THIS HOUR HAS 22 MINUTES AND THE ART OF RESISTANCE:
A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF CANADIAN CULTURAL ANTLANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the role of rhetoric in identity creation, and demonstrates how popular discourses can shape and maintain cultural identity. It examines how a marginalized culture uses its popular discourse as a way of establishing and maintaining a sense of cultural distinctiveness in face of overwhelming external (in this case American) influences. In particular, this thesis examines the formation of Canadian identity through an analysis of the first eight seasons of the award-winning satirical television programme This Hour Has 22 Minutes.

Television programmes are a type of cultural discourse, and they appeal to their audience by reflecting back to that audience recognizable aspects of themselves. In cultures that are quite resistant to an outside influence, like Canada's, public discourses often act as languages of resistance; in other words, our shared public expressions are marked as much by a sense of “against whom,” as by a sense of “with whom.” 1 This thesis offers a case study of one such resistant discourse in order to explore how these languages of resistance, or antilanguages, help to establish and maintain a culture’s distinct identity, especially in the face of overwhelming outside cultural influences. My analysis will draw upon the works of several theorists, such as Kenneth Burke, Norman Fairclough, and John Fiske, to illustrate how shared resistance to “them” contributes to the creation of a stronger sense of “us”.

Canadian discourses have often been labelled as simply “anti-Americanism”, but this thesis demonstrates that this resistance is a part of a larger pattern of Canadian identity that serves to unite us as a culture. These patterns have been identified by

many critics of Canadian culture that I will draw upon in this thesis, including Jennifer MacLennan, Margaret Atwood, Pierre Berton, and Northrop Frye. This thesis demonstrates how this antilanguage functions to create Canadian identity through case studies of the sketches "Talking to Americans" (Chapter 2) and "Connie Bloor" (Chapter 3) then applies the same patterns to a variety of sketches taken from the rest of the programme (Chapter 4).
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Introduction: The Rhetoric of This Hour Has 22 Minutes

One of the accepted truths of rhetorical theory is that a culture's public discourses, including its popular expressions, not only reflect but also help to shape how that culture perceives and defines itself. The artefacts of popular culture, like all shared expression, are anchored in a foundation of "unquestioned beliefs" that the culture "takes for granted without hesitation." Centuries ago, Aristotle explained how such commonly shared beliefs can provide an effective basis for persuasion: "because they are commonplaces, everyone seems to agree with them, and therefore they are taken for truth." However, as pervasive and influential as they are, normally these "commonplaces" are neither made explicit nor overtly recognized; instead, they are simply assumed by the members of the culture "to be shared by every reasonable being," and they function "typically without our being aware" of them.

Thus, audiences are most readily persuaded by arguments that incorporate attitudes and beliefs that they have already accepted, since these arguments will sound

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3 Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 99.

like common sense to them. These embedded arguments, known as enthymemes, appear routinely in overtly persuasive messages, such as election campaigns or advertising.

However, as Jennifer MacLennan points out, what is less well recognized is that these same devices are equally pervasive and influential in other kinds of messages—messages that on the surface do not appear to be persuasive in intent. As MacLennan and others have shown, television programmes provide an especially good example of popular forms that create such implicit arguments. They invite our willing suspension of disbelief in exchange for the entertainment of a good story, which typically displays, in dramatic form, the same network of “common sense assumptions” that are found in overtly persuasive forms. As a result, television programmes provide powerful vehicles for social and cultural identification—and a reliable source of insight into the culture that produced them.

This thesis argues that the award-winning Canadian television satire This Hour Has 22 Minutes provides just this kind of insight into the Canadian ethos. The programme features satirical commentary on Canadian politics, news, and current events through sketches presented in a news-style format. My analysis will focus on the

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7 This Hour Has 22 Minutes. (CBC) Seasons 1-8. 1993-2002.
first eight seasons, which feature the original cast of four – Mary Walsh, Greg Thomey, Cathy Jones, and Rick Mercer – playing a variety of eccentric characters who comment on, interpret, report, and dramatize hot topics and news items. Drawing examples from various sketches, I intend to show how This Hour Has 22 Minutes participates in a broader pattern of resistant discourse that typifies the rhetoric of Canadian identity, both reflecting and shaping the commonplaces that Canadians take for granted as part of their cultural context.

This thesis is primarily a rhetorical criticism of This Hour Has 22 Minutes. The first chapter establishes a theoretical foundation drawn from rhetorical theory, rhetorical criticism, and the rhetoric of Canadian identity. Chapters Two and Three are case studies of two of the programme’s most overtly resistant sketches, both of which feature the familiar patterns of Canadian identity rhetoric: “Talking to Americans” and “Connie Bloor.” Chapter Four demonstrates how the same resistant patterns that show up in the two case study sketches also operate in a variety of instances throughout the rest of the programme. Finally, the conclusion discusses the implications of my analysis for our understanding of Canadian identity and of the potential uses of rhetorical-critical methods.

The purpose of the analysis chapters is to demonstrate the ways in which cultures – particularly marginalized cultures – use patterns of differentiation to establish a collective identity, and how these patterns infuse the public discourses that the culture produces. In particular, my analysis of This Hour Has 22 Minutes is intended to demonstrate how even the texts of popular entertainment – and perhaps especially these – contribute to the establishment and maintenance of a unique cultural identity by
showing us to ourselves. Thus, I will show how This Hour Has 22 Minutes participates in a uniquely Canadian language of resistance that is a hallmark of Canadian identity formation.

After laying out the defining features of the Canadian antilanguage in Chapter One, I will demonstrate, through case studies and examples, how these same patterns are exploited in the popular Canadian programme, and with what effect. By considering the alleged “anti-Americanism” of overtly resistant sketches like “Talking to Americans” and “Connie Bloor,” I will attempt to establish how a cultural antilanguage operates and what it contributes to the formation and maintenance of a distinct identity, particularly for a culture whose identity is threatened by overwhelming outside influences. My ultimate goal is to contribute to our understanding of how our public discourses help to shape and maintain identity.

Chapter Four, the final analysis chapter, demonstrates that the patterns revealed in the two featured sketches are not unique to these overtly resistant examples. Instead, as I will show, the elements of antilanguage demonstrated in “Talking to Americans” and “Connie Bloor” also permeate and form a foundation for much of the rest of the programme. As I will show, its humour and its unifying sense of shared understanding depend to a large degree on the recognition and participation in a set of cultural assumptions that Canadians take for granted. The same themes of resistance typical of Connie and of “Talking to Americans” also inform sketches such as “Dakey Dunn,” “Jerry Boyle,” “Celebrity Headlock,” “Hockey Notebook,” “Quinlan Quints,” “Streeters,” “Heritage Minute,” and “Playboy Grotto,” just to name a few.
This thesis is informed by three central concerns. The first, of course, is to provide an analysis of how my object, *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*, gains its rhetorical appeal among its intended audience, and thus what has made it such a long-running and popular discourse in Canada. Even though the scope of my thesis is the first eight seasons with the original cast, *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* is at this writing still running in its original format after thirteen years, having even successfully survived a series of cast changes that have seen the departure of all but Cathy Jones of the original cast. My analysis aims at uncovering what it is about this particular discourse that has made it so popular with Canadians that its format still works after so long on the air.

My second major purpose, beyond contributing to an understanding of this specific object, is to add to our understanding of the larger tradition of Canadian identity rhetoric, and how a specific discourse like *22 Minutes* grows out of, and contributes to, the patterns of Canadian identity that have been established by other critics in this area, especially Jennifer MacLennan, Pierre Berton, and Margaret

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Atwood.\(^9\) It is important to note that Canada clearly has regional differences; however, for the purpose of this thesis, I focus on an identity that the whole country can share.

Finally, this thesis is concerned with exploring what the discipline of rhetoric has to offer when studying popular discourses and how they shape and maintain identity. Though rhetoric has traditionally been thought of as a theory of persuasion and of practical uses of discourses, in the last century Kenneth Burke confirmed its


important symbolic role in human relations, and particularly in identity formation.\textsuperscript{11}

Other theorists have followed, providing definitions that recognize the inescapable
importance of rhetoric to the establishment of community and social identity.\textsuperscript{12} This
acknowledgement opens doors for critics to explore all sorts of identity-building
discourses that had not previously been considered rhetorical, and enables us to better
understand the process of identification that Burke claims is the driving force of
rhetorical activity.

In order to accomplish these ends, I will be drawing on a variety of theorists and
critics from the disciplines of rhetoric, communication, sociology, and Canadian
studies. My critical method will rely on Kenneth Burke’s method of cluster criticism,
which can “help the critic discover a rhetor’s worldview” through the patterns of
association and dissociation evident in a discourse.\textsuperscript{13} I will also employ Burke’s theory
of “perspective by incongruity,”\textsuperscript{14} sometimes called the comic corrective, which
consists of juxtaposing significantly different words, ideas, or images in order to
provide an alternate way of seeing an event or situation, and which is heavily evident in
\textit{22 Minutes}. Finally, I will draw on the work of sociologist Norman Fairclough and his

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11} Kenneth Burke, \textit{A Rhetoric of Motives} (Berkeley: University of California
\item \textsuperscript{12} Roderick P. Hart, \textit{Modern Rhetorical Criticism} 2e. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon,
1997) 36.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Sonja Foss, \textit{Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice} (Prospect Heights:
Waveland, 1996) 63.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Kenneth Burke, \textit{Attitudes Towards History} 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed. (Berkeley, University of
\end{itemize}
concept of antilanguage – a discursive pattern characterized by “acts of resistance” – to reveal how resistance in discourses operates.15

In the area of Canadian identity, I will be drawing extensively on the work of rhetorician Jennifer MacLennan, who has identified a number of “commonplaces” and patterns that characterize the rhetoric of Canadian identity. In particular, I will be using her concept of Canada as an “Islandized” culture and what that association means for our identity. I will also make use of the works of other Canadians who have written extensively on our cultural identity, among them Northrop Frye, Pierre Berton, and Margaret Atwood.

Rhetorical study allows us to look beneath the surface appeal of the discourses that resonate with a culture in order to discover the patterns of that culture’s “common sense.” For Canadians, one such surface pattern is overt resistance to the influences and values of American mass culture. But at the same time that we so explicitly resist these commodities, we also embrace them. In this thesis, I intend to explore that pattern of resistance as it is codified in This Hour Has 22 Minutes in order to reveal what’s going on in the heart of that contradiction.

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15 MacLennan, “I Can’t See the Difference, Can You See the Difference” 15.
Chapter I: Rhetoric, Identity, and Canadian Resistance

As an academic discipline with a history spanning two millennia, rhetoric offers rich resources for understanding public communication, and in particular the ways in which shared messages exert their influence, shaping common attitudes and behaviour. In order to understand how rhetorical methods can lead us to such understanding, we will begin by establishing the nature and scope of rhetorical study. From Aristotle’s assertion that “rhetorical study, in its strict sense, is concerned with the modes of persuasion”¹ to Donald Bryant’s more contemporary view that the art involves “adjusting ideas to people, and people to ideas,”² definitions of rhetoric have consistently focused on the ways in which rhetors use public messages to influence the thoughts and actions of others.

However, although rhetoric has always been focused on persuasive effects, not all the discourses that a rhetorician studies are expressly persuasive in design or form. It is important to understand that persuasive intent is not always explicitly signalled; in fact, one of the basic tenets of rhetorical theory is that influence is exerted even — and perhaps most effectively — by discourses that do not appear overtly persuasive. It is for this reason that recent theorists like Sonja Foss have emphasized the persuasive

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influence inherent in all communication, and have cautioned us, as Kenneth Burke does, to look for rhetoric’s influence even “in places where it is not thought to belong.” Roderick Hart similarly notes the role of rhetoric in any “attempt to build community” through linguistic or other symbolic means. According to these definitions of rhetoric, all public communication—even when it may not appear to be explicitly persuasive—can be considered rhetorical, since it is through its public communication that a community builds its shared sense of identity.

Not only does persuasion often occur invisibly, but it is actually most effective when it is least visible—that is, when the persuasive function of the message does not call attention to itself. The form of a message may even seem to be other than persuasive: it may lament, entertain, inform, or celebrate, persuading only indirectly. However, as Edwin Black notes, our communication always has a persuasive element, in part because people “look to the discourse they are attending for cues that tell them how they are to view the world.” In other words, it is not simply explicit arguments that persuade; the unspoken assumptions that shape how the content of a message is presented are just as influential as that content itself. For example, news reports do not explicitly make persuasive arguments, but many critics have argued that they

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5 Roderick P. Hart, Modern Rhetorical Criticism 2e. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1997) 36.

nevertheless exert influence by implication, persuading an audience by the positioning and wording of a story to hold a particular opinion of the event.\(^7\)

Similarly, as Jennifer MacLennan points out, dramatic programmes can persuade without seeming to do so "by presenting us with a set of dramatized experiences anchored in the same network of 'commonsense assumptions' that drive more explicitly persuasive artefacts."\(^8\) By so doing, the stories we see on television "invite our willing suspension of disbelief in exchange for the anticipatory and participatory pleasures inherent in their very form." Recognition of the power of such indirect persuasion led Roderick Hart to assert that the most effective persuasion is often presented in forms not commonly recognized as persuasive.\(^9\) In such guises persuasion is not only invisible to its audience, but also much more powerful, since the audience may be unaware that a point of view is being advanced and hence be less inclined to resist it.

Rhetorical influence may also escape notice because it is embedded in a culture's values and in the assumptions the audience take for granted, frequently without even being aware of doing so. Such naturalized values form the "common sense" of a culture, and are assumed by the hearer even when they are not explicitly


\(^9\) Hart 31.
stated. Effective public persuasion relies on these common sense values of the audience, and if we want to gain insight into the values and beliefs shared by that audience, we may do so by studying the patterns of assumption and inference in discourses that are designed to appeal to them. As Chaim Perelman and Lucy Olbrechts-Tyteca point out, “the particular culture of a given audience shows so strongly through the speeches addressed to it that we...can rely on them to a considerable extent for our knowledge of [the culture’s] character.”

That character is in part reflected and in part shaped by the culture's public discourses, including its media such as newspapers, magazines, television, and movies, since one has to at least be able to entertain certain assumptions held by a community in order to make sense of the discourses addressed to it. These media, like other public messages, exert an influence on how the audience see themselves, inviting them “not simply to believe something, but to be something.” If public communication is a primary means of building community, then it stands to reason that one of the most productive approaches to understanding a culture and its identity is, as Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca suggest, to study the patterns of shared values and beliefs revealed by the patterns of association and dissociation in its public discourses.

One kind of public discourse with an enormous potential to persuade without seeming to do so is television. This form of media is particularly powerful, as it has the capability of reaching large audiences with a level of immediacy not possible less than

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11 Black 119.
even a century ago. With its combination of images and human voice, its seemingly infinite variety, and its easy access from the homes of millions across the world, television is popular entertainment, but it is also capable of shaping the way its viewers experience events in the world, as Marshall McLuhan’s famous axiom “the medium is the message”\(^{12}\) demonstrates. According to McLuhan, our contemporary mass media “shape and control the scale and form of human association and action.”\(^{13}\) Marshall Gregory takes the point even further, arguing that “there is no such thing as being ‘merely’ entertained” by television, since even entertainment requires an audience to assume, and accept, the programme’s point of view.\(^ {14}\) If these theorists are correct, television can and should be analyzed to uncover its power as a persuasive and identity-creating public discourse.

