

# Books

Fun, inventive and mostly accurate — but it's rotten of Heald to blow Steed's cover

## JOHN STEED

AN AUTHORIZED BIOGRAPHY  
VOLUME I: JEALOUS IN HONOR  
BY TIM HEALD  
McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 197 pages, \$12.95

REVIEWED BY SANDRA MARTIN

I always thought Steed's decline began with the defection of Mrs. Peel. It was after the sublime Emma, all brains and sexiness, abandoned The Avengers that Steed took up with the highly unsuitable Tara King, she of the short skirts, puppy rolls and vacant gaze. It was then only a matter of time and ratings before the valiant Steed was retired from the airwaves taking the unfortunate Tara King with him. That's where he should have remained, in blissful indolence, sipping champagne and tooting around the countryside in that beautiful Bentley.

Instead he has been trotted out again, wheezy and spavined, in a patchy reread called The New Avengers. It really is most unseemly. By now Steed should be directing operations, bringing an elegance and wit to Mother's old job as head of intelligence, not poking around with Purdey, the leggy ballerina turned agent, and Gambit, Lady Bellamy's old footman on Upstairs Downstairs. But, if the New Avengers is a series whose time has passed, Tim Heald's authorized biography of John Steed is a gimmick without a product to sell. Today, Steed is simply not a big enough cult figure to warrant such treatment. Heald, an Englishman who writes crime novels (Let Sleeping Dogs Lie, Unbecoming Habits, etc.), presents himself as the son of an old army buddy of John Steed. His writing talent, familiarity with the subject, and fascination with intelligence operations make Heald John Steed's obvious choice as official biographer. In this first volume, Heald traces Steed's career to the point where he meets Cathy Gale, that marvellous panther-like woman who inveigled him into the secret service. The rest is, of course, well documented thanks to Patrick Macnee, Steed's friend since Eton and the actor who

has portrayed him on television.

The Steeds, "men and women of rare, often uncomfortable distinction," have been around since the beginning of the sixth century. Whether in service or disservice to their monarchs, they have tended to be "eminences grises, shadowy figures on the fringe of history." For example, Walter Steed was beheaded in 1537 for alleged indiscretions with Anne Boleyn, a smirch on the family name eradicated by his grandson John who smuggled detailed plans of Philip II's Armada to England fully six months before the Spanish fleet set sail. It was this intelligence that allowed Francis Drake to occupy himself with bowls before the famous battle. Steed, alas the last of the line, was born the elder son of a younger son in Campbellpore near Peshawar in the northwest corner of the Indian subcontinent in the mid-twenties. His parents

were slaughtered before his eyes by rebel Indians and then John and his younger brother Walter were abducted and held captive until his aunt Eithne (younger daughter of the Duke of Dorset) rescued the two little boys and took them home to England.

John experienced the horrors of the English preparatory school system, was expelled from Eton (for riding the winner of the four o'clock on the Tuesday of Ascot Week when he should have been studying), and eventually ran away to war, serving as an ordinary foot soldier because he had lied about his age and background. After he was invalided home he joined army intelligence and was sent back to France to work with the resistance. There he met up with his childhood sweetheart, Jeanne de Saint-Rambert, married her, and only a week later lost her to a Nazi butcher named General Schmidt.

The murder of his wife crazed John and drove him to vengeance, a plan executed with all the ingenuity and panache we have come to associate with Steed's later career. After the war Steed was an empty, bitter man, having lost his wife, his cause, and his occupation. He sought solace in a monastery, abandoning the world for a scratchy black habit and sandals that gave him blisters. It was then that Cathy Gale intervened.

