

T. J. Allard
Straight Up.
Private Broadcasting in Canada:
1918 - 1958

Ottawa: Canadian Communications Foundation, 1979.

Warner Troyer
The Sound and the Fury:
An Anecdotal History of
Canadian Broadcasting
Rexdale, Ontario: John Wiley & Sons Canada Ltd,
1980.

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Straight Up by T. J. Allard and The Sound and Fury by Warner Troyer are two fairly recent contributions to the field of Canadian Broadcast history. Both represent a contribution to an already existing vast body of literature. However, from a scholarly point of view, there is much work yet to be accomplished and these publications contribute little to the field.

Warner Troyer's book is precisely what it purports to be, "to make some color, pageantry and irony of our broadcast experience accessible and entertaining." Troyer's report is subjective; his is well known in Canadian broadcast circles, having been heavily involved since the early '50's. Objective reporting according to him is "as improbable as the self-lubricating, perpetual motion machine" with such reporting available only from computerized weather terminals. Troyer believes the reporter owes the audience the benefits of the

sensory experience, "of the senses and our glands as well as the hard facts". This is reflected in *The Sound and The Fury: An Anecdotal History of Canadian Broadcasting*.

The text is chronologically organized beginning with the Canadian struggles of Fessenden and Marconi and concluding in 1980 with his editorial on the new technology. His bibliography is primarily for the novice. He cites the standard textual and governmental publications dealing with the subject.

The text is liberally sprinkled with historical pictures. Indeed it is a good pictorial history. It is short, concise and enjoyable reading and provides interesting material for spicing up the history lecture. Troyer criticizes the governments for helping the Italian inventor while Fessenden was forced to seek help outside Canada. He is critical of modern budgetary practices which create "phantom" recorders. The color comes from Troyer's own experience in the business and his writing style. However, it is not always obvious as to which account represents experience and which represents the reporter. His wit, style and critical analysis, however, are consistent throughout.

Troyer's bias is perhaps most self evident in the epilogue. It is a predictable prognosis of broadcasting's continuing contributions to our society. He credits television for the re-invention of the town meeting and describes broadcast programmers as "conservative to a fault". There are many in the business of scholarly and commercial program analysis who would disagree completely. What Troyer sees for the future is unclear. He calls for programming which is of "clear relevance" to the individual viewer, but he says little about its content. For Troyer the hope is in the new technology. "As with Fessenden in the

beginning, Canadians were well ahead in many areas of new technologies...New frontiers have always attracted the adventurous ...maybe in the eighties and nineties, broadcasting will find its new Lindberghs. They're overdue."

In short, **The Sound and The Fury** is a journalistic narrative. It is informative for the novice and provides interesting spice for the history lecture. It does not contribute any new understanding to the field, but it did not claim that as its purpose. It is a pictorial and anecdotal history.

T. J. Allard's **Straight Up** could have been one of the most significant contributions to the literature in the past decade. Unfortunately it stops far short of its declared purpose. **Straight Up: Private Broadcasting in Canada: 1918 - 1958**, covers an area heretofore overlooked. Allard indicates his major purposes are:

- (a) to explain how the present framework of broadcasting in Canada really evolved.
- (b) To document the fact that the so-called private sector is now and always was, the most significant and useful element in Canadian broadcasting.
- (c) to demonstrate that there has never been any 'master plan' or coherent philosophy of development for broadcasting. Our present structure grew from the 'private sector service'; and the ambitions of a handful of men who wanted to control the shape and content of broadcasting from Ottawa. (emphasis added) (Allard, p. 3)

Allard is in a position to fulfill these objectives. He, too, is a pioneer of sorts, in Canadian broadcasting. As former head of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters, he has been

a vocal force in the development of the private sector.

The book is a disappointing narrative. The organization is roughly chronological. Beginning with the nature of radio during the experimental era, he works his way through the major events of the industry and governmental activity. Allard begins each chapter with interesting descriptive information. He is successful in enticing the reader. However, too often there is little substantive follow through or expansion of the introductory information. The writing falls back to a dry listing of facts which lack historical justification. For example, in the "Regional Mosaic," he briefly presents selected historical summaries of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia and Atlantic stations. The history, however, is never put into perspective with the other major historical events. It is isolated in its context. The listings also consistently drop bits of information and intrigue that are simply not developed. For example, he hints of Marconi's experiments with television and drops the subject with the statement that "these ambitious undertakings were killed by political maneuverings in Ottawa." What were these political maneuverings? Why did they occur?

The events discussed represent the private sector and are given a liberal dose of Allard's personal interpretation. There is little new information, but the private sector point of view needs expression. In this way, the text does contribute an alternative look at history. This is the most significant contribution of the publication. Much of Canada's broadcasting history has been written without perspective. Allard's writing is one small step in the direction of balancing that record. However, there is much work to be accomplished.

Allard has really fallen victim to his own criticism. He criticizes the academic community for perpetuating the governments myths. They have been "crooned by academic theses who hate to be confused with hard evidence...." However, Allard fails to present any "hard evidence" in his text. For him, documented "hard evidence" is apparently in the narration of his own experience. We are expected to accept his version without question and with no knowledge of his reference or source material. Although Allard claims the work will "document" the significance of the private sector, he has presented no hard evidence, other than his own narrative. It is disappointing. Undoubtedly, Allard has access to and knowledge of documents that are not available to most historians. Had he documented his work, as promised, he would have initialed a new surge of investigation. Scholars are acutely aware of the deficiency in historical writings and his writing could have been a catalyst. However, the text is not documented and has had little effect on historical research. It has not lived up to its declared purpose.

It is important that we take the proper perspective. Much of the criticism leveled here is not aimed at the content but rather the methodology. Allard is a professional broadcaster not a historical scholar. The text has a value similar to the oral history interview. The information is important and insightful, but further research is needed to document the events and place them in proper perspective.

In short, **Straight Up** is an interesting historical narrative. Its private sector bias is self evident, see the "Epilogue". It is a clear editorial. If the reader understands that the text comes from this viewpoint, then it can stimulate ideas for further investigation. It is worth reading.