*The Scope of Rhetoric*

Whether they describe it as “building community,”\(^{15}\) “adjusting people to ideas,”\(^ {16}\) promoting “right attitudes,”\(^ {17}\) “inducing co-operation,”\(^ {18}\) or simply using the


\(^{13}\) McLuhan 24.


\(^{15}\) Hart 36.

\(^{16}\) Bryant 401-404.

\(^{17}\) Richard Weaver, “Language is Sermonic,” *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present* eds. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg 2\(^{nd}\) ed. (Boston: Bedford, 2001) 1351.
tools of persuasion,\textsuperscript{19} rhetorical theorists have consistently recognized the centrality of influence to an understanding of rhetoric. Whether explicit or implicit in motive, rhetoric always aims to influence an audience's beliefs or actions; as Lloyd Bitzer has established, rhetorical discourse "functions ultimately to produce action or change in the world"\textsuperscript{20} by enlisting the cooperation of others.

All considerations of rhetoric recognize the importance of the audience's role in shaping persuasive appeals. Whether it takes the form of overt persuasion or simply invites others to "see as I see, know as I know, value as I value,"\textsuperscript{21} effective rhetoric must accommodate its audience's expectations and values. As a result, the study of rhetoric, beginning with Aristotle's treatise, has always involved an understanding of audience psychology. In his \textit{Rhetoric}, Aristotle identifies as one of the modes of persuasion "putting the audience into a certain frame of mind," and he devotes much of his book to understanding those being addressed.\textsuperscript{22}

For Aristotle, the key to persuasion is the enthymeme, a participatory reasoning structure similar in structure to the syllogism. Like the syllogism, the enthymeme links premise with conclusion, but it differs from the syllogism in that the key connection between ideas is left unstated, with the expectation that the audience will supply it from

\textsuperscript{18} Burke, \textit{Rhetoric} 43.

\textsuperscript{19} Aristotle 1355a.


\textsuperscript{22} Aristotle 1356a.
their own assumptions. The enthymeme gains its power from the fact that the audience actually help construct the rhetor’s argument by supplying the “missing” information from their own “common sense.” As Aristotle explains, “the enthymeme must consist of few propositions, fewer than those which make up the normal syllogism. For if any of these propositions is a familiar fact, there is no need even to mention it; the hearer adds it himself.”23 The filling in of the unstated premise requires that the audience participate in the argument, usually without recognizing that they are doing so, making it in Aristotle’s view, “the most effective of the modes of persuasion.”24

Like Aristotle, the contemporary theorist Norman Fairclough explains that assumptions grounded in common sense “are implicit, backgrounded, taken for granted, not things that people are consciously aware of, rarely explicitly formulated or examined or questioned.”25 That is, the common sense that underlies an effective rhetorical appeal is automatically accepted by the participants in the exchange because it is already part of the worldview they take for granted. When the unstated connection in an argument is grounded in values or assumption the audience accepts as common sense, the audience makes the leap from premise to conclusion along with the rhetor, often without even realizing that any argument has been made. Because the persuasion is implicit rather than explicit, and because the audience supplies the connections, there is little resistance to the rhetor’s persuasive attempts.

23 Aristotle 1357a.

24 Aristotle 1355a.

When they participate in cultural discourses that require them to supply the unstated assumptions from their own values and beliefs, the audience are able to share in a communal identity that their very participation shapes and affirms. This process is the key to understanding the humour and the appeal of cultural discourses of identity such as the popular and long-running Canadian satire This Hour Has 22 Minutes: the programme draws upon shared assumptions to make us laugh, but at the same time it exerts a shaping and affirming influence on Canadians’ perceptions of themselves and their place in the world. Invitations to participate and share in a cultural identity are repeated in a variety of cultural discourses, and the repeated participation becomes, in turn, a ritual affirmation of the audience’s membership in the culture.

Such ritual affirmation has special significance for a culture whose identity is uncertain, as I will shortly show, and it constitutes an example of what Kenneth Burke calls repetitive form, “a restatement of the same thing in new ways.”26 According to Burke, this conventionalized form is best represented by “a character repeating his identity...under changing situations; the sustaining of an attitude.”27 The sketches of 22 Minutes, as well as the programme as a whole, offer exactly this kind of repeated invitation to participate and share our national identity and as such are part of the ritual enactment of Canadian cultural identity. The programme re-asserts the familiar patterns of resistance and survival that can be found in other Canadian identity discourses.

27 Burke, Counter-Statement 125.
An example from 22 Minutes will help to illustrate how this ritual enactment works. In the "Talking to Americans" sketch, Rick Mercer interviews people in New Orleans as reporter J.B. Dixon. He asks for their opinion on what our national flag should be because we supposedly are still using the British Union Jack: "We’re doing a story on the fact that the Canadian government has decided to do away with the Union Jack and we are actually going to have our own flag now. We’re pretty excited about that. We have a couple of designs; one is kind of a hockey puck, a moose head, a flag with a fish, and another one is a maple leaf. What do you think?" Rather than recognizing that Canada does have its own flag, even when it is included among the options presented to them, the American interviewees respond with their opinion of the best design for Canada’s "new flag." The point of the exchange is not to catch the American interviewees in an error, although doing so heightens the humour; instead, it is intended to dramatize an assumption every Canadian has learned to take for granted: that Americans are ignorant of basic Canadian facts. The interviewees fulfill the cliché, and in turn, affirm the rightness of our assumptions.

Canadians delight in laughing at this display of American ignorance in part because of its situational irony: it highlights the fact that people so geographically close to Canada are so unaware of obvious facts about the country; at the same time, it points to the paradox of Canadians’ own unavoidable awareness of American culture. In their amused rancour at American ignorance, the Canadian audience participate in the ritual aspects of the discourse, and in so doing reinforce one of shared commonplaces of

28 Rick Mercer, "Talking to Americans," This Hour Has 22 Minutes, (CBC) Season 6, Episode 14. 1999.
Canadian public discourse. Thus, by participating in the humour, the listeners are in fact reaffirming and even celebrating their very identity.

Rhetoric and Cultural Identity Formation

As I established in the previous section, public communication participates in and helps to shape the shared worldview of a culture, and as a result it is also concerned with the identity of that culture. The creation of a community’s identity requires a foundation of shared values, goals, attitudes, hopes, or fears. Kenneth Burke argues that such identifications are not simply side effects, but in fact the central aim of rhetoric and persuasion. As he explains, “the classical notion of clear persuasive intent is not an accurate fit for describing the ways in which the members of a group promote social cohesion by acting rhetorically upon themselves and one another.”

Effective persuasion is dependent upon effective identification, which in turn arises out of the desire to belong. Burke, among others, emphasizes a universal human need for such a sense of belonging, and argues that one of the primary ways we achieve that sense of belonging is through our rhetorical activity.

However, it is in the nature of identification that as soon as we are identified with one group, we are necessarily divided from another. Thus, our sense of belonging is forged partly out of a sense of estrangement from some other group or groups, and this is true of all human identifications. As Northrop Frye explains, identity is always “a way of defining oneself against something else,” a process he describes as more

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29 Burke, Rhetoric 46.
30 Burke, Rhetoric 146.
"agonistic" than "antagonistic." Along with Frye and Burke, cultural theorist John Fiske counts "the sense of oppositionality, the sense of difference" as more important than similarity to any sense of identity, and points out that cultural discourses thus often have as much of a sense of "against whom," as a sense of "with whom." Burke confirms the inevitability of such difference when he emphasizes that identification always, and inescapably, "implies division."

Because identity is based upon what members of a culture divide themselves from as well as what they identify with, a culture will typically create and reaffirm its sense of identity as much by repudiating an undesirable "them" as by embracing an "us." Burke therefore includes "identification by antithesis" as "the most urgent form" of identification. It is, in effect, a creation of "union by some opposition shared in common." In sum, a group creates a sense of shared values in part through the repudiation of a common undesirable other.

The repudiative element of identity formation is true of all groups, but is particularly important for marginalized cultures, or cultures that must neutralize the influences of a dominant other in order to maintain their own cultural distinctiveness. They are thus particularly prone to "congregation by segregation."

31 Northrop Frye "Conclusion to a Literary History of Canada," Divisions on a Ground (Toronto, Anansi, 1982) 75.


33 Burke, Rhetoric 45.


35 Burke, "The Rhetorical Situation" 268.
In order to distinguish itself from the dominant culture, the marginalized culture will typically establish its own distinctive patterns of expression—or "antilanguages" as Norman Fairclough calls them— that reflect its separate values and assumptions. Jennifer MacLennan describes a cultural antilanguage as encompassing "acts of resistance, reflecting the attempts by a marginalized culture to achieve identity through the repudiation of a dominant other." Such antilanguages, Fairclough argues, are "set up and used as conscious alternatives to dominant or established discourse types."

An antilanguage has two functions for a marginalized group: first, to give the culture a sense of presence or distinctiveness against the overwhelming influences of a more powerful culture; and second, to allow for a sense of identification or shared sense of identity among the members of the marginalized culture. It is for this reason that through the commonplace of its antilanguage, Canada has become "something like a North American counter-culture against the United States."

Faced with a massive influx of American cultural influences, Canada can be considered a marginalized culture; like all such groups, it employs an antilanguage to counteract the impact of the sheer mass of American discourse, and the American values and assumptions that come embedded within it. Canadian cultural products cannot compete on the basis of financial and media power with American cultural

36 Fairclough 91.


38 Fairclough 91.

39 Frye "Conclusion to a Literary History of Canada" 85-86.
corporations such as Disney, Time-Warner, and Universal Pictures, to name a few; however, Canadians can create our own patterns of dissociation from the dominance of American cultural and corporate influence. As Pierre Berton points out, from a Canadian perspective, such acts of resistance are a "necessary form of cultural protectionism." The necessity of resistance, especially to mass media influences, was recognized as long as fifty years ago in the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, which even in the early days of television warned of the potential dangers of American influence on Canadian culture.

As in many marginalized cultures, the Canadian language of resistance uses humour and satire as its primary tools. In particular, Canadians employ what Margaret Atwood calls "the laughter of derision and distancing." It thus fulfills the repudiative function so important to a marginalized group in forming and maintaining its separate identity. According to MacLennan, such humour functions as one "means whereby a small country like Canada, on the margins of a larger, more economically powerful and culturally extroverted nation, establishes and maintains its sense of distinctiveness."

For Berton the role of humour is especially important in distancing Canadian values from American ones: "The only way to fight American values [is] to make them

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43 MacLennan, “I Can’t See the Difference, Can You See the Difference” 3.
appear vulgar and vaguely comic.”\textsuperscript{44} This form of humour portrays its object, in this case Americans, in a negative light for the amusement of those witnessing the spectacle: “The laugh is laughing at, not with; his laughter makes him feel superior to the butt of the joke, and he can say to himself smugly, ‘That person is stupid, or crude, or absurd; I am not like that.’\textsuperscript{45} As I will demonstrate in the remainder of this thesis, \textit{This Hour Has 22 Minutes} is an instance of exactly such a language of resistance, whose purpose is to use humour to carve out a sense of Canadian identity in the midst of a flood of American cultural products and influences.

\textit{Methods of Rhetorical Criticism}

Rhetorical criticism is the collective name for the variety of methods that rhetoricians use to examine discourses in order to understand how they work to engage and influence their audiences.\textsuperscript{46} Established in the early part of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century by Herbert Wichelns,\textsuperscript{47} rhetorical criticism is “the business of identifying the complications of rhetoric and explaining them...systematically [and] in a comprehensive and efficient manner.”\textsuperscript{48} As a means of understanding “symbolic human action,” or actions performed by humans that “enable us to communicate with

\textsuperscript{44} Berton 58.

\textsuperscript{45} Atwood “What’s So Funny?” 176.


\textsuperscript{48} Hart 23.
one another," rhetorical criticism is performed not only to gain insights into the nature of persuasion, but also to understand those who are persuaded.

Though the roots of rhetoric lie in the tradition of oratory, the study of rhetoric and rhetorical criticism is no longer limited to a consideration of formal speeches. As Barry Brummett explains, recognition of the variety of sources of influence has expanded the scope of rhetorical enquiry to include non-verbal, metonymic and narrative, diffuse, and democratic objects, allowing us to understand the persuasive power of a wide range of contemporary media. Today a rhetor need not gather the intended audience together in the same place to hear a formal address; instead, a single speaker or writer can reach vast audiences through mass produced print, radio, television, and the internet. Examples of objects of rhetorical criticism are varied and abundant. While political speeches are still important objects of study, such as in Leah Ceccarelli’s analysis of Abraham Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address, rhetoric is also routinely applied to contemporary media, as in John Fiske’s analysis of *Hart to Hart*, a primetime television drama of the 1980s. Rhetorical criticism also can be used to examine the phenomenon of public celebrity, such as that of Dennis Rodman, or

49 Foss 4.


cultural events such as the Iditarod, an Alaskan dog sled race.\textsuperscript{54} It has been applied to literature\textsuperscript{55} and other cultural phenomena;\textsuperscript{56} it has even been used to examine criminal acts.\textsuperscript{57} The variety of objects that rhetorical criticism has been used to explore illustrates its versatility as a method for analysing persuasion in all its forms.

In addition to being applied to a variety of objects, rhetorical criticism has also been approached from a variety of perspectives. For example, it is possible to examine an object using a rhetor-centred approach, as in ethical criticism,\textsuperscript{58} psychological criticism,\textsuperscript{59} or biographical criticism.\textsuperscript{60} These methods focus on the person(s) or agent(s) performing the act and how they contribute to the influential nature of the discourse. Another option is a text-based approach, which may employ a method of


\textsuperscript{55} For example, Wayne C. Booth, \textit{A Rhetoric of Fiction} (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961).

\textsuperscript{56} For example, Jeanie Wills, "Sasquatch’s Role in the Canadian Imagination: A Dramastic Analysis." Paper presented North East Popular Culture Conference in Worcester, MA, October 2003.

\textsuperscript{57} For example, Jeanne Y. Fisher, "A Burkean Analysis of a Multiple Murder and Suicide," \textit{Quarterly Journal of Speech} 60 (1974): 175-189.


\textsuperscript{59} For example, Justin Frank, \textit{Bush on the Couch: Inside the Mind of the President} (New York: Harper Collins, 2004).

close reading, such as metaphorical analysis,\textsuperscript{61} critical language study,\textsuperscript{62} or cluster criticism.\textsuperscript{63} Yet another approach examines the scene in which the rhetorical act took place, using such methods as cultural criticism\textsuperscript{64} or situational analysis.\textsuperscript{65} Some critics use multiple methods of rhetorical criticism for a single analysis in order to achieve the fullest possible understanding of their object. Kenneth Burke advocated for such a multiplicity of methods when he advised the critic to “use all there is to use,”\textsuperscript{66} and he devised his method of cluster criticism to assist the critic in uncovering the embedded assumptions in a discourse.