Jealous In Honor is fun, inventive and mostly accurate. (I found one tiny error — a mention of Jessica Mitford in London in 1943 when she had gone to America in 1939.) It is also hollow. John Steed is himself a parody of the James Bond type of secret service agent. Elegant and fastidious, relying on charm and wit rather than machismo and violence (women do most of the fighting in The Avengers, both old and new, and one rarely if ever sees blood). Steed is an enigmatic chameleon whose strength and resourcefulness are hidden behind an effete mask — sort of a Scarlet Pimpernel figure. The background Heald has invented for him is a parody of a parody that both stretches the joke too far and gives away the punch line. It is a strange trend in current fiction that instead of inventing new characters, writers are devising pasts for well established creations. Unlike historical fiction where imaginary characters are used to explain or embellish a real event or personality, books such as Jealous In Honor are fictional histories where real people and events are thrown into invented pasts to give characters such as Steed a greater legitimacy. It's a device that is amusing, and ultimately frustrating. First the character is pinned down, no longer free to engage our individual imaginations and, second, a character is successful because he lives and breathes, not because he makes an appointment for tea with Jessica Mitford or has an aunt who dallied with Winston Churchill. I think it's rotten that Tim Heald blew John Steed's cover. That's not playing by the rules.

Sandra Martin is a Toronto freelance writer.



Borden in retirement 1930

A fraud. A travesty of an election

Officers lined up the men and told them how to vote

REVIEWED BY DONALD C. MACDONALD

Out of the same body of research John English has produced two volumes of distinctly different emphasis and approach. Both are writings of exceptional merit.

The Decline Of Politics (a phenomenon which contemporaries believed they were witnessing when, in fact, politics merely took on new forms) focuses on the restructuring of political parties, particularly the Conservatives, during the years of Borden's leadership. In the Centenary Series, Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook explored the profound impact of industrialization, urbanization, immigration and war upon Canadian development in a volume appropriately titled Canada 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed. But the Conservative Party under Sir Robert Borden has received relatively little attention from historians. This is curious, John English feels, because not only was the period the most turbulent and tragic in our history, but during it the contours of the modern party system were shaped. John English seeks to fill this gap. The result is a modest volume of just over 200 pages, of as much interest and value to the political scientist as the historian.

A moment's reflection will indicate how critical a period the first two decades were for Canadian parties. The Conservative Party had disintegrated following the death of Sir John A. Macdonald and Borden was desperately engaged in rebuilding it. The Liberal Party had finally emerged in 1896, and dominated the scene with the charismatic Sir Wilfrid Laurier. In the 1911 Reciprocity election an unlikely coalition of Tory imperialists and Quebec nationalists (because of Bourassa's opposition to Laurier's naval bill) toppled the Liberal government. There were the incredible social and military tensions of the war years, which climaxed first with the Union government, and then with Borden as a "lame duck" prime minister presiding over another disintegration of the Conservative Party while the Liberals were integrating the diverse elements of non-Anglo-Saxon Canada into the base for future political dominance. Finally, third parties emerged from farmer-labor unrest to alter fundamentally the traditional party polarization.

It is a critical period of Canadian history and politics. English has mined the lode of hitherto neglected or underplayed materials. His most engaging chapters are his detailed analysis of the formation, administration and disintegration of the Union government, some of which challenges the conventional assessment.

For example, an officer reported that, while censoring letters in September, 1917, he found that 70 per cent of the soldiers were advising relatives back home to vote against conscription, so disillusioned were they with the stalemate and slaughter in France. Disaster faced the Union government unless it undertook intensive "educational work immediately". Yet, English notes, the government could not even estimate the number of troops in Europe to the nearest ten thousand. How, then, could they ever accomplish the necessary "education" within the short period before voting?

"The answer was obvious, unfortunate and illegal: they could work through the military hierarchy" — and they did. Every regiment and platoon was organized from the top. Officers lined the men up and told them what they should do "as a matter of duty". Many chaplains made impassioned appeals before every gathering of troops, whatever its purpose. The Beaverbrook press in Britain "turned out reams of Unionist propaganda, which flooded barracks and trenches throughout England and France. Let-

ters in the Borden papers reported how the vote was thus swayed, and how the "floating" soldier vote was directed to specific ridings where Unionist candidates were thought to be in trouble. Not without prejudice, but with considerable truth nonetheless, did W. T. R. Preston, the Liberal overseas scrutineer, complain: "Never can there have been such frauds, never an election such a travesty."

No historian has ever detailed the organizational efforts in the Unionist campaign. English does, from material which was found, ironically, in the papers of W. F. O'Connor, who acted as the equivalent of the chief electoral officer in 1917. These papers specify the chief organizer(s) for the Unionist cause in each province with whom he worked. So much for the impartiality of the key bureaucrat in a "democratically" conducted election! The results by December were foregone: an astonishing 92.1 per cent of overseas vote for the government.

