

JUDIT ÁGNES KÁDÁR

VIRGINIA L. SAUVÉ AND MONIQUE SAUVÉ: *GATEWAY
TO CANADA*

(Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1997. 280 pp.)

The study of Canadian culture either as foreign learners or as newcomers in Canada is a different enterprise than that of other culturally and historically well-established nations. The outsider must put his/her finger on the pulse of a culture, one which is actually not one but the blend of many cultures under constant change and interconnection; which is full of uncertainties about major questions of self-definition and identity; which seems a bit uncertain about the interpretation of its past but seems proud of the colorful diversity that characterises its present culture; and one which has become one of the largest well-developed countries on earth. The study of Canadian culture can be rooted only in a perspective, which provides less the image of a unified culture based on the similarities of people, places and events but rather that introduces their colorful multiplicity as well as the possible questions and tension that mark many fields of life nowadays, just like in the past.

Virginia and Monique Sauvé attempt to present a book that gives many answers to the question of what it means to be Canadian besides challenging the readers to “explore the country from sea to sea” and “have fun” doing so. This approach creates a real *Gateway* to Canada. The presentation of the book itself is very attractive, so one might start to fear content does not fit the form so nicely—as it often turns out elsewhere. However, what we get here is not only the beautiful illustrations and high quality printing. The very first glance will recognize the careful planning behind the preparation of the layout where the most important guiding point for the authors must have

been efficiency in learning. Virginia L. Sauvé's long-term TESL and curriculum planning experience visibly marks the book from the very first page, while Monique Sauvé contributed with her knowledge and appreciation of Canadian history and immigrant life.

The structure of the book is built on twelve chapters followed by a glossary and an index section, the latter helping the quick search for words, expressions and notions mentioned in the texts. Each chapter opens with a list of "Quick Facts" offering an impression about the given chapter as well as an Introduction to that particular unit. After this part which often contains easy-to-grab clues to locate the topic, one or more sections are developed on the main idea. Then comes the chapter review where theory is put into practice. The Comprehension Checks include various tasks such as crosswords, "mix and match", "research and write" besides vocabulary expansion exercises and discussion questions. The variety and length of each unit depend on the content. The authors provide keys to the exercises at the end of the book, which enable the reader to use it effectively even without the help of an instructor. Chapters that discuss the characteristics of the different regions of Canada follow the pattern of presenting a general geographical and economic orientation with further references to major cities, national parks and other points of interest.

Following the traditional format of other introductions to a culture (such as *American Life and Institutions* by D. K. Stevenson, *Spotlight on Britain* by S. Sheerin et al., or a quite recent one on Canadian culture entitled *Canada: Pathways to the Present* by J. Saywell) one can find prefatory chapters on government, economy, arts, education and recreation along with the ones that discuss issues such as biculturalism, native voices, religion, and make references to some problematic points related to them, too.

The abridged chapter that highlights historic events, trends and periods does not make an effort to accomplish a thorough examination with any claim for completeness instead it summarizes what the writers consider as most important facts regarding the origins of Canadians, their cultural and political encounters and the rise of the nation as such. In this respect the chapter of *Gateway* on Canada's past seems to be a curtailed version of the general impressions suggested by other well-known interpretations of Canadian history, such as that of D. Morton's (*Canadian History*) or C. Brown's (*The Illustrated History of Canada*), and it is similar to the overviews

offered by J. Saywell in *Canada: Pathways to the Present* or the chapter entitled "History and People" in *Inside Guides: Canada* (ed. H. Cunningham), which apparently both give a bit deeper understanding of Canada's past. The authors' personal view of these matters is counterpointed by the dominance of others' opinions in the later chapters, especially the one entitled "Challenges for Canadians", where central contemporary issues such as unemployment, racism or the question of native land claims are diagnosed.