Cluster criticism, or key terms analysis, is designed to “help the critic discover a rhetor’s worldview,”\textsuperscript{67} and hence that rhetor’s notion of identity. In this method, the critic searches out the associative links made in a discourse, and examines the terms or ideas that cluster around those associations. According to Burke,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{61} As in Michael P. Graves, “Functions of Key Metaphors in Early Quaker Sermons, 1671-1700,” Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, 1996) 368-387.
  \item \textsuperscript{62} Described in Fairclough, 77-108.
  \item \textsuperscript{63} Kenneth Burke, A Grammar of Motives (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969) 3.
  \item \textsuperscript{64} John Fiske, Reading the Popular (London: Routledge, 1995).
  \item \textsuperscript{65} Barry Brummett, “Paradoxes of Personalization: Race Relations in Milwaukee,” Rhetoric in Popular Culture (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994) 157-178.
  \item \textsuperscript{66} Kenneth Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973) 23.
  \item \textsuperscript{67} Foss 63.
\end{itemize}
the work of every writer contains a set of implicit equations. He uses
‘associated clusters.’ And you may, by examining his work, find ‘what goes
with what’ in these clusters—what kinds of acts and images and personalities
and situations go with his notions of heroism, villainy, consolation, despair,
etc.68

The “associated clusters” Burke describes also point to an accompanying pattern of
dissociation, and together the two help reveal both the rhetor’s attitude and its
implications. The “implicit equations” Burke refers to are Aristotle’s enthymemes,
founded on the unspoken assumptions that the rhetor and audience share. Cluster
criticism allows the critic to unearth the unstated assumptions upon which persuasion
depends.

In addition, rhetorical criticism allows the development of what Burke termed
“perspective by incongruity.”69 Essentially, perspective by incongruity is a method for
approaching an issue from an alternate point of view, encouraging the critic (or
participant) to achieve a fuller understanding. The power of this perspective shift is in
its radical “otherness” from the taken-for-granted approach. The shocking
juxtaposition of something incongruous is what jolts the audience out of tacit
acceptance of a single interpretation, and for this reason is a common device of satire.
This tool is not only useful for a rhetor who is inventing arguments, however; it also
provides a means by which the critic can recognize when a rhetor is using this sort of
“planned incongruity” to get a similar effect for an audience. Burke notes that

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68 Burke, Literary Form 20.

69 Kenneth Burke, Permanence and Change (Berkeley: University of California
perspective by incongruity is most effective when presented as a comic corrective with the spirit of cooperation and good will.\(^{70}\)

*The Rhetoric of Canadian Identity*

Perhaps more than many other cultures, Canadians constantly question our identity and argue over what makes the culture distinctive. As John Meisel states, “we are constantly brooding over who we are, what gives us our Canadian character, and what makes us different from other nationals.”\(^{71}\) So much of Canadian discourse deals with this concern that Northrop Frye has described it as “the famous Canadian problem of identity.”\(^{72}\) Though there is no definitive answer to the question of what is meant by Canadian identity, common patterns and themes run throughout Canadian discourses. In her celebrated study of Canadian literature and culture, *Survival*, Margaret Atwood demonstrated that such “key patterns, taken together, constitute...a reflection of a national habit of mind.”\(^{73}\) Jennifer MacLennan has argued that a significant part of this habit of mind expresses itself as a discourse of resistance.\(^{74}\) I will show that *This Hour*

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74 For example, Jennifer MacLennan, “Dancing with the Neighbour: Canadians and the Discourse of ‘Anti-Americanism,” *Reimagining Borders: Canada-United States*
Has 22 Minutes features these same patterns of resistance and thus that it is a part of the larger Canadian tradition of resistant discourses that MacLennan has identified.

In keeping with our marginalized state, the Canadian sense of identity may seem to derive as much from our attempts to differentiate ourselves from Americans as it does from our identification with our own culture. As the sociologist Seymour Lipset outlines, “much of what Canadian intellectuals, both scholars and creative artists, write about their own country is presented in comparative context—that is, with reference to the nation to the south. They frequently seek to describe what Canada is by stressing what it is not: the United States.” But despite the ubiquitousness of such repudiative discourses, Canada’s relationship with the United States is contradictory. Canadians love American products, as can be seen by the number of American cultural products that we freely allow within our borders, a number that has increased since the enactment of the North American Free Trade Agreement. Canadians watch American movies and television programmes. We read their books, newspapers and magazines. We wear their clothing brands. We eat from their restaurant chains. As John Meisel notes, Canadians “share a keen awareness of, interest in, and concern with all things American.”

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Relations since 1800 ed. John Herd Thompson and Michael D Behiels (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, forthcoming); MacLennan, “I Can’t See the Difference, Can You See the Difference?”; MacLennan, “Only in Canada, You Say?”

75 Seymour Martin Lipset, Continental Divide: The Values and Institutions of the United States and Canada (New York: Routlage, 1990) xiv-xv


77 Meisel, 304.
However, at the same time as we allow American cultural products inside our borders, Canadians resist the American values that are embedded in those cultural products. This Canadian language of resistance is an open repudiation of American culture and values. In fact, Canadians often resist American values with a fervour that has been labelled by some as “anti-Americanism.” 

However, as Jennifer MacLennan explains, what may appear on the surface to be simply anti-Americanism is more than that for Canadians. MacLennan argues that such talk is not actually about Americans at all, but about clearing space for a Canadian mode of expression: “it is an attempt to redefine the figure-ground relationship to make Canadian distinctiveness visible as figure, and to cast the overwhelming influence of American cultural imports as ground.”

The Canadian antilanguage can be seen in a variety of popular Canadian discourses, from newspapers articles such as Michael Adams’ “Moralistic Them, Humanistic Us,” magazine features such as Maclean’s “America Lite: Is That Our Future?,” and advertising like Molson’s “I am Canadian” campaign, to books like

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79 MacLennan, “Dancing with the Neighbours.”

80 MacLennan, “Dancing with the Neighbours.”


83 The Molson Canadian ads such as “The Rant,” “No Doot,” “Beaver,” and “Office Glen” are available to view at the Bensimon Byrne website <http://bensimonbyrne.com/LatestWork/index.html> Accessed September 15, 2004.
Pierre Berton's *Why We Act Like Canadians* or Adams's *Fire and Ice: The United States, Canada and the Myth of Converging Values* and television programming, including *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*. When examined collectively, these discourses reveal common features that characterize the Canadian antilanguage. As catalogued by MacLennan, these features include explicitly Canadian content, overt repudiation of American values, and the inclusion of frequently eccentric but authentically Canadian characters. The repetition of these and other features in a variety of forms helps create a familiar cultural pattern that unites Canadians and strengthen our sense of cultural identity.

As MacLennan points out, all “human identities – from the personal to the cultural – are reiterative by nature, and must be routinely re-enacted in order to be sustained.” She notes that these ritualistic repetitions create recognizable cultural patterns that remind us of who we are, particularly when the cultural conditions that produced them persist. Because American cultural influences are unlikely to lessen with time, Canadian resistance to American values must constantly be reinforced through repetition. Burke notes that persistent conflicts of this nature are negotiated and “symbolically transcended” through such discursive re-enactments. In addition,

84 Berton.


86 MacLennan, “Dancing with the Neighbours.”
Burke asserts that "such symbolic resolutions must be repeated, since the underlying situation is not resolved."\(^{87}\)

An added complexity to this resistance that makes repetition especially necessary is the fact that, even as they reject Americanization, Canadians accept and even expect American cultural products; as Meisel notes, "we have an avid thirst for most things American...and believe that [we] are entitled to have full access to them" even though we resist the values those same products take for granted.\(^{88}\) Berton illustrates the conflicting attitudes toward American culture when he states that many Canadians "sneer at American television as vulgar and commercial while watching it avidly."\(^{89}\)

Nevertheless, in the midst of this embrace, perhaps because of it, resistance remains necessary. It is through the repetition of distinctive Canadian patterns, such as overt Canadian references, explicit and often humorous repudiation of American values, and a variety of eccentric characters that Canadians gain cultural visibility within our own media. Such repudiative gestures serve as an antidote to American cultural influences, and through their continual reiteration become unmistakable commonplaces of Canadian identity.\(^{90}\)

The first line of defence offered by the Canadian antilanguage is its explicit foregrounding of recognizably Canadian topics, which are rarely mentioned in the

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\(^{87}\) Kenneth Burke, *Dramatism and Development* (Barre, Mass: Clarke University Press, 1972) 15.

\(^{88}\) Meisel 307.

\(^{89}\) Berton 58.

\(^{90}\) MacLennan "Dancing with the Neighbours."
“predominantly, even overwhelmingly American” discourses that dominate the airwaves,” posing a threat to Canadian cultural life through “the massive advantages that American cultural products derive from the huge scale of the American market.”

The first solution to this threat to Canadian culture is to promote identifiably Canadian artefacts and themes in our own discourses. Canadian programming can easily differentiate itself from the dominant American programming just by featuring Canada, Canadian subjects, or even Canadian styles. For example, a drama like DaVinci’s Inquest may be unapologetically and explicitly set in Vancouver, Made in Canada in Toronto, or North of 60 in the North West Territories.

The programmes may also be overtly Canadian in form, as MacLennan reveals in her analysis of Mary Walsh’s Marg, Princess Warrior or Degrassi Junior High.”

One such typically Canadian form is the quintessentially resistant genre of satire. Although satire is not an exclusively Canadian form, it is a typically Canadian one, and much of our antilanguage is satirical in form. As Pierre Berton acknowledges, “it’s no accident that some of our most successful comedy has been satire.” Margaret Atwood, too, notes that the wide variety of biting satirical Canadian discourses, such as political cartoons, books like Farley Mowat’s My Discovery of America and Al Purdy’s The New Romans, and CBC programmes such as Royal Canadian Air Farce or Kids in the Hall, “are more typical of [Canadians] than are halos on their politicians” and other

91 Meisel 305 & 315.


93 Berton 89.
public figures. Martin Knelman similarly asserts that satire is more reflective of the Canadian attitude than situation comedy, which has “tended to be made by machines like the Norman Lear machine or the Mary Tyler Moore machine,” the like of which “didn’t seem to be part of the Canadian character.” This Hour Has 22 Minutes is entirely Canadian in form and content; not only is it satirical, but also it regularly invokes a variety of Canadian themes and topics. Even its title is distinctly Canadian, a direct allusion to the landmark Canadian news programme This Hour Has Seven Days, heralded as “the most exciting and innovative public affairs television series in the history of Canadian broadcasting.” In its own way, This Hour Has 22 Minutes is equally innovative and exciting.

The target of satire is nearly always its own intended audience, and Canadian satire is no different in this regard. Satirizing ourselves is a large part of the rhetoric of Canadian identity and acts as a kind of cultural affirmation. As Reid Gilbert explains, “Canadians want to laugh at what seems to them drab or second-rate in themselves... Canadians do not destroy their culture by laughing at it; instead, they affirm it in a complex, inverted manner.” This type of humour, while not exclusive to Canadian

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94 Margaret Atwood, “Canadians Looking at Americans Looking at Us,” The Advocate (4 May 1985): 1B.

95 Knelman 106.


culture, is nevertheless an important part of it, reflecting what Pierre Berton calls “our northern realism.”

Another feature of the Canadian language of resistance is the overt repudiation of American values and attitudes, an inevitable result of what MacLennan describes as its “Islandized” culture, which stands in relation to American culture as an island community to a dominant mainland culture. Repudiative forms of discourse, says MacLennan, are part of the Island mythos; Islanders both celebrate and complain about mainland ignorance, seeing it as confirmation of their distinctiveness even as they resent being overlooked. Following the repudiative aspect of the Island model, the sketches and one-liners of This Hour Has 22 Minutes are frequently, and often hilariously, repudiative, as I will show in the remainder of this thesis.

The pattern of repudiation that marks the rhetoric of Canadian identity is reflected in two of its familiar commonplaces, as identified by MacLennan: displays of American ignorance and the persistence of the American bully figure. Canadians’ “fascination with tales of American ignorance of Canada” is well known, and indeed Canadians do have some evidence to support their belief that Americans don’t know much about Canada. For example, a recent Globe and Mail poll indicated that 30% of American respondents classified Canada as a 51st state, only 14% recognized Canada as the United States’ largest trading partner, and only 18% viewed Canada as the United

98 Berton 88.

99 MacLennan “Dancing with the Neighbours.”

100 MacLennan “I Can’t See the Difference, Can You See the Difference?” 16-18.

101 MacLennan “Dancing with the Neighbours.”
States' closest friend and ally.102 This commonplace has been celebrated in much Canadian humour and satirical discourse, leading Derrick Toth to observe that “Canadians just can’t get enough of one of our longest-running jokes—Americans’ lack of knowledge of their next-door neighbours.”103 Our “long-running joke” has a powerful unifying appeal for Canadians, as it reinforces our notion of “us” in opposition to the repudiated and less knowledgeable “them.”

This celebration of American ignorance is often accompanied by a second commonplace of the Canadian antilanguage: the ubiquitous figure of the American bully. The American bully is the embodiment of Canadian perceptions of the culture’s relationship with the American colossus, encoding the power differences, the ignorance, the disregard for our cultural welfare. Not only is the bully bigger, stronger, and more powerful than his Canadian counterparts, but he also has a sense of entitlement. Martin Knelman characterizes the American bully as a “stereotype...dear to the hearts of Canadian cultural nationalists—the vulgar, pushy American who behaves as if he has every right to boss Canadians around.”104 MacLennan, too, observes the American bully in many Canadian discourses, particularly in Canadian


104 Martin Knelman, Home Movies: Tales From the Canadian Film World (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1987) 121.
political cartoons. This commonplace typically portrays the United States as powerful, coercive and self-interested, ignorant of and apathetic to Canadian needs.

The American bully is dangerous not so much because of his belligerence but because of his pattern of ignorance, and he poses a threat even when benign, as Pierre Trudeau’s famous remark illustrates: “Living next to [the United States] is in some ways like sleeping with an elephant: No matter how even-tempered the beast, one is affected by every twitch and grunt.”

Canadians feel the immense presence of the United States as if one day it will “roll over” and our culture will be no more. As my analysis in the remainder of this thesis will show, This Hour Has 22 Minutes incorporates these familiar commonplaces in a variety of sketches and “news” items each week. Indeed, the show depends on the recognition and identification provided by these commonplaces for much of its humour.

One final characteristic of the Canadian language of resistance is its foregrounding of “common folk” who resist American cultural dominance by standing in contrast to the slick, polished, picture-perfect characters who dominate American television programming. In Canadian discourses, these figures are often outsiders.

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107 For more on this topic, see Jennifer MacLennan and G.J. Moffatt, “An Island View of the World: Canadian Community as Insularity in the Popular Writing of
frequently eccentric but nevertheless also wise because of the insight bestowed by their perspective by incongruity. Because 22 Minutes is satirical, these quirky outsiders are exaggerated to the point of caricature,108 but as odd as they are, they are still recognizably us. This Canadian eccentric – Walsh’s Dakey Dunn or Thomey’s Jerry Boyle, to mention only two of the recurrent figures from 22 Minutes – is not the stock American figure of the “lovable oddball” who appears in American sitcoms. That figure is typically merely a comic diversion, a foil for the more polished main character, and is usually relegated to the sidelines of the plot. The Canadian eccentric, by contrast, features a satirical insight gained from his or her outsider status, and the appeal of these eccentric folk characters for their Canadian audience is in their “authenticity,” or how they look and sound like a recognizable, though frequently exaggerated, version of us.109 In the tradition of the folk figure, this eccentric “has in its very makeup a certain resistance to commodification and quantification.”110 The folk oddball characters seen in many Canadian programmes provide a sense of authenticity wholly unlike the polished surface of American television programming.111

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108 A few examples illustrate the point: Airfarce’s Mike, from Canmore; The Beachcombers’ Relic; The Forest Rangers’ Mr. MacLeod, the prospector; North of 60’s Joe Gumba; Wayne and Shuster’s Professor Waynegartner; any of the characters depicted in the songs of Stompin’ Tom Connors: Big Joe Mufferaw or Bud the Spud; Codco’s Marg in the Mental, Cass and Betty Elliot, or the Budgells.

