R.E. Randall, Delburne, Alberta: "I am fed up with these ivory tower civil servants from Toronto wasting my tax dollars to malign such men as Arthur Harris and the Bomber Command boys. The ex-servicemen in our country have had quite enough of these armchair strategists perpetually sounding off from the comfort and safety of a freedom won for them by others at a fearful cost in human life": *Alberta Report*, 22 June 1992.

- 16 For example, many of the interviews seen in the sympathetic, pro-Bomber Command video, "On the Winds of Valour: In Defense of Bomber Command," could likewise effectively have been used in "The Valour and the Horror" if edited and contextualized only slightly differently. Similarly, the documentary by Brian Stewart on Canadian participation in the Dieppe raid, "Dieppe — 50 Years Later," broadcast on CBC's *The Journal* in June and August 1992, included on-camera reflections which were very critical of the military and political leadership. The three veterans seen on camera had obviously been very carefully selected, one of them defending the purposes of the Dieppe raid. He nevertheless deferred to the other two, who had been taken prisoner at Dieppe, acknowledging that their war time had been very different from his own.
- 17 "On the Wings of Valour: In Defense of Bomber Command" was produced by Jeannie Muldoon for London, Ontario's community cable channel in September 1992 in response to "The Valour and the Horror." Peter Desbarats, Dean of Journalism at the University of Western Ontario, introduced and narrated the programme, which was broadcast over a number of community cable channels across Canada.
- 18 *Ottawa Citizen*, 13 June 1992.
- 19 Brian McKenna, taken aback by this accusation, specified the research, documentaries and personal support which he had committed over the years to the cause of the Jewish people of Europe during World War II.
- 20 Canadian historians were considerably divided in their reaction to "The Valour and the Horror." David Bercuson, Bill Carter, Jack Granatstein, Desmond Morton, Gilbert Drolet, Terry Copp, Reginald Roy and John English, among others, objected to the documentary series. Pierre Berton, Michael Bliss, Graham Decarie and others supported the series and the CBC broadcast of it, despite reservations concerning particular "facts." The CBC Ombudsman invited Sydney Wise, David Bercuson and Denis Richards to provide "detailed commentary" on the series and further consulted Steven Harris and Carl Vincent — at the urging of the documentary-makers.
- 21 On the CBC's English Television Network evening news, *Prime Time News at Nine*, 10 November 1992.
- 22 *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 8 November 1992.
- 23 The chapter on the docu-drama, "Docudrama: 'To be seen is to seed'," in Mary Jane Miller, *Turn Up the Contrast: CBC Television Drama Since 1952* (1987), provides a good historical and critical review of this genre on CBC television.
- 24 See Ernest J. Dick, "History on Television: A Critical Archival Examination of 'The Valour and the Horror'," *Archivaria* 34 (Summer 1992), pp. 199-216.
- 25 "Journalistic Policy" (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1988), p. 5, "The policies in this volume concern all information programmes. These programmes comprise news and all aspects of public affairs (political, economic, social) and include journalistic activities in science, arts, agriculture, religion, sports"; p. 8, "Continuing news and current affairs programmes must present a balanced overall view on controversial matters, so as to avoid the appearance of promoting particular opinions or being manipulated into doing so by events"; p. 38, "Journalistic programmes must not as a general principle mix actuality (visual and audio of actual events and of real people) with a dramatized portrayal of people or events. The audience must be able to judge the nature of the information received. The mixture of forms renders such a judgement difficult because it may lend the appearance of reality to hypothesis."
- This comprehensive review of the CBC's public accountability is being carried out under the authority of the Vice-President for Media Accountability, and may well include a review of the Journalistic Policy.
- 26 *Supra*, note 21.
- 27 William Thorsell, "Slavish Defence of Conventional Wisdom Shows Up CBC's Stupidity," in *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 19 November 1992, cited A.J.P. Taylor, Carl Berger and Erik Erikson in his argument, and observed, "A 'bias for revisionist history' is, of course, a condition of intelligent life. A bias for revisionism is the very foundation of discourse and discovery. Revisionism is the stuff of insight, of growth, of the search for truth. Without revisionism, publicly aired and publicly tried, there is only conventional wisdom at best, lies at worst."

- 28 Michael Bliss, on *Prime Time News at Nine*, CBC English Television Network, 10 November 1992; Peter Trueman, "Yours Truly...", *Starweek*, 19 December 1992.
- 29 Examples include:
- The Catholic Civil Rights League issued a protest against the portrayal of Catholic priests in Harry Rasky's film "The War Against the Indians", broadcast by the CBC.
 - The *fifth estate* programme of 1 December 1992 was accused of tampering with evidence because a juror in the Christine Jessop murder case was interviewed.
 - A court injunction against "The Boys of St. Vincent" (a fictional treatment of sexual abuse of young boys by a Christian religious order) prevented its being broadcast, as scheduled, on 6 December 1992 in Ontario and Québec, because it was deemed to endanger the possibility of a fair trial of a similar case in eastern Ontario.
 - A Winnipeg judge ordered CBC-TV News in Winnipeg to make available to the police a videotape of CBC film footage of aboriginal people occupying the offices of the Manitoba Indian Agricultural Development Corporation in November 1992.
 - In late December 1992 an Ontario judge blocked the CBC Television Network from broadcasting the taped evidence of a one-time blood donor who is alleged to have transmitted the AIDS virus. This testimony was to be used as part of a *Prime Time News* documentary in which the donor's face and voice were to be camouflaged electronically.
- 30 Michael Moore, "And lo, the media priests speak with one voice," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 11 December 1992.
- 31 House of Commons *Debates*, 16 November 1992.
- 32 Although many debated the pros and cons of whether the Senate should be undertaking this investigation, few commentators who attended the Senate hearings defended the Senate. Ken MacQueen (*Ottawa Citizen*, 11 November 1992) articulated a common observation thus: "The senators have cheated and distorted and bullied. They took a parliamentary forum and twisted it into an obscene show trial. In the style of the poisonous U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy, they have appropriated the heroism of others while smearing the loyalty and patriotism of all they oppose."
- 33 Christopher Moore, "Valour, Horror and Freedom" (*The Beaver*, December '92 - January '93, pp. 54-56), "But the sight of historians collaborating with the Senate's attack on a work that did not conform to their own notions about military history — and the absence of organizations like the Canadian Historical Association from the coalition of writers, artists, and intellectuals which condemned the hearings — seemed to many people a confirmation of McKenna's charge." Covering the controversy in the *Globe and Mail*, Stephen Godfrey wrote that the film was necessary because the official war history was "complacent and unquestioning. In fact it is not — the behaviour of the historians just made it seem that way last June."