

Elegy for Stuart McLean

Was he Stephen Leacock reborn? Final
Answers are impossible now.
But both were Montréalais, so
They do share that. Compare Vinyl
Cafe and Sunshine Sketches: Both men's tales
Eye Canada as countryside
Whistle-stops—burghs where poets hide
Among pub talkers, farmers hoisting hay bales,
And philosophers turned town humourists—
Pranksters never on the level,
Jesters round the cracker barrel—
Whose wisecracks ape th'Acropolis:
Look up Athens-at-Big-Narrows, or Rome-
At-Estevan, or Istanbul-
At-Flin-Flon, or Beijing-à-Hull,
Or Paris-at-Head-Smashed-In-Where-Elk-Roam—
Spy "Local colour" in pastel pictures,
Where sunflowers beckon fauna,
And flames chuckle as wood whispers
In cottages cozy as a sauna....
Such was McLean's Leacock genius: To tell
Of Canadian character
Through characters who truly were
Woodlot democrats, prized subjects who dwell

Where canoes portage through sugar bush,
Or secateurs snap a rose bloom,
And Perth-Andover hears ice boom
As it cracks so Saint John freshets can rush....

Who's more Canuck than Mary Turlington?
What's more Canuck than Confusion
Over truffles—the illusion
That chocolates can be mushrooms—in season?

Think of Dave cooking a Christmas turkey—
Or planning to, to show his wife,
Morley, his skill with heat and knife
Produces a poetics of poultry.

There's no troubled poem in Stuart McLean's
Anthology. Vox populi?
That's him: Tartan-brazen, unshy
At splicing Wisdom in which Wit remains.
Where McLean lives, a floral mosaic
Ever thrives, where roses cluster—
Red, white, gold, lending earth lustre,
And where saints—proletarian—are laic.