109 MacLennan, “Only in Canada, You Say?”


111 See, for example, such Canadian television programmes as The Red Green Show, Made in Canada, Royal Canadian Air Farce, and This Hour Has 22 Minutes.
As I have discussed in this chapter, public communication in a variety of forms builds identity within a culture or community through its appeals to the group’s shared values. However, establishing and maintaining identity depends on more than stressing common beliefs and assumptions. It depends just as much on repudiating undesirable values and assumptions through a language of resistance, or antilanguage, particularly when the community’s survival is, or is perceived to be, under threat. The distinctiveness of Canadian culture, as we have seen, is threatened by the overwhelming influx of cultural products and values from a different culture. Not surprisingly, its cultural discourse has developed a strong pattern of resistance or antilanguage that repudiates the influences of American culture. This pattern of resistance includes a foregrounding of Canadian icons and topics, an overt repudiation of American values and attitudes, and a variety of resistant eccentrics who directly contrast with the polished characters typical of American television. This Hour Has 22 Minutes, as a language of resistance, or antilanguage, should be expected to feature these same patterns, and as I will show, it does.

The following chapters present analyses of various aspects of This Hour Has 22 Minutes that show in greater detail how the antilanguage of Canadian identity operates in the programme. I will begin my analysis by considering Rick Mercer’s “Talking to Americans,” a sketch that on the surface appears simply to exploit Canadian “anti-Americanism,” but which, when examined with rhetorical criticism, is revealed in fact as a discourse primarily focused on creating identity for Canadians. Next, I will examine Mary Walsh’s “Connie Bloor” sketches, in which Walsh portrays a ranting, conspiracy-theorizing, prairie correspondent for 22 Minutes, who uses Canadian
commonplaces to make Canadian culture more visible to her Canadian audience.

Finally, I will examine some themes of Canadian resistance that can be seen threaded throughout the whole programme, and how they operate in this language of resistance.
Chapter II: “Talking to Americans” as Cultural Repudiation

In order to demonstrate how the Canadian antilanguage operates in This Hour Has 22 Minutes, I analyse the most popular and best-known segment from the program: “Talking to Americans.” This sketch resonated so strongly with Canadians that it was made into its own special, the only sketch from 22 Minutes to have been so recognized. Talking to Americans: The Special first aired on April Fool’s Day 2001 to an audience of 2.7 million,¹ was re-aired the same year on Canada Day, and has been re-aired several times since, most recently on January 5, 2005, making it quite possibly the most popular comedy special ever aired on the CBC. It was nominated for a Gemini award in 2001.

The continued popularity of this explicitly resistant sketch raises some important questions. Why does a skit that exposes ignorance of our neighbouring country resonate so much with the Canadian public that CBC (whose mandate it is to promote Canadian identity)² would choose to re-air Talking to Americans: The Special on our national holiday? What does this action say about Canadian culture and identity? What can we learn about cultural identification, especially in Canada, from this artefact? The answer to these questions, as I will explain, lies in the Canadian


² The CBC’s mandate in accordance with the Broadcasting Act of 1991 can be found at <http://cbc.radio-canada.ca/htmen/1_2.htm> Accessed October 8, 2002.
obsession with differentiating ourselves from the overwhelming cultural machinery of the United States.

"Talking to Americans" the Sketch

The segment “Talking to Americans” first appeared in 1998 during the fourth season of This Hour Has 22 Minutes. The sketch features Rick Mercer, in character as 22 Minutes reporter J.B. Dixon, conducting in-the-street interviews with ordinary Americans. Though Mercer plays the thing straight, his questions and assertions are ludicrous, presenting as if they are commonplace absurdly exaggerated or fantastical stories about Canadian people, places, and events. Canadians laugh as they watch their southern neighbours responding seriously to Mercer's ridiculous questions about, for example, our supposed 20-hour clock. There is undeniably an anti-American flavour to the sketch in that it is overtly repudiative, but though the segment looks like anti-Americanism, I will argue that it serves a larger purpose, providing a vision of ourselves as distinct within, even superior to, the cultural “soup” of which we are a part.

Discourses like “Talking to Americans” have been accused of being nothing more than attacks on Americans. Jack Granatstein, for example, sees Canadian cultural discourses as fundamentally anti-American: “No sector of Canadian life today is more overtly nationalistic and anti-American than the arts.”

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examination of the tradition reveals something else, however. She argues that “such apparent ‘American-bashing’ is actually a much more complex phenomenon than it first appears,” and that such discourse “is not an instrumental rhetoric designed to bring about practical ends, but an epideictic genre whose role it is to celebrate and affirm.”

What this means is that Mercer’s real purpose is not to challenge American attitudes or show them as mistaken, but to celebrate and affirm a particular Canadian point of view for a Canadian audience. In a sense, then, the Americans interviewed by Mercer in character as J.B. Dixon are foils; they are simply a means of illustrating the Canadian conviction that they are overlooked and misunderstood by the dominant culture. As MacLennan points out, the “correctness” of the assumptions revealed in “Talking to Americans” is not relevant to understanding the sketch’s purpose; rather, their recognizability and unifying power are what counts in the epideictic genre. She explains:

... the repudiation of American culture is about something other than bashing Americans into recognizing Canadian difference. Once we make this assumption, we can begin to understand that Canadian statements of dissociation are not, and have in fact never been, statements about Americans, no matter how prominent their references to the US might be. Although the United States, in particular American mass culture, plays a feature role in these discourses, the part it plays is purely symbolic. Understanding the rhetoric of Canadian identity means understanding that American culture forms a foil, a

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perceptual "ground" or "scene" within which the drama of Canadian difference is played out.⁶

Why do Canadians need to resort to such tactics? One answer is that our geographic proximity to such an economically, militarily and culturally aggressive superpower makes us more vulnerable than other countries to being swamped by the mass production and promotion of American commercial and cultural products. Although other countries are also subject to Americanization, the Canadian situation is unique. Not only do we share a continent, the longest unprotected border in the world, and the Free Trade agreement, but Canadians and Americans also share many other similarities. Canadians look the same as Americans do, they dress the same, eat the same food, speak the same language (except in Quebec), and share a common history. To most international observers, including Americans themselves, there are few easily visible differences between Canadians and Americans.

Though they keenly feel the difference, Canadians themselves are often in danger of losing sight of their distinctiveness, as commentators from George Grant to Mel Hurtig, as well as others cited in this study, have pointed out.⁷ As a result, they strive for ways to distinguish themselves and to reassure themselves that their culture really isn’t being subsumed, despite the ubiquitous presence of American cultural products. In such artefacts as “Talking to Americans,” Canadians employ what

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⁶ MacLennan “Dancing with the Neighbours.”

⁷ George Grant, Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism [Reprint edition] (Toronto: Macmillan, 1965) and Mel Hurtig, The Vanishing Country: Is It Too Late to Save Canada? (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2002).
Margaret Atwood describes as “the laughter of derision and distancing” to accentuate, and perhaps exaggerate for their own reassurance, their cultural distance from their American neighbours.

What appears to be Canadian “American-bashing” is more like what Margaret Atwood describes as a way of “hanging on as a people” or of establishing and maintaining our identity in the midst of outside threats to our culture. In this sense, the humour functions as part of an antilanguage whose intended audience is not American but Canadian. Canadian laughter at displays of American ignorance is a laughter of differentiation rather than of ridicule, of creating what Kenneth Burke describes as “union by some opposition shared in common.” The “antilanguage” created by the satire is meant to remind Canadians of their distinctiveness by ensuring that they remain aware that the repudiated “they” are not the same as the unified “us.”

Canadian Antilanguage

The first function of any antilanguage is to differentiate a culture from its surrounding, an important gesture particularly when the culture is marginalized. In order to establish the boundaries of its identity, or to define what is authentic to itself, a culture must also define what lies outside. Marginalized cultures are especially

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dependant on differentiation to establish their identity because they are constantly pressured by the dominant culture’s presence. A culture like Canada, whose unique features are otherwise overrun by foreign consumer products, needs to retain its emphasis on “what . . . occurs only here” if it is to avoid being obliterated by “what also occurs here, like Ford motor cars.”

Languages of resistance are by nature both repudiative and reiterative. Human identities of all kinds – personal, social, or cultural – rely on differentiation, as Northrop Frye argues: “identity is only identity when it becomes, not militant, but a way of defining oneself against something else” – “against” in this context meaning “simply . . . differentiation.” In some cultures, the repudiation carries overtones of violence; in Canada, the pattern is usually satirical, which is what makes Canadian indignation at American ignorance into our “longest running joke.”

Because all identities are reiterative by nature, an antilanguage will also be constantly reinforced through repetition. It is not enough to state an identity once; an identity – particularly one that is threatened – must be restated to keep it viable, and it is thus that identity becomes ritualized. The ritualized re-enactment of identity is an example of what Kenneth Burke calls repetitive form, which is necessary for “the

\[1\] Margaret Atwood, “Eleven years of Alphabet,” Second Words: Selected Critical Prose (Toronto: Anansi, 1982) 94.

\[2\] Northrop Frye, “Conclusion to A Literary History of Canada,” Divisions on a Ground (Toronto: Anansi, 1982) 75 and 86.

sustaining of an attitude,"14 culturally no less than personally. Canadian identity, like all other human identities, contains – as it should be expected to – this same element of ritual.

As a discourse of Canadian identity, we would expect “Talking to Americans” to participate in the Canadian language of resistance by not only differentiating Canadians from Americans by reflecting qualities of “Canadianness” back to Canadians, but also repudiating American values and attitudes. Also, we would expect the sketch to employ the commonplaces of Canadian identity as a part of this repudiation. Finally, we would expect that these qualities would be repeated in several variations of the same form as ritual enactments of these aspects of our identity. The rest of this chapter will be dedicated to exploring various examples of antilanguage in “Talking to Americans” and showing how these examples participate in affirming Canadian identity.

**Patterns of Dissociation in “Talking to Americans”**

As an antilanguage of Canadian identity, “Talking to Americans” most obviously differentiates itself from popular American programming by its use of familiar Canadian references which function as a kind of “secret code” between Mercer and his listeners. The sketch mentions Canadian places, like Toronto, Calgary, Cape Breton, and Saskatchewan, but often in ways that his American listeners will be unable to correctly contextualize or interpret; for example, he invites respondents to comment

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on "the Russian invasion of Chechnya in Saskatchewan." Even those who recognize the incidents in Chechnya and willingly admit their ignorance of the details, still don't recognize that the name of the Canadian province: "I've heard about Chechnya, but not about Saskatchewan, so there isn't enough coverage of Saskatchewan." People in Saskatchewan might agree, particularly since he later asks respondents, "Do you think Americans should be bombing Saskatchewan?" In another example, Mercer solicits respondents' opinions about whether the Toronto polar bear hunt should be ended.

Similarly, he makes hilarious use of the names of Canadian public figures. Should people be prevented from climbing on top of Peter Mansbridge? he asks his American targets; would they be interested in exploring Joe Clarke's Hole? He also uses the same tactic to exploit Canadian convictions about the American propensity for violence: "Do you think Americans should be bombing Bouchard?" or "Do you think Americans should be lined up the ground troops to send into Gilles Duceppe?" Canadians see these people's blind agreement to violence against any foreign-sounding nation as typical American behaviour.

Mercer also exploits every conceivable Canadian cliché and stereotype, from the weather to seal hunting, from moose and beaver to igloos. The presence of these features not only establishes “Talking to Americans” as a Canadian discourse but also sets up a further insider/outsider dynamic through dramatic irony, in which words or actions “carry a meaning unperceived by the character but understood by the audience.”

In each case, we know something that the respondents to his questions do not. The meanings shared by Mercer and his Canadian audience in “Talking to Americans” are not shared by the American interviewees. It is in part the suspense of whether the American interviewees will catch on and the humour of sharing a private joke that confirm our assumption of American ignorance and delight the Canadian audience.

The major source of humour in Talking to Americans, of course, is the familiar pattern of American ignorance that it exploits. Mercer heightens the humour by interviewing those who should be educated and politically aware but who are no more informed than the average. For example, many of the sketches selected for the special are interviews with university students and professors, state governors, and presidential candidates, in addition to randomly selected individuals on the street. These are exactly the people who should know, if anyone does, about the merits of the questions Mercer poses to them. At least, there should be some recognition that his questions and assertions are preposterous. For instance, in one interview, Mercer convinces a Princeton professor of nearly 40 years to read aloud a petition opposing the proposed reinstatement of the Toronto polar bear slaughter by Mel Lastman, the Mayor of

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Toronto. In effect, by choosing those who are positioned in American society as the most knowledgeable, Mercer heightens the impact of his exposure of Americans as so ignorant that a clever Canadian can outwit even the smartest and most politically aware among them.

Mercer increases the irony of his interviews with political leaders by conducting set-up interviews with supporters, colleagues, handlers, and others from the politician’s entourage. For example, before presenting his interview of Mike Huckabee, the Governor of Arkansas at the time, Rick Mercer questions people outside the governor’s office building. He asks about the governor’s level of education and his intelligence, as well as whether he should be expected to know anything about Canada. One respondent assures Mercer, “I would think so. I would hope so.” Immediately following is the interview with Governor Huckabee, who proudly congratulates Canada on preserving its national igloo as Mercer holds the microphone.

In some of the interviews, Rick Mercer engages the interviewee with topics that sound similar to ones that have been reported in the news. But Mercer changes relevant details so that Canadian standards and practices are depicted as less sophisticated or technologically advanced than those of Americans. He asks whether Canadians should be forced to conform to American ways. The American interviewees are unfailingly shown as taking for granted that the rest of the world should adopt American practices, and are usually so distracted by insisting on this point that they overlook the specifics of the preposterous notions being placed before them. Their understanding of Canada

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24 Mercer, Season 6, Episode 9, 1999.
and Canadians is apparently so lacking that they will accept as valid nearly any characterization, no matter how ridiculous.

Mercer also baits the interviewees with startling facts and statistics that he attributes to Canadian sources, when in fact most are reports about Americans. His American interviewees cheerfully and willingly express their shock and condemn such “facts” without realizing their actual origins. In one skit, Mercer tells a man that “it was recently revealed that 70% of grade 7 students in Canada couldn’t find their state on an unmarked map and also couldn’t name their own congressman.” The irony, of course, is in the fact that this pattern of ignorant youth he mentions is often reported of American students rather than of Canadian. Based on this misinformation, he asks his respondent: “Do you think that this indicates a crisis in our educational system in Canada?” The man responds, “I think it is disgraceful that people are that unaware of the world that they live in,” but he himself is unaware that he has just exposed his own ignorance of the political divisions and government of the country next door. The example confirms for the Canadian audience their assumptions about American ignorance and American arrogance: they are quick to proclaim their disapproval of the

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ignorance of other countries, but fail to recognise their own ignorance of their next door neighbours and the world.

