

## **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 spicing 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.