Professional readers might wonder about the selection of facts, personalities and details included in the text. We all have our personal preferences as do the authors; no one textbook can include the immense factual detail behind the scope of its investigations. However, let me express the doubts of an outsider (being a Hungarian teacher and researcher of Canadian culture) I might share with some Canadians, too. The authors mention that they invited others' views to accompany their own. Nevertheless, a more pregnant solution, the use of quotes from authentic resources of opinion would have been welcome, especially in chapters like the one on Canadian identity. There are some in other chapters, but I think to introduce others' views on national (and regional) identity and self-definition would greatly enrich the reader's access to a better understanding of what Canadians think about themselves. Moreover, that would provide a multiple perspective without inclusive and simplifying views and there would be no need any more to put everything under the cover of first person plural statements on what a proper average Canadian citizen is expected to be proud of (especially related to the U.S.–Canadian controversies). The writers here seem to overemphasize the need to sustain the integrity of Canadian national identity *against* the Southern neighbor. It is especially unfortunate since in my view a lot of Canadians are excited about their regional and ethnic definition at least as much as about the American impact on the nation's economy and culture. Besides, there is little indication of the diversity of opinions on certain problematic issues (for instance the U.S.–Canadian relations are viewed differently by Canadians living along and close to the 49th Parallel, who are naturally more influenced by the U.S. and less concerned about questions of Canadian national identity, than other Canadians might be). If the authors can devote only a very limited length of text on the issue of identity, probably the mention of

related questions and the indication of the great variety of possible answers would have done better.

Another troubled part seems to be the selection of “Significant Canadians” who represent the nation in different fields of life such as arts, including literature and music. It must be a difficult task to decide whom to mention, and even harder to decide whom not to, in these sections. To prefer Anne Murray to Rita MacNeil, both singers of outstanding popularity throughout Canada, yet to exclude Brian Adams, k. d. Lang or Céline Dion who all have achieved great international success and reputation recently, is probably not very fortunate. To devote a longer paragraph to the details of Roch Carrier’s well-known short story “The Hockey Sweater” in the literature section seems to reduce our chance to learn about more about other literary personalities of at least equal relevance to Carrier or Lucy Maud Montgomery, author of the *Anne of Green Gables* stories... One other field that the authors did not consider worth enough mentioning here is poetry, though it is difficult to doubt the relevance of landscape poetry for the Canadian imagination, or the popularity of poets like, Al Purdy and Leonard Cohen. Perhaps again the authors might have made mention of the regional varieties or some more classics of Canadian literature, or they might as well call the attention to the fact that they are presenting their own personal preferences of significant persons.

Other significant aspects of daily life have also relatively little mention in the book. Canadians’ contributions to peacekeeping, or their achievements in technology, especially communications might have received more attention. Neither have the authors devoted much space to the aspects of Canadian wilderness and wildlife, both defining features of the Canadian persona. However, on the whole these questions of emphasis are not serious drawbacks, do not spoil the overall efficiency and strength of the book.

Now let me explain what I personally like about this book. I consider its chief merits to be the following:

- It has an attractive presentation (cover, layout, printing, illustrations of extremely high quality) and nicely organized subject matter;
- The language used is easy to follow for both intermediate and advanced speakers of English, as well as for those getting introduced to Canadian culture here for the first time;

- It manages to introduce and summarize relevant characteristics of Canadian life highlighting features of symbolic relevance for Canada as a nation;
- It includes fairly recent issues and data such as the 1995 Quebec separation referendum and the Nunavut project;
- Despite some minor issues mentioned above, the authors achieve success in sustaining a relatively objective and widely accepted perspective;
- It can be a useful resource for both newcomers to Canada and to others studying this culture from outside;
- It is highly motivating for further readings since it invites the reader to investigate the different fields of Canadian life in detail.

What describes the resource students and teachers all want to use? It has an attractive outlook, contains rich and valuable material which is organized in an effective way—supposedly by someone who is experienced in teaching. The book Virginia L. Sauvé and Monique Sauvé have recently released seems to achieve these points successfully.

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