Some of the Americans interviewed justify their ignorance of Canada by dismissing it as insignificant, providing a shock of delighted indignation in Mercer’s audience. For example, when the member of presidential candidate Al Gore’s entourage responded to Rick Mercer’s question about whether Gore would know that Toronto is the capital of Canada by dismissively responding, “If you feel that is really important,” 27 Canadian viewers were confirmed in their conviction about American disdain toward their country. Apparently Canada, the United States’ closest neighbour and largest trading partner, holds little importance in the view of this presidential aide.

The implied disdain for Canada can also be seen in other interviews that Mercer conducts. A man from Arkansas doubts he will go to Canada to support the preservation of our national igloo: “I don’t plan on ever going up there. I never heard of a building made out of ice anyway.”

Mercer: “You’ve never heard of an igloo?”
Arkansan: “Not as the capital.”
Mercer: “Well, it’s Canada”
Arkansan: “Sounds right.” [laughs]

This exchange contains an enthymematic structure in which the unstated premise is left for the participants and audience to fill in. In this case, Mercer leads his interviewee to reveal the implicit attitude shared by many Americans, that Canada is cold and

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28 Mercer, Season 6, Episode 9, 1998.
uninhabitable. The response that Mercer elicits confirms for the Canadian audience that Americans believe what Berton describes as "the universally held impression that Canadians are creatures of the cold" and that we live in "a frozen wasteland."²⁹

The exploitation of presumed American ignorance is not the only commonplace employed by Mercer. In many of the "Talking to Americans" sketches, the American bully, a figure frequently invoked in Canadian public discourse and a familiar motif of Canadian political cartoons, is suggested.³⁰ Martin Knelman describes the American bully as "vulgar" and "pushy" and continues by asserting, "Indeed, the intrusive American has become one of the few unifying themes in Canadian culture."³¹ In its many portrayals, the American figure is shown as powerful, coercive and self-interested, ignorant of and apathetic to Canadian needs, approaching interactions with a sense of entitlement.

Canadians are acutely aware of the power differences between Canada and the United States and their implications for Canada, but Americans optimistically assume that their interests are shared by other nations, and in particular by their smaller neighbour. Former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau illustrated our unique relationship


³¹ Martin Knelman, Home Movies: Tales from the Canadian Film World (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1987) 121.
best when he likened our relationship with the United States to sleeping next to an elephant. Jennifer MacLennan also explains the role of the caricature of the American Bully in editorial cartoons and elsewhere:

Our popular discourse makes overt some of the assumptions about Canadian-American relations upon which the rhetoric of Canadian identity is based.

Editorial cartoons in particular serve to make explicit assumptions that we have taken for granted, and to invite us to examine their implications. "America as bully" is a depiction of one of these basic assumptions, intended to remind us not to be complacent, not to be taken in by our own discourse of friendship, but to understand that friendship has its limits and that we must be responsible for protecting our own interests.

The spectre of the American bully is revealed in the attitudes and expectations of the Americans being interviewed by Mercer. For example, in one set of interviews, Mercer tells his American interviewees that Canada is run on a 20-hour clock. The respondents all take for granted that Canadians should, and would want to, switch over to "American" time. The most amazing aspect of these responses is that the American interviewees seem unaware that there could be no such thing as a "20-hour" clock – a fact that further reinforces Canadian assumptions of American ignorance. They do not

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33 MacLennan, “Brian Meets Rambo” 116.

question the validity of Mercer’s proposition; instead, they are distracted by the suggestion that the Canadians are operating contrary to “their” standard.

The underlying assumption of these responses is that if a change needs to be made, it will – of course – be done in accordance with what the respondents assume to be American standards. It seems never to occur to them that the United States might make a change; their automatic supposition is that Canada would change to the presumed American model. The issue is not so much one of exerting supremacy and dominance as simply taking these things for granted.

In this sketch, Mercer participates in a familiar pattern famously exposed by Pierre Berton. Margaret Atwood reports Berton’s response to the Texan who suggested that the two countries should simply become one:

Berton retorted that he thought this would be a dandy idea. The Americans could get back the Queen, whom they’ve always coveted, and revert to constitutional monarchy, and do away with the FBI and receive the much more colourful Royal Canadian Mounted Police in return, and change to a three-party system and become officially bilingual. Well, that wasn’t exactly what the Texan had in mind.  

The American tendency to perceive Canada as simply an extension of their own culture rankles Canadians, who are likely to see this view as all too typical of both the ignorant attitude they deplore and the sense of entitlement that characterizes the American bully figure. Of course Canadians should conform to American standards; it would never occur to them that any other choice is possible. And to the Canadians watching

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Mercer’s special, the American respondents who display this attitude are simply conforming to type.

In another particularly preposterous set of interviews, Mercer polls Chicago residents for a potential name for Canada’s 5th season, which, he claims, consists of two months of darkness over the entire country during July and August. 36 Despite the proximity of Chicago to the Canadian border, his respondents seem unaware of how ludicrous such a notion is and appear quite prepared to accept it.

The exposure of American ignorance is also a way of exposing other implicit American views. What do Canadians see when they watch Mercer’s interviews with Americans? Mercer’s interviewees seem to take for granted that it is the natural course of events that other countries look to them for guidance. It does not appear to occur to them, for instance, how inappropriate it would be for Canadians to seek American advice about what to name a supposedly uniquely Canadian experience. Canadians believe, and Mercer’s interviews confirm, that Americans perceive themselves as superior to the rest of the world. They appear so preoccupied with their own cultural importance that they would not even bother to question the outlandish suggestion that all of Canada is experiencing two months of complete darkness while just below the 49th parallel Chicago is experiencing the peak daylight hours of the entire year.

Mercer’s interviews confirm Margaret Atwood’s characterization of how Canadians see the attitudes of their American neighbours. Americans, says Atwood, have been “oddly educated.”

taught that they were the centre of the universe, a huge, healthy apple pie, with other countries and cultures sprinkled round the outside, like raisins. . . . The most disturbing of all was the realization that they were blundering around in the rest of the world with the same power, the same staggering lack of knowledge and the same lack of concern: the best thing for the raisins, in their opinion, was to be absorbed into the apple pie.\textsuperscript{37}

Other examples further reveal this same attitude. An excellent illustration can be seen in the responses to Mercer’s question about whether Canada, which he describes as land-locked, should have a navy.\textsuperscript{38} The majority of respondents feel that Canadians should have a navy, ignoring the ridiculous assertion that Canada is land-locked and currently without a navy. As a solution to its supposed lack of ocean access, the respondents suggest that Canadian ships simply dock in US harbours, reasoning that “we’re all on the same side, aren’t we?” Quite apart from the fact that a land-locked country would have little or no use for a navy, it is incredible to Canadian viewers that none of Mercer’s American respondents recognize the untruth of the assertion that Canada is land-locked. The sketch confirms Canadian assumptions about American ignorance and at the same time exposes the underlying assumption is that Canadian interests must inevitably coincide with American interests. Mercer’s interviewees confirm Canadian beliefs that Americans fail to see that there is any North American perspective different from their own.


\textsuperscript{38} Mercer, Season 8, Episode 15, 2000.
In addition to the two commonplaces of Canadian identity identified by MacLennan, there is another major area in which an antilanguage is apparent in “Talking to Americans.” It is apparent not only in the exposed ignorance of Canadians, which Canadians laugh at, or the implied American Bully, whom we resent, but also in the character of J.B. Dixon himself, bravely stepping onto the bully’s turf and challenging him on our behalf while we watch and cheer him on.

As J.B. Dixon, Mercer interviews representative Americans in their territory, making preposterous assertions and daring them to challenge him. It’s not the individual Americans who provoke Canadian amusement; instead, it is how perfectly they fulfill our expectations that makes us laugh in amused outrage. An individual’s ignorance is pitiful, but the smug ignorance of a culture is something else again. It is for this reason that Mercer concentrates on educated elites: it is not the individuals he criticizes, but the system of which they are a part. In their role in the sketch, they symbolize something larger than, even other than, themselves as individuals. They are simply representative examples of a cultural pattern.

Canadian audiences love to watch Mercer expose the bully’s ignorance on his own turf. He demonstrates that, even though the bully may be coercive and powerful, we can still be smarter than he is. Thus, the satisfaction of Talking to Americans is the satisfaction of the little guy on seeing an ignorant bully cut down to size.

Canadians love seeing Rick Mercer’s interviewees congratulate their “Eskimo neighbours to the south”39 on finally getting 800 miles of paved road.40 We delight in

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watching him hold the megaphone while a Harvard student proclaims to the entire campus that he is against the placing of Canadian senior citizens on ice floes to perish.\textsuperscript{41} We cheer him on as he leads San Franciscans in a rousing and ridiculous version of our national anthem.\textsuperscript{42} He expresses our sentiments when he lets out a smug “ha” after convincing Jerry Springer that his talk show is so revered in Canada that a national holiday has been declared in his honour.\textsuperscript{43}

The ridiculous version of the Canadian national anthem that Mercer offers in yet another sketch reveals once again the lack of understanding, even condescension, that the Canadian audience feels is typical of Americans.\textsuperscript{44} The lyrics he provides are overtly ridiculous and their first two lines should suggest that it is a farce: “Oh Canada, a great big empty land, / We look to America for a helping hand.” For Canadians, however, Mercer’s parody of an anthem reflects the views they believe his American interviewees probably hold of Canada: it emphasizes our inadequacies as a nation and declares our dependence on a foreign power. Rick Mercer sings along, plays the kazoo, and conducts while Americans sing an anthem that declares our dependence on, and inferiority to, the United States. It does not seem to occur to any of the participants that there is anything wrong with this.

In this example as elsewhere, Mercer aims some of his barbed commentary back at Canadians. The lyrics not only expose American presumptuousness, but also satirize

\textsuperscript{41} Mercer, Season 6, Episode 11, 1999.
\textsuperscript{42} Mercer, Season 8, Episode 6, 2000.
\textsuperscript{43} Mercer, Season 6, Episode 13, 1999.
\textsuperscript{44} Mercer, Season 8, Episode 6, 2000.
Canada's tendency to pander to the bully at times. Canadians laugh at Mercer's American interviewees who do not recognise the absurdity of the lyrics, but we also laugh at ourselves. When, in another "Talking to Americans" sketch, an unnamed American announces "America salutes Mulroney's Brownnose" under the assumption that it is a racing boat, Canadians are reminded of the extent to which the American bully's control is partly the result of our own compliance.\(^45\) While the sketch exploits patterns in the Canadian tradition to repudiate and create difference from Americans, it also satirizes our cultural transgressions so that Canada may correct them.

_Dissociation and Identity Creation_

Some commentators have suggested that Mercer and the CBC are unfair to Americans because of their ability to selectively edit the clips they broadcast. The argument is that the programme must be unfairly skewed to misrepresent Americans and that this is a cruel or mean joke.\(^46\) Such objections are surely countered by the fact that Mercer selects to show the most educated and politically aware among his interviewees. He does not just show the average person on the street; rather, he demonstrates how even the most educated of Americans are ignorant of Canadian society.

Second, these objections miss the point of this ritual celebration, for although the sketch prominently features Americans, it is not really about Americans. As Jennifer MacLennan points out,

\(^{45}\) Mercer, Season 8, Episode 6, 2000.

Canadian statements of dissociation are not, and have in fact never been, statements about Americans, no matter how prominent their references to the US might be. . . . Although the United States, in particular American mass culture, plays a feature role in these discourses, the part it plays is purely symbolic. Understanding the rhetoric of Canadian identity means understanding that American culture forms a foil, a perceptual “ground” or “scene” within which the drama of Canadian difference is played out.47

“Talking to Americans” is not about Americans; instead, it is about Canadian attitudes, Canadian experiences, and a Canadian sense of identification. The American participants are simply foils employed to access a Canadian cultural commonplace through the practice of a familiar—and necessary—discourse form. Such ridicule is not so much anti-Americanism as it is antilanguage.

Nevertheless, there are those who would consider “Talking to Americans” as simply an attack on Americans. There are arguments that Rick Mercer is simply being mean-spirited and taking advantage of unsuspecting Americans. But such claims surely don’t tell the entire story, since the programme has never been shown, and was never intended to be shown, in the US (American networks do not carry Canadian programming, although CBC is available on a few cable outlets close to the border). There has been no discernible effect on American culture by the programme being shown in Canada, and little likelihood of embarrassment to the individuals featured since they are anonymous and it’s unlikely that anyone watching would know who they are.

47 MacLennan, “Dancing with Americans”
More to the point, the United States has not lost any of its economic and military supremacy as a result of Mercer’s programme, nor has it lost its cultural influence in Canada. Americans for the most part are simply not affected by this Canadian antilanguage, as any dominant culture would not be affected by the internal grumblings of the culture they – unwittingly or otherwise – marginalize.

In fact, those who dismiss “Talking to Americans” as simply anti-Americanism are missing the point, mistaking the means for the ends. The programme is not simply about Canadians insulting Americans out of mean-spiritedness. Instead, it is about Canadians sharing a joke on the mass culture that dominates their public discourse, and feeling as a result a sense of identification. It is about a marginalized culture using humour to displace, if even for a short while, the ubiquitous and suffocating cultural influence of the dominant “other.” The sketch confirms that, in one way at least, we are more powerful than the culture in whose shadow we stand: we know more than they do. We feel the satisfaction of the little guy who outwits the bully.

To answer the question I posed at the beginning of this chapter, “Talking to Americans” was so popular with Canadians because of the shared sense of identification among Canadians that the programme enables. We are not “just another state like Oregon or Michigan,”48 as Americans suppose. Instead, Canadians take pride in their existence as an independent nation, with a distinct history, culture, political system, and social structure of its own—a culture it maintains partly through the celebration of these differences in an antilanguage of resistance.

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Chapter III: Connie Bloor and the Tradition of Canadian Anti-Americanism

American television programming is one of the most pervasive and influential cultural imports to Canada, and its effects have been noted by numerous cultural commentators. As one analyst has noted, "Canada, unlike virtually any other country in the world, has a cultural transmission system that is almost entirely in the hands of a foreign power. Most Canadian children pass into adulthood without, for example, ever seeing a Canadian feature-length film." What they see instead is "American commercials and . . . American advertising."

As an antidote to this overdose of American programming, This Hour Has 22 Minutes offers Mary Walsh’s "Connie Bloor," a doughnut-eating, toque-wearing fanatic. Connie is the show's "prairie correspondent" who proclaims herself "a


complete raving lunatic of a Canadian nationalist, eh."³ The "Connie" sketch has been on 22 Minutes since the beginning of the first season and appears in all the following seasons in which Mary Walsh remained in the cast.