Equally questionable means were justified to achieve Unionist victory at home. The vote was extended to the wives, widows and female relatives of

men overseas who could be counted on to support the government. The vote was taken away from non-British immigrant arrivals after 1902 who could not be counted upon to support the government. Conscription had been introduced, but the registration and exemption figures under the Military Services Act were only 21,568 reporting for service, while 316,376 applied for exemption. These claims for exemption were not only from Quebec, but from rural Ontario and other portions of "loyal Canada" — so much so that the government had to modify its position by an order-in-council, stating that, whenever an agricultural worker had been denied an exemption by a tribunal, the minister of militia could review his case and exempt the worker if he believed the person was "promoting agricultural production".

The resulting Unionist government was, racially, an Anglo-Saxon monopoly; religiously, overwhelmingly Protestant; socially and economically, almost totally restricted to the upper middle class. In its ranks was only one French-Canadian; not a single worker, skilled or unskilled; even such socio-economic groups as the small town merchant, so common in earlier parliaments, were absent. It was representative of the "nationalist elite", and excluded, often deliberately, the great diversity of Canadians, with consequences which are still quite discernible, notably in Quebec.

The Decline Of Politics is solid historical research which makes fascinating general reading.

Borden, His Life And World is one of a new series which now contains P. W. Waite's Macdonald, J. L. Granatstein's Mackenzie King, and has in preparation Richard Clippingdale's Laurier and Robert Bothwell's Pearson, all under the general editorship of the distinguished Canadian historian, W. Kaye Lamb.

It is a popular history at its best, an admirable introduction for the student or general reader. Though thoroughly readable, there is no sacrifice of historical accuracy. In printing and lay-out, the volume is excellent. There are 20 color plates and over 100 black and white pictures, many of which are photographic art. Together they add a pictorial presentation that is remarkably comprehensive of events and social conditions, as well as of the central character, Robert Laird Borden. If only history could always be so engagingly and authoritatively presented!

Donald C. MacDonald is NDP member of the Ontario Legislature for York South.

PLANNING FOR THE WAR  
IN NORTH AMERICA  
BY RICHARD A. PRESTON  
McGill-Queen's University Press, 290 pages, \$22

REVIEWED BY J. L. GRANATSTEIN

Today we are so inclined to think of Canada and the United States as allies that we forget it was not always so. The myth of the undefended border, long destroyed by Charles Stacey, still tends to linger on, although every schoolboy is sure to have learned that the dastardly Fenians helped push the British North American provinces toward Confederation. It was British-American friction that dragged Canada into difficulties with its neighbor throughout the nineteenth century, and there were usually hot-heads on both sides of the border who were spoiling for a scrap in the name of Manifest Destiny or God and Queen.

What Professor Richard Preston, a Canadian who teaches at Duke Univer-

sity in North Carolina, has demonstrated conclusively here is that war planning went on in Ottawa and Washington well into the 1930s. The efforts of Buster Brown, Colonel J. Sutherland Brown, the Director of Military Operations and Planning in Ottawa in the 1920s, have been known for some time. Brown was the author of Defence Scheme Number 1, a 200-page plan for a war against the United States to be featured by lightning strikes at Spokane, Seattle, Minneapolis and St. Paul, Albany, parts of Maine, and the Niagara Frontier. Today Sutherland-Brown is something of a hero to nationalists although the general view is probably that he was a bit of a crackpot.

But as Preston shows, his counterparts in the United States were making similar plans. How seriously the United States took its plans for war in North America is less clear, and as Preston notes quite properly, "The drafting of a color plan (Canada was

Crimson) did not signify anticipation of war with the country concerned. The color plans were contingency plans to meet either probable or improbable situations." In other words, American war planning against Canada was largely an exercise in abstract and technical processes, a method of training staff officers. Sutherland-Brown's scheme, on the other hand, was put into the hands of district military officers, some of whom planned reconnaissance missions in support of it. The surrealism still seems greater north of the border.