Although Connie embodies elements of the Canadian antilanguage that have already been elucidated – she is an explicitly Canadian oddball who openly repudiates American values – she also reinforces another aspect of the recurrent rhetoric of Canadian identity: she makes Canadians the target of her satire. In particular, the sketch jabs at the Canadian tendency to accept and prefer American cultural products to our own. The focus of this chapter will be to show how this sketch employs elements of Canadian resistance and Connie’s own eccentricity to provide Canadians with what Kenneth Burke calls perspective by incongruity.⁴

"Connie Bloor: " The Sketch

Walsh’s "Connie" is a caricature whose extreme preoccupation with the United States makes her sound like a conspiracy theorist. Though the character’s perspective is clearly exaggerated, her on-screen title describes her as “Average Canadian” or “Normal Canadian,” an attribution she also frequently claims for herself in her monologues: “As an average Canadian, eh, I am pretty busy laughing up my smug Canadian sleeve at the boneheaded antics of our neighbours to the south.”⁵ She is

³ Mary Walsh, "Connie Bloor," This Hour Has 22 Minutes, (CBC) Season 4, Episode 1. 1997.


clearly intended as a personification of a culture that some have described as “US-obsessed.” Through Connie, Walsh brings this accusation vividly to life and reveals how absurd, pathetic, and ultimately repugnant the preoccupation is.

Walsh isn’t the first to observe the effects of our fascination with American cultural products on Canadians’ sense of themselves; Pierre Berton, for example, argues that the reason so many of us “continue to hold the belief that there is no such thing as a national identity” is that American “movies have frequently blurred, distorted, and hidden that identity under a celluloid mountain of misconceptions.” Margaret Atwood, too, bemoans “the deluge of values and artefacts flowing in from outside, from ‘there,’” and their effect of rendering “invisible the values and artefacts that actually exist ‘here.’” A culture’s own artefacts, she argues, provide a kind of mirror in which the viewer comes to know herself as a member of that culture, and warns that if a country or a culture lacks such mirrors it has no way of knowing what it looks like; it must travel blind. If, as has long been the case in this country, the viewer is given a mirror that reflects not him but someone else, and told at the same time that the reflection he sees is himself, he will get a very distorted idea of what he is really like.

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8 Atwood, Survival, 18.

9 Atwood, Survival, 15-16.
It is this distortion, Berton argues, that has led to that very Canadian habit “of seizing on the American model and believing it to be the only one,” \(^{10}\) and in turn judging our own culture to be inferior.

It seems fair to conclude that, through Connie, Walsh hopes to counteract that habit of mind. “Somehow or other,” she has elsewhere said, “we’ve always thought that their [the American] vision was better . . . and that our vision was pedestrian in a way.” But she has also declared her intention to teach us to see “our vision as real and their vision as bullshit.” \(^{11}\)

However, she is faced with a problem: Canadians remain, in the words of Frank Manning, “insatiable consumers of American culture,” \(^{12}\) who, Northrop Frye observes, could not resist the pull of American mass culture “even if they wanted to, and not many of them do want to.” \(^{13}\) Walsh’s cultural mirror has to provide enough of a jolt to change their understanding of their relationship to American popular culture. The result is Connie, who is ugly and exaggerated, but who is also recognizably an “average” Canadian.

Walsh’s characterization exploits every conceivable Canadian stereotype: Connie’s speech is littered with “Eh?,” the ubiquitous and quintessentially Canadian

\(^{10}\) Pierre Berton, *Why We Act Like Canadians* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982) 89.


\(^{13}\) Northrop Frye, “Sharing the Continent” *Divisions on a Ground* (Toronto: Anansi, 1982) 64.
speech tag. Most often, the sketch is set against the typically Canadian backdrop of “Joe Horton’s” doughnut shop (transparently based on the Canadian doughnut icon Tim Horton’s Donuts). Connie is also always shown wearing winter clothing, including a toque, and her doughnut of choice is, of course, a maple dip. Connie is also quintessentially Canadian in her preoccupation with the US, an orientation signalled by the fact that the sketch frequently opens with Connie holding up an edition of USA Today.

Although we can identify with much of what she says, Connie is a distasteful character that, in the end, we are invited to repudiate even as we identify with her attitudes. She is physically repulsive, as “flat as the prairies and twice as wide.” She is dressed unattractively. She laughs and snorts obnoxiously and sprays spittle into the camera lens as she rants about the latest issues surrounding Canadian and American politics, news, and culture. There are hints that she is on medication. We are repelled by her, but for all her repulsiveness, Connie has a certain appeal. She certainly offers an alternative to the polished and idealized characters featured on American television, and she invites us to re-examine our fascination with—and automatic acceptance of—the cultural values they represent.

_Satire and Commonplaces of Canadian Identity_

The target of the Connie sketch’s satire is not the US or even American culture, despite her frequent criticisms of it. If Connie is a mirror, then what are we invited to see in her obsessive concern with American doings and her almost pathetic need to feel superior? While the characterization certainly falls within the pattern of repudiation as a
means for Canadians to create a necessary cultural distance, it also follows another thread in the tradition of Canadian identity rhetoric, which takes aim at Canadians themselves, who bear some responsibility for their cultural predicament. Jennifer MacLennan notes “the persistently ironic depiction of identity in a culture torn between the expression of its own distinctiveness and its desire for the economic prosperity afforded by close ties with the empire.” Margaret Atwood is somewhat more cynical:

Part of the much-sought Canadian identity is that few nationals have done a more enthusiastic job of selling their country than have Canadians. Of course there are buyers willing to exploit, as they say, our resources; there always are. It is our eagerness to sell that needs attention.

The “Connie” sketch responds to the pressure Canadians experience from living next door to the United States, but it deals as well with Canadian complicity in the overwhelming willingness to surrender their cultural independence. Walsh begins by fulfilling the expectations of the rhetoric of Canadian identity by acknowledging the commonplaces of survival, repudiation, and the American bully, as she does in the following example:

Oh, be afraid, eh, be very afraid...First [the United States] passed a piece of legislation that says that they can do what they liked in BC’s inland waters.

And then, well I guess the poor guys are tired from kissing the rings of foreign dictators, eh, but they passed what they call the Liberty Bill. They are gonna

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use it to punish Cuba, eh, and they are going to clean Canada’s clock for consorting with the Cuban enemy.16

Connie’s exclamation reflects all of these commonplaces: the concerns for Canada’s survival, the bully who will “clean Canada’s clock,” the repudiation of American attitudes toward Cuba. Connie reminds us that “they” have a different agenda and expectations from our own, and that we can, and should, go our own way with respect to issues of sovereignty. Canadians are very sensitive to the notion that threats to our survival come from south of the border, and in this respect Connie’s monologue is consistent with dominant patterns in Canadian cultural discourse.

However, as other sketches show, the threat Connie is most worried about is the one imposed by what Frank Manning describes as “the aggressive power of American popular culture and its infatuation with a missionary zeal that suits it well for certain types of international propaganda.”17 The effect of this “propaganda,” as Walsh has noted elsewhere, has been to “make us constantly think that we’re not as good as the other buddy next door,”18 a situation she deplores. Connie warns,

We’re up here drowning in Americana; we even know the stupid name of their stupid 23rd president, Benjamin stupid Harrison. Until last week, eh, I didn’t even know we had a Prime Minister named Borden, and I’m a complete raving lunatic of a Canadian nationalist, eh?19

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18 Walsh, “A Hymn to Canada” 5.
She is a lunatic of sorts, but she is also our mirror, and in her exasperation we see our own ignorance revealed. How many of the viewers watching the sketch would, like Connie, have been unaware of the existence of Borden? They've just learned something, not only about Canadian history, but about themselves as members of their own cultural community.

Like many other artefacts in the tradition of Canadian identity rhetoric, the “Connie” sketch resists dominant American discourses by featuring Canadian content not normally heard of on television even in Canada, where the airwaves are dominated by American programming. For example, Connie's colourful metaphors are all uniquely – even perversely – Canadian:

I mean, whip me with wet weed, eh, and run me buck naked through the grommet section of Canadian Tire ’til my short term memory returns.20

Stick me in a Mountie suit, bloat me up with chick peas, and send me to Moose Jaw, ch.21

Dress me up in a mountie suit, stand me up in the middle of Portage and Main, and hit me continuously with oncoming traffic.22

Dress me up like a mountie, eh, and sell me to the Walt Disney corporation.23

These are images that only a Canadian would appreciate. The latter one, in particular, encodes a particularly sharp satirical jab: a bitter blow to Canadian pride came in 1995,

when the RCMP negotiated a marketing deal with the Disney corporation, a move widely regarded in Canada as a sell-out. Connie’s monologues are also lavishly sprinkled with references to well-known Canadians such as Preston Manning, Mike Harris, or Paul Martin, as well as Canadian events, like the Referendum vote. Since Canadian references are virtually non-existent in the American programming that dominates our airwaves, Connie’s liberal use of Canadian references is doubly striking. The effect is deliberate.

Not surprisingly, the “Connie” sketch also employs direct repudiation of all things American. Connie’s language is outrageous and harsh: she refers collectively to Americans as “boneheaded,” or “developmentally-delayed, intellectually-challenged, money-mad morons.” Despite the extremity of her wording, her sentiments are recognizably an expression of one of the commonplaces of Canadian identity. She also gleefully recounts examples of poor judgement from south of the border:

How about those Texas legislators eh? When they heard that Texas was the first state that had more deaths related to handguns than highway fatalities what

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did they do? Suggested that they up the speed limit on Texas highways, eh, so the number of highway deaths would increase. Way to legislate, longhorns!31

The American bully makes frequent appearances in Connie’s monologues. As in other Canadian discourses, the bully is especially dangerous because of his pattern of ignorance; not does he not know anything about us, he does not seem to care as long as he gets what he believes to be rightfully his. Connie’s characterizations of American culture, and particularly of the US government, reflect this commonplace: it is “majestically cruel and savage,”32 made up of “lunatic, low-life, power-lusting, blood suckers,”33 and “flag-waving, gun-toting, Iraqi-bombing, crack-cocainePushing, power-starved, Washington wankers.”34

Although her phrasing is often amusing, Connie’s warnings are frequently ominous or tainted with what may seem like paranoia: “We better watch out; they’re starting to notice us again and no good can come of that.”35 The implication, of course, is that the US does not take notice of Canada until they want to exploit or take advantage of us in some way. Connie fans this particular spark of concern when she suggests that Americans already have plans for “annexing bits of Canada after it is

separated." These premature plans confirm Canadian fears – which have, after all, some historical basis – that the US harbours intentions to take over Canada.37

Connie's monologues also frequently involve well-known differences in attitude and policy between the two cultures, differences that Canadians cherish, such as our attitudes toward health care, gun control, or capital punishment:

On January 26th this year, the state of Utah is going to execute a murderer by firing squad and, like, they had to disconnect all the phones to the state’s Department of Corrections because thousands of Utah wing nuts were calling up to volunteer for the firing squad. Oh say, Bubba, I'm not busy on the 26th. I think I could maybe just manage to squeeze in a little head-exploding, gut-erupting, firing squad action. Woooo, it's a killing spree down there, eh?38

The view of American culture as more violent than our own is not restricted to Connie, of course; for historical and sociological reasons, it is a view deeply embedded in Canadian culture. As Pierre Berton notes, "it seems to many of us that you Americans have been willing to suffer more violence in your lives than we have for the sake of individual freedom."39 This assertion is supported by the sociological and political analyses of Seymour Martin Lipset and Richard Gwyn, among others.40

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37 Pierre Berton, for example, notes several historical examples. See Pierre Berton, Why We Act Like Canadians, 2e (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987) 5, 72.


39 Berton, Why We Act 20. The most recent figures available show that in 2004, the crime rate for homicide in Canada stood at 2.0 per 100,000; the US figure for 2003 was 10 homicides per 100,000 (.1 per 1,000). Statistics Canada, "Crimes by Type of Offense." On-line. <www40.statcan.ca> and US Department of Justice, "National
Berton anchors these differences in the "common sense" supplied by each country's core values. Arguing from historical evidence, he contrasts the central philosophy of "peace, order, and good government" outlined in Canada's original constitution, the British North America Act of 1867,\(^{41}\) with the "life, liberty, and happiness" that shaped the American ideal. The rejection of violence that this philosophy entails is, he says, a "national preoccupation.\(^{42}\) Thus, Connie's ridicule of the Utah incident is richer than it initially appears; it is an expression of deeply held and historically embedded cultural differences that find their roots in Canada's beginnings, when, in place of revolution, Canadians chose the traditional stability of British institutions. In fact, many scholars see the rejection of the American revolution as "the

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\(^{42}\) Berton, *Why We Act*, 19.
central fact of Canadian history.”Connie’s monologue is thus explicitly tied to a tradition that informs much of Canadian identity rhetoric.

I pointed out earlier that the primary purpose of the “Connie” sketch is to point the finger at Canadians themselves. In some monologues, Connie’s audience is invited to repudiate the qualities of ignorance, stupidity, inanity, and general disregard for human welfare that she cites as typical of the US. However, as soon as she has secured our outrage at such deplorable behaviour, she turns our attention to Canada’s own inexcusable record:

if we didn’t have America to look down our smug, self-satisfied Canadian noses at, well then I guess we’d just have to look at ourselves, eh, and realize that Canada is just another fat cat G7 country that is living shamelessly high on the hog on the utter degradation, crushing poverty, and unremitting misery of the rest of the world.

The Americans may be “money-mad morons,” but our own then Finance Minister Paul Martin is not above taking “a strong, uncompromising, Liberal stand right on the side of big business.” Although it may seem to be directed at an American target, the satire in these sketches actually use the Canadian assumption of its superior social

43 Lipset, Continental Divide 65.

44 For a fuller discussion of this tradition, see, for instance, Jennifer MacLennan, “Peace, Order, and Good Government: The Distinctively Canadian Appeal of Trudeau’s War Measures Proclamation.” Paper presented to the Canadian Society for the Study of Rhetoric annual conference, Toronto, ON; 25-27 May 2002.


conscience to go after Canadian offences. The commonplaces with which we so readily identify become vehicles for unexpected criticism.

However, the most pointed satire in the sketch has to do with the Canadian conviction that “the real world [takes] place somewhere else, that the real things, the important things, [happen] somewhere else,” a vision encouraged by television, that “constantly open window on the real world of Los Angeles and New York.”48 The Canadian preference for foreign cultural products and disdain for their own comes in for a good deal of pointed criticism:

You could probably spend your entire life laughing at those bozos [the United States], and then you’d probably never notice that last year we spent $16,704,112 recognizing the queen as Canada’s head of state. Wow, eh? How much is that per breath? Let’s see, that’s 365 days, okay, into $16,703,112, okay, eh? And so, okay, so it’s about $2.75 per royal breath and that’s in this country alone, not to think about if you took in Australia and all the other commonwealth countries. Hey, if somebody put a pillow over the Queen’s head, eh, it would save the world a bundle.49 The Americans, she suggests, may be dim-witted enough to pay one CEO $1.50 per breath, but at least they aren’t spending even larger amounts of money to support a foreign head of state. She deplores the attitude that has made Canadians a collection of

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48 Walsh “Hymn to Canada,” 1993 Spry Lecture. 2.
"unanchored souls . . . who fe[el] that their here [i]s just an inferior version of somebody else’s there."\(^{50}\)

Despite her anti-monarchist stance, Connie’s real concern is not so much with Canadian reverence for British culture, which after all isn’t in serious danger of overwhelming our indigenous expressions, at least not any more. More frequently her target is the Canadian appetite for all things American and their sense that their own culture is somehow irrelevant unless validated by American attention:

Whip me with wet wheat, eh, and run me back and forth through a free market economy if we didn’t make it in the news last week. The real news! The American news! Yes! And all we had to do was threaten to self-destruct.\(^{51}\)

Through both its featuring of Canadian icons and its satire of Canada’s acceptance of the world according to American media, the “Connie” sketch attempts to correct the Canadian feeling that the real world is the one perpetuated in the American media and not the one right outside Canadians’ own front doors.

Connie also recognizes the ambiguous nature of Canadians’ relationship to American culture that Pierre Berton characterizes as a “love-hate relationship.”\(^{52}\) Like most of us, Connie admits to being “confused and conflicted with our relationship with Americans.” She then compares the Canadian-American relationship with her relationship to Donnie, the unseen night manager at her Joe Horton’s: “I’d do anything to get Donnie to notice me. At the same time, I hate him because I resent caring so

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\(^{50}\) Walsh, “A Hymn to Canada” 3.


\(^{52}\) Berton, Why We Act 5.
much.” Canada’s relationship with American culture is marked by the same pattern of infatuation and resentment. Canada accepts and even prefers American cultural products, while at the same time deploiring and repudiating the culture’s excesses. MacLennan explains the ambiguity of Canada’s relationship with the United States in her metaphor of “islandized” culture:

On one level, the inevitable rejection of Island values by mainstream culture...serves as an ironic confirmation of Island difference...At the same time, however, Islanders desire, even seem to crave, acknowledgement from mainland culture of which they are inevitably a part, and feel resentment at being overlooked.

Though Canadians reject American values, we do crave acknowledgement from the machinery of the dominant culture, just as Connie craves acknowledgement from Donnie. This craving can cause us to pander to the American bully the way Connie panders to Donnie’s affections and attempts to get his attention – in her case, by trying to break her record for the number of doughholes she can eat in an hour.

*Perspective by Incongruity: Ritual Enactments as Cultural Correctives*

Through her humorous presentation of Canada’s relationship with the United States, Connie provides her Canadian audience with what Kenneth Burke calls perspective by incongruity. For such a perspective to be effective “it must be employed


as essentially a comic notion” that avoids preaching to its audience, treating it instead with “charitable attitude... that is required for the purpose of persuasion and cooperation.”

Connie’s attitude to her American neighbours is not especially charitable, but making them the ostensible target of her vitriol softens the blow to Walsh’s real target: her Canadian listeners. By framing her criticism in humour, Walsh reveals our own shortcomings in a way that is easier for us to acknowledge and, perhaps, correct.

As Burke points out, perspective by incongruity is fundamentally a comic device, inviting us to see the world from a point of view other than our own. He explains: “it must be employed as an essentially comic notion, containing two-way attributes lacking in polemic, one-way approaches to social necessity.” Thus satire succeeds where polemic fails.

As necessitated by the comic corrective of satire, Connie’s eccentricity places her outside the realm of the usual; indeed, she brings with her some of the qualities of the literary figure of the fool, who is “often given an unparalleled degree of freedom in... speech” and who, as long as his critiques were offered in humour, “theoretically had the freedom to criticize individuals or mock political policy.” Within this freedom of speech is often a fool’s sort of wisdom that can provide a point of view of a situation that would not necessarily be available to the rest of us. In Connie’s case, the

55 Burke, Attitudes 166-167.
56 Burke, Attitudes 166-167.
exaggerated caricature of our own concern with American culture engages us initially with laughter; the implied critique comes after the humour has softened our resistance.

In keeping with her role as a fool figure, Connie often says and does things that are over-the-top. For instance, she mocks both Canadian and American political figures by running paper cut-outs of them through a paper shredder or by taking off their little paper heads with a mini guillotine. She acts the buffoon in her sketch, committing outrageous, repulsive, and often humiliating acts, such as stuffing her mouth full of doughnut holes,\(^58\) or drawing a barcode on her forehead and pretending to swipe it repeatedly over an imaginary scanner.\(^59\) Yet despite her weird behaviour and appearance, which is intensified by odd and unflattering camera angles, she voices our deepest cultural concerns, and her criticisms are serious. "Well, mind your own business, eh? Eat your own fish. Keep your dirty hands out of my clean dish. Ever hear of it, America? Ever hear of the mouse on top position, you big old elephant?\(^60\)

Though Connie plays the fool, the wisdom behind her antics is suggested in part because many of her ridiculous and foolish acts are intellectually framed with allusions to history or literature, such as this one from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*:

> How about those Republicans, eh? What a witch’s brew they’re cooking up!  
> Eye of Newt. Ancient toe of Strom. Jesse Helmes’s sting. Bob Dole’s pineapple ring. In a congress of powerful trouble, like a hell broth boil and bubble.\(^61\)

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Other references are explicitly identified, as in this example, spoken as she runs paper effigies of the Alberta and Ontario premiers through her miniature guillotine:

And then maybe I’d start to have visions, eh, of Mike Harris all done up like some old French aristocrat, eh, on his way to the guillotine, and I’d see myself as a character in the Tale of Two Cities, eh, old Madam Defarge knitting names of those mean poor hating politicians into my who’s-up-next-to-the-guillotine-now scarf. Oh, couldn’t happen to a nicer premier. And I’d be saying things like it’s a far far better thing that I do now than I have ever done. It’s a far far better place that Ralphie goes to that he’s ever been before. Ooh and the eyes are still rolling in the head.  

Her ease with such references suggests that Connie is not entirely the buffoon that her actions may lead us to believe she is. Like the fool of literature, she is insightful and politically aware despite her oddity. This quirky wisdom lends weight to her critiques of Canadian attitudes and behaviour, and points to a purpose more serious than simply to entertain us at the expense of Americans and other public targets.

Connie’s monologues, whatever their ostensible focus, serve not so much as a critique of the US as of the Canadian fixation with the US and the resulting neglect to Canadian issues. Exaggerated as she is, Connie is nevertheless a mirror, as all satire is. What she mirrors is our own weaknesses, and she does so in such an unflattering light that we cannot help but be repulsed. Our disgust at Connie’s excesses is, in the end, an invitation to repudiate the worst aspects of our own cultural preoccupations. However ridiculous are the American ways she targets, Connie herself is at least equally

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ridiculous, and Walsh's portrayal encourages a closer examination of the function of Canadian "anti-American" talk in our own identity formation.
Chapter IV: This Hour Has 22 Minutes as Canadian Antilanguage

The previous chapters have established how the patterns of antilanguage are demonstrated in the “Talking to Americans” and “Connie Bloor” sketches: first, through their operation as a language of resistance in their repeated participation in the Canadian tradition of survival; second, through their use of antilanguage that creates difference and repudiates American values; third, through their eccentric characters featured; and finally, through their satirical treatment of issues. In this chapter I will demonstrate that these two sketches are not anomalies in This Hour Has 22 Minutes; the Canadian language of resistance functions in similar ways throughout the whole programme.

Though most of the sketches are not as explicitly focussed on the Canadian-American relationship as are “Talking to Americans” and “Connie Bloor,” the remainder of the programme nevertheless functions as a deliberate repudiation of dominant discourse types in Canadian media, which, as has been discussed throughout this thesis, are American in origin. In this chapter, I will show how not just selected sketches, but the programme as a whole, resists American culture through its distinctively Canadian features, through its overt repudiation of dominant American values and attitudes, through the “ordinary” characters that the programme features, and through the commonplaces of Canadian identity that are taken for granted. I also will
show how these modes of resistance function on a theoretical level through the Burkean concept of perspective by incongruity.\footnote{Kenneth Burke, \textit{Attitudes Towards History} 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984) 166-167.}

More than thirty years ago, Margaret Atwood established that survival is the “habit of mind” that informs and shapes much of Canadian cultural discourse.\footnote{Margaret Atwood, \textit{Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature} (Toronto: Anansi, 1972) 13.} Her assertion has never been seriously challenged; in fact, Jennifer MacLennan has shown that it is part of what she describes as the “Islandized” mythos that marks Canadian identity rhetoric. Survival, both these analysts argue, is the inevitable product of a threatened identity: “For the Islander, the ever-present threat to identity emanates from ‘the mainland’; for a Canadian, the threat is the result of ubiquitous and inescapable American influence.”\footnote{Jennifer MacLennan, “Dancing with the Neighbours: Canadians and the Discourse of ‘Anti-Americanism,’” \textit{Reimagining Borders: Canada-United States Relations since 1800} ed. John Herd Thompson and Michael D. Behiels (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, forthcoming).} The concern with survival sharpens the instinct toward differentiation and repudiation of a cultural “other.” Nor surprisingly, as I will show, these same cultural preoccupations show up throughout \textit{This Hour Has 22 Minutes}.\footnote{Atwood, \textit{Survival} 32.}

The Canadian preoccupation with differentiation is fuelled not only by the influx of American cultural images and artefacts that threaten to obliterate Canadian images. As Atwood, Pierre Berton, and others point out, when images of Canada do appear in our media, they are themselves likely to be products of the American cultural machine, as is the case in the some 575 Canadian-themed Hollywood movies

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
  \bibitem{1} Kenneth Burke, \textit{Attitudes Towards History} 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984) 166-167.
  \bibitem{4} Atwood, \textit{Survival} 32.
\end{thebibliography}
catalogued by Pierre Berton. Berton points out that it is American movies rather than Canadian productions “that have projected our image to the world and also, to a considerable extent, to ourselves,” and these depictions therefore have done nothing to sharpen our understanding of ourselves. Instead, they have typically “blurred, distorted, and hidden that identity under a celluloid mountain of misconceptions,” just as in the 1950s the Massey Commission warned that such cultural inundations would do.

One of the mock news reports seen on 22 Minutes illustrates that such threats to Canadian culture from the United States still represent an urgent problem:

First, there were veiled threats from south of the border that if Canada implements a new policy promoting Canadian films, American companies might stop making movies here. Then American trade officials warned that if Ottawa didn’t scrap plans to protect Canadian magazines, the US would retaliate against this country’s steel exports.

The clincher to the report reflects not only an assumed American attitude, but also an implicit Canadian one: “Canada didn’t produce anything of cultural value worth

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6 Berton, Hollywood’s Canada 12.

7 Berton, Hollywood’s Canada 12.


9 Cathy Jones, “Mock Newscast,” This Hour Has 22 Minutes, (CBC) Season 6, Episode 12. 1999.
protecting anyway." Canadians, the satire suggests, don’t take their own cultural production seriously; why, then, should anyone else?

The perceived threats to Canadian survival go beyond cultural concerns to include such issues as natural resources, Arctic sovereignty, economic independence, and political decision-making. For example, Mary Walsh’s Marg Delahunty warns her Canadian audience of the dangers of our trade agreements with the United States to the supply of Canada’s natural resources: “Have a good wash while you still can, before the NAFTA diverts all our water down to the Yanks, and once we turn on the tap for that crowd, there will be no turning it off.” Echoing the conception of Canada as made up of “hewers of wood and drawers of water,” Walsh voices the persistent Canadian concern that we are viewed as little more than a “vast water tower and oil tank preserve convenient to the United States,” not only by the American government but all too willingly by our own. In the guise of Delahunty, Walsh exploits our assumptions about the self-interest of American government and culture to prod us toward greater political awareness and, perhaps, resistance.

One of the most visible modes of resistance employed by This Hour Has 22 Minutes is its incorporation of distinctively Canadian features. This is a resistant move since most television programming that Canadians are exposed to originates with

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11 Mary Walsh, “Marg Delahunty,” This Hour Has 22 Minutes, (CBC) Season 1, Episode 7, 1994.


American sources that rarely include any mention of Canada, as John Meisel notes:

"Television is, as we all know, predominantly, even overwhelmingly American" and as a result "Canadian cultural life [is] threatened by the massive advantages that American cultural products derived from the huge scale of the American market."14 As MacLennan explains, Canada tends to be "utterly invisible" in this programming, because American discourses typically fail to include even "a single application to Canadian contexts or situations."15 Sadly, even some made-in-Canada programming, in the hope of gaining audience sales south of the border, either avoids mention of Canada or passes itself off as American.16 As a result, any mention of Canada or Canadian subjects tends to stand out as a marked form, and the shock of seeing images of themselves made visible is part of the satirical prodding on which 22 Minutes relies.

This Hour Has 22 Minutes deliberately brings Canada to the forefront in the programme’s content, themes, and style. The sketches often feature guest appearances by prominent Canadians such as singer Bryan Adams;17 former Prime Minister Joe Clark;18 former Leader of the Opposition Preston Manning;19 and then-Finance


Minister Paul Martin.\textsuperscript{20} Even a sketch as silly as the “Celebrity Headlock” series, in which notable Canadians are seen wrapping an arm around the head of Greg Thomey’s Frank McMillan, gains favour because, as nutty as it is, it is our own. It is also uniquely Canadian because of the “ambush” technique employed by Thomey and by Walsh as the outrageous Marg: Princess Warrior, which could not have been carried out in the US. Says Walsh: “Imagine Marg Delahunty going to the White House! I’d be shot carrying that plastic sword. Just imagine! I think poor Marg wouldn’t even get within three to four miles of the place.”\textsuperscript{21}

The stories and sketches are set in Canadian locales and settings and invoke Canadian symbolism, such as the curling spoof of the celebrated Labatt’s hockey commercial shown during the 2002 Winter Olympics,\textsuperscript{22} or the recurring “Hockey Notebook” sketch.\textsuperscript{23} Even the sing-a-longs on Parliament Hill feature politicians lip-syncing to songs from Canadian artists such as Trooper.\textsuperscript{24} The harsh Canadian winter is a recurring theme on \textit{22 Minutes}, just as it is in Canadian conversations, including one sketch featuring Cathy Jones as Mrs. Enid, who notes, “When I was young the

\textsuperscript{20}Greg Thomey, “Celebrity Headlock,” \textit{This Hour Has 22 Minutes}, (CBC) Season 5, Episode 17. 1999.


\textsuperscript{22}Various, “Labbatt’s Spoof,” \textit{This Hour Has 22 Minutes}, (CBC) Season 5, Episode 18. 1999.

\textsuperscript{23}Rick Mercer and Greg Thomey, “Hockey Notebook,” \textit{This Hour Has 22 Minutes}, (CBC) Season 3, Episode 11. 1996.

\textsuperscript{24}Rick Mercer, “Sing-Along,” \textit{This Hour Has 22 Minutes}, (CBC) Season 8, Episode 2. 2001.
weather was a boring subject. If you wanted to know what it was like out, you said, ‘What’s it like out?’ and someone said ‘Cold!’ and it was too, because it was winter.”

However, our weather does have a unifying aspect too, as Rick Mercer notes in one of his “Streeters”: “One thing we do have in common is weather. We know it. We do it. We live it... It’s Canada and the weather sucks.”