Preston's book offers us more than this new material on the period after the Great War. It is a detailed history of the military tensions after Confederation, of the planning on both sides of the border. This is a good, competent study based on a wide range of sources in Canada, the United States and Britain, but sometimes the material gets thin and Preston is forced to generalize on the basis of an article by an obscure

junior officer, rotting away at a frontier outpost. Occasionally, too, Preston gets caught up in the political intricacies where his mastery of the sources is less certain. And one might also object to the way he dismisses the military threat to Canada from the United States during the Great War. At least into 1916 there were fears of raids from German-Americans of Fenian sympathizers, and although the military masters were less calm. Some of this could have appeared in the book.

Preston concludes by observing that today "The American menace... no longer takes the form of planning for a military invasion on the ground, and Canada's defence against it has similarly changed its shape." Rest assured, brave Canadian lads, the staff planners in the Foreign Investment Review Agency stand on guard for us.

J. L. Granatstein is a professor of history at York University.

Buster Brown may have been a crackpot, but he had his counterparts over the border

## THE DEFENCE OF THE UNDEFENDED BORDER

PLANNING FOR THE WAR  
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BY RICHARD A. PRESTON  
McGill-Queen's University Press, 290 pages, \$22

REVIEWED BY J. L. GRANATSTEIN

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J. L. Granatstein is a professor of history at York University.

A shrewd insight into ordinary people and their ways. No puffing and blowing about the old outposts.

## TALES FROM PIGEON INLET

BY TED RUSSELL  
Breakwater Books, 175 pages, \$4.95

REVIEWED BY PATRICK O'FLAHERTY

This book is a selection from the rich store of eight hundred stories which Ted Russell, speaking as the character Uncle Mose, broadcast on the Newfoundland network of the CBC between 1954 and 1963. The setting of the stories is Pigeon Inlet, an isolated fishing community in the immediate post-Confederation period, just beginning to feel the influence of new ideas and North American technological improvement. The intrusion of such modernity into the ancient ways of outboard life is the main theme, and the theme is handled with an appealing gentleness, whimsy and wisdom. Uncle Mose is a shrewd and tolerant observer of a people on the brink of a new way of life. His version of the old Newfoundland outpost is so different from that of some recent writers, so much closer, it seems to me, to what that setting was really like, and so applicable to settled rural life anywhere, that this book should prove a delight to readers far beyond the shores of Newfoundland.

There is no puffing and blowing here about the uniqueness of the outpost, the unsung heroism of the fishermen, or

the sanctity of old traditions. Pigeon Inlet "is much about the same as any small place anywhere on the Main-

land," Uncle Mose says; and as for the vaunted bravery of the fishermen, "a lot of this talk about some people being brave and others being cowardly is a pack of nonsense." There is little or no antagonism towards modern technology in Pigeon Inlet. In fact, the people want as much of it as they can get. The more fish plants, drying plants, Danish seiners, hockey games from away on the radio, education, television — the more of all this they can have, the better they like it. This is a refreshing change from the distorted images of the old outpost inflicted annually on Canadian readers. Ted Russell did indeed want to preserve the outpost way of life, but he wanted to see it kept up to date, with the amenities and opportunities of advancing civilization. He wanted a dynamic and useful outpost.

There is in all his stories a shrewd insight into how ordinary people think. Russell's men and women cling to no foolish romantic notion about the past, or moan and groan about innovation. Nor are they coarse, loud, drunken, primitive, bigoted, hostile, or elemental. They simply carry on, driving the

system of life onwards from year to year, living quietly, hoping for improvements, but doubting many such improvements will occur. They are people who have the look of observed reality. Ordinary people, as Russell saw, have little difficulty adjusting to change. It is only the intellectual who has this difficulty, who sees the chicken take-out bars and beer advertisements as some kind of affront to virtue. Uncle Mose and his kind are earthy, accepting, and durable.

The limitation of Ted Russell's work is that it remains centred on the domestic and the whimsical. The harsh economic realities of the old outpost way of life are passed over, not because Russell did not see them, but because he did not choose to emphasize them. He seemed to want to preserve the best about the people he knew and loved so well. He was himself blood of their blood, bone of their bone, and as they listened to him in their thousands in the 50s-60s they may well have gained a measure of self-assurance and pride from his spoken word. Now they have his written word too, to help them and all of us new Canadians as we turn to the uncertain future.

Patrick O'Flaherty is a professor of English at Memorial University.



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