The title of the show is itself a Canadian allusion that recalls the celebrated news/current affairs programme *This Hour Has Seven Days*. Although 22 Minutes is satire, in its way it offers as original and intelligent commentary on current events as its namesake did. *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* foregrounds our leaders, our cities, our products, our events, and our culture in a way not seen anywhere else on Canadian television. For example, during the Quebec Referendum of 1996, the programme featured a variety of sketches on the topic, featuring Walsh’s Dakey Dunn and Connie Bloor, Thomey’s Tim McMillan, Mercer’s Streeters,” and the whole

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29 Mary Walsh, “Connie Bloor,” *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*. (CBC) Season 3, Episode 3. 1996.


ensemble as the Quinlan Quints. Each of the sketches offered a slightly different “take” on an issue that, as Pierre Berton notes, has always been “at the root of our national identity . . . [since] ‘separatism’ is . . . as old as Confederation.”33 Paradoxically, talk about separatism may itself be a unifying force, since, as Northrop Frye confirms, “every part of Canada has strong separatist feelings.”34

In addition to its explicitly Canadian content, the comic style of This Hour Has 22 Minutes is recognizably Canadian, as in, for instance, what Pierre Berton describes as “the Great Canadian Put-Down.”35 Although these are not exclusively Canadian, they are certainly typically so, as has been noted by many observers besides Berton.36 The show takes aim, for example, at “Heritage Moments,” a well-known series of government-sponsored television vignettes highlighting significant events and achievements in Canadian history. In one sketch, the voiceover describes the parodied version “Heritage Minutes” as “A collection of vignettes that remind Canadians everywhere how lame we really are.”37 In a similar vein are the “Special Eds,” the

32 Cathy Jones, Rick Mercer, Greg Thomey, and Mary Walsh, “Quinlan Quints,” This Hour Has 22 Minutes. (CBC) Season 3, Episode 3. 1996.


35 Berton, Why We Act 89.

36 Margaret Atwood, “Canadian Looks at American Looking at Us,” The Advocate (4 May 1985). 1B.

37 Cathy Jones and Rick Mercer, “Heritage Minute,” This Hour Has 22 Minutes. (CBC) Season 5, Episode 7. 1998.
bumbling RCMP constables who emerged on 22 Minutes after the break-in at Sussex Drive when the Prime Minister was forced to defend himself with a sculpture while RCMP officers outside failed to realize what was happening. One such sketch introduces the supposed Mattel Mountie Ken doll, which of course is not “anatomically correct”; the Eds explain that this is “standard Mountie issue.”  

This response poke fun not only at the Mounties’ failure to protect the prime minister, but also takes another of several satiric jabs the 1995 licensing agreement between the RCMP and the Disney Corporation, which was widely regarded as a betrayal of Canadian culture.  

The sketch takes aim at the sell-out of one of our most distinctive national icons, and implies that Canada does not have “the balls” to resist the American bully, even if it means protecting our own best interests.  

Although such satirical jabs might seem counter to the goal of building and maintaining a national identity Canadians can be proud of, there is nevertheless something of value for our national identification even in these acts of self-parody. Reid Gilbert argues that “Canadians do not destroy their culture by laughing at it; instead, they affirm it in a complex, inverted manner.”  

Laughing at ourselves and our

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weaknesses may occasionally be painful, but at least it ensures that we remain visible to ourselves. This type of satirical prodding, though not exclusive to the Canadian consciousness, has always been an important feature of it. As Margaret Atwood has pointed out, Canadians are very much “prone to understatement, to trashing their own successes to keep their heads from swelling – who do you think you are, eh?”

This Hour Has 22 Minutes functions as a language of resistance not only because it echoes Canadian cultural concerns in its content; like the two sketches I have already examined, the programme as a whole repudiates dominant American values and attitudes. As in the “Talking to Americans” and “Connie” sketches, and as in Canadian cultural discourse as a whole, our delight in exposing American ignorance and presumptuousness is repeatedly lampooned, as in a “Heritage Minute” sketch that declares, “Thinking the American president is stupid: a proud part of our Canadian heritage.” Another sketch features a mock news story of an insurance company suing the programme Who Wants To Be A Millionaire on the grounds that the questions are too easy and thus would result in their giving away too much money. The 22 Minutes’ joke has the game show’s producers apparently responding that the questions weren’t too easy – for Americans. In yet another example, Mercer points out that 90% of Americans cannot find their home towns on an unmarked map and suggests that “if

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41 Atwood, “Canadian Looks at American Looking at Us,” 1B.


they [Americans] get mad at us, we will just have to take our name off the map and feel safe knowing that they will never find us.”

The American bully may be bigger, richer, and more economically powerful, but there is one area in which he is not superior: he is ignorant. While this doesn’t necessarily make him any less a danger to Canadian interests – and arguably more so – it does make him vulnerable to Canadian satire. Our satirical acts of repudiation allow us to get a bit of our own back on a bully who dominates us in every other arena; at the same time, the ritual serves as affirmation of a distinct identity. This pattern helps to explain the jubilation Canadian fans feel when victory is literal, as it was at the Salt Lake City Olympics when Canada took gold in both men’s and women’s hockey. And the Canadian men’s hockey team ended out of gold medal contention at the Nagano Olympics, Walsh’s Molly McGuire expressed the feelings of all Canadians when she noted that, though we didn’t win, “at least we beat the Yanks.” No doubt the same cold comfort was being dished out following the 2006 Olympics, when the Canadian men’s hockey team finished out of the medals.

Nevertheless, behind the jubilation and the celebration of “our game” is the harsh reality of yet another Canadian sell-out: our national sport is being sold off team by team to the highest bidder, which inevitably means an American, and even the Montreal Canadiens aren’t sacred. For example, on the topic of the sale of the Habs to a buyer in the US, the coaches of “Hockey Notebook” observe that “Hockey is a

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45 Mary Walsh, “Mock Newscast,” This Hour Has 22 Minutes, (CBC) Season 5, Episode 16. 1999.
Canadian game. It is only owned by the Americans. Like the Mounties, like our natural resources, indeed, the show implies, like every other treasured Canadian symbol. The sketches hit us directly where they will sting most sharply, in the hope of waking us up to the ways in which we are selling out our own national culture. It is, as Margaret Atwood has put it, “our eagerness to sell that needs attention,” and 22 Minutes urges us to take a good look at our own practices and attitudes.

Occasionally 22 Minutes includes caricatures of Americans in its sketches, as in Cathy Jones’s impersonation of an American reacting to the introduction of a Canadian chocolate bar into the American market. Jones’s loud, brash, and arrogant portrayal exaggerates the features Canadians presume to be “typical” of corporate America. In “Playboy Grotto,” Greg Thomey and Cathy Jones absolutely overthrow the seductive glamour of American cultural iconography by transporting it into pathetically ordinary Canadian space. Jones’s small-town Playboy bunny, Byna Puddister, is painfully unsophisticated and, despite her costume, is more pitiable than glamorous, an unlettered young woman to whom anyone more worldly than she is “so stuck-up.” The incongruity between the reality of Byna and the fantasy world of Playboy, combined with Thomey’s Donnie Borgnine, the obvious flimflam artist who hosts the segment, exposes the “grotto” for the cheap sham that it is. In case we missed the satire,


48 Cathy Jones and Greg Thomey, “Mock Interview,” This Hour Has 22 Minutes, (CBC) Season 8, Episode 11 & 12. 2002.

49 Cathy Jones and Greg Thomey, “Playboy Grotto,” This Hour Has 22 Minutes, (CBC) Season 7, Episode 7. 2000.
however, Thomey makes its intentions explicit: "Thank you to our viewers, whose obsession with pornography has helped us build this Playboy empire." And thank you to the viewers of 22 Minutes, whose obsession with American programming has created the very monster that the show lampoons. So much for the glamour of what American popular culture has to offer.

Yet another parody features Mary Walsh playing the then-squeaky-clean American icon Martha Stewart as a drunken pill-popper who, while under the influence, glues her face to the floor, gets a hot glue gun stuck to her head, or sticks her head in a turkey. She also hurls abuse at her compliant audience: "You mindless sheep! Baaaa!...If I said mustard was a good stain remover, you'd be walking around with yellow spots." Beneath the carefully-cultivated patrician image, the sketch seems to imply, lies the vulgar reality of American culture: loud, brash, grotesque and pathetic. And there too lies the sheep-like Canadian viewing audience, willingly accepting whatever American content the box dishes out, no matter how contemptuous of its audience it may be.

In another context, Walsh seems to explain the impetus of sketches like these, an analysis worth quoting in full:


51 Mary Walsh, "Martha Stewart's Weekend," This Hour Has 22 Minutes, (CBC) Season 5, Episode 16. 1999.


... in America there is that ladder to success and it's so high and so lofty that the top is hidden from you and anything is possible up there – do you know what I mean? The myth, the mythological clouds, are hiding the top from you. So it's not just the stuff, it's the possibility of going up that high.

And then I thought, in Canada it's more like a kitchen stool, and it's like—you know? You've got easier access to the cupboards... but when you're up there it's hard to make a myth out of it because where are you? You're standing on a kitchen stool.

Now that's one vision and then there's their vision. And now, somehow or other, we've always thought that their vision was better, because it did of course hold out that thing, and that our vision was pedestrian in a way. But in a way I see our vision as real and their vision as bullshit... I don't want to, you know, impose that on them or anything, but I see the validity of our vision, in a way, too, that the survival and the managing to get by and get through is in fact something that should be celebrated and hymns should be sung to.55

But the sketches of 22 Minutes imply that the only way our vision can be celebrated is to make room for it in the national consciousness; this means somehow sweeping the American figure into the background so that Canadian realities can come to the fore.

Although the programme repeatedly criticizes Canadians for our complicity in placating the bully, 22 Minutes acknowledges that standing up to him is not easy. He’s

stupid, but he’s big and he’s dangerous, especially when provoked. Mercer explains in one of his “Streeters”:

America is like the big guy at the dance. It’s three o’clock in the morning, the lights just came on, and the girls are all gone; they are not going to get any. They have no choice. They got to close one eye, stagger out into the parking lot, look for the smallest guy they can find, and punch him really hard in the face. They have no other choice; it is a primitive male thing. So my advice to the entire planet is everyone should just lay low for a little while because they’re really mad and we’re all out in the parking lot.”

When the American bully has a mind to take out his troubles on someone close by, Canada is likely to be one of the nations in the parking lot. We can poke fun at the excesses of their culture, we can lampoon their lack of insight and their presumptuousness, but we had nevertheless better be careful not to poke the sleeping elephant too hard with the sharp stick of satire. This repudiation game, the programme warns, is tricky and must be delicately handled.

Nevertheless, we keep it up. 22 Minutes repudiates not only by virtue of its content, but also by virtue of its form and approach. For example, Pierre Berton notes “our reluctance to support a star system in Canada . . . We tend to build up institutions rather than individuals.” This very Canadian privileging of institutions over individuals is evident in the continued popularity and success of This Hour Has 22 Minutes, even after the departure of two of its original cast members (Rick Mercer left

57 Berton, Why We Act 89.
the cast in 2001 and Mary Walsh in 2003). That institutions are more important than individuals is also evident in the accessibility of the public figures who are featured on the programme. For example, Walsh in character as Marg, Princess Warrior confronts and lambastes politicians like Mike Harris,\(^5^8\) Pierre Pettigrew,\(^5^9\) or Lucien Bouchard\(^6^0\) in face-to-face interviews; Mercer as J.B. Dixon treats then-Prime Minister Jean Chretien to lunch at the local Harvey’s fast-food restaurant;\(^6^1\) and Walsh as Marg Delahunty hosts a slumber party featuring such politically diverse guests as Deborah Grey of the Canadian Alliance Party and Svend Robinson of the New Democratic Party in their pyjamas and sharing a bed.\(^6^2\) Celebrities are not held in such high regard that they are above participating in poking fun at themselves, as when Walsh, in guise as Connie, accosts Nicholas Campbell of DaVinci’s Inquest on the street.\(^6^3\) Even the cast and characters of This Hour Has 22 Minutes are not immune to the grounding force of their own satire, as can be seen when Walsh and Thomey’s Ma and Eddie Reardon in one “That Show Sucked” sketch poke fun at various characters on 22 Minutes.\(^6^4\)

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58 Mary Walsh, “Marg, Princess Warrior,” This Hour Has 22 Minutes. (CBC) Season 4, Episode 20. 1998.


61 Rick Mercer, “Mock Interview,” This Hour Has 22 Minutes. (CBC) Season 5, Episode 17. 1999.

62 Mary Walsh, “Marg’s Slumber Party,” This Hour Has 22 Minutes. (CBC) Season 4, Episode 4. 1997.


64 Greg Thomey and Mary Walsh, “That Show Sucked,” This Hour Has 22 Minutes. (CBC) Season 8, Episode 20. 2002.
Like all satire, 22 Minutes does not use humour merely to ridicule, but to inspire a vision of what should be instead. In the show as a whole, just as in the individual sketches previously examined, American culture is frequently the apparent butt of the joke, but more often the intended target is Canadian attitudes and behaviour.65 One "Heritage Minute" sketch features a series of Canadian couples praising and lauding CBC programming, and then immediately switching over to watch popular American fare. The sketch targets the seduction-repudiation pattern of Canadian attitudes to American culture,66 in which, though we embrace and celebrate our differences, we nevertheless continue to prefer American forms of entertainment over our own.67 Yet another "Heritage Minute" satirizes the tendency of many Canadians to abandon their home country for lucrative employment in the United States: "Leaving this country to find work in the States; for over a hundred years, a proud part of our Canadian heritage."68

Other sketches explicitly dramatize Pierre Berton’s observation that too many Canadians "sneer at American television as vulgar and commercial while watching it avidly."69 The sketch "22 Minutes Salutes Canadian Culture" provides a telling example. For example, Global Television’s praiseworthy contribution to Canadian


66 MacLennan, “Dancing with the Neighbours.”


68 Greg Thomey, “Heritage Minute,” This Hour Has 22 Minutes, (CBC) Season 5, Episode 7. 1998.

69 Berton, Why We Act, 58.
culture is its ability to match the title lettering of American products like *Friends* and *The Simpsons* in its ads for “The Simpsons on Global” or “Friends on Global.”

Another instance of the same sketch mocks *Time Magazine*’s split-run edition for being “basically the American *Time Magazine* with a few Canadian covers thrown in.”

Both instances of “22 Minutes salutes Canadian Culture” satirize how American media are thrust upon the Canadian public with only the thinnest of gestures toward Canadian content. In one of his “Streeters,” Rick Mercer bitterly satirizes the lengths Canada is willing to go to sell itself to the American machine:

> Pierre Trudeau said it was a lot like a relationship between an elephant and a mouse and Brian Mulroney, to give him the benefit of the doubt, felt that Canada could influence America more from the inside; therefore, he devoted most of his time in public life to trying to figure out a way to get the mouse up inside the elephant, and let’s face it, that is a period in our country’s history we would all like to forget. \(^{71}\)

The programme is also resistant in its presentation of the characters who populate the world of *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*. The programme celebrates the earthiness, ugliness, and absurdity of featured characters whose ordinariness and imperfection are deliberately foregrounded and exaggerated: consider, for example, the rough crassness of Walsh’s Dakey Dunn, the absurdity of the ensemble’s Quinlan Quints, the repulsiveness of Walsh’s Genova Hallerstein, the absolute vulgarity of Walsh and Thomey’s Ma and Eddie Reardon, the homey insights of Jone’s Mrs. Enid.

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\(^{70}\) Greg Thomey and Mary Walsh, “22 Minutes Salutes Canadian Culture,” *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*, (CBC) Season 6, New Years Eve Special. 2000.

or the wry commentary of her Joe Crow. Envision the imperfect 50-something body of Mary Walsh, revealed as Marg Delahunty in her swimsuit or Princess Warrior bustier. Think, too, of the air of desperation that clings to Thomey’s Jerry Boyle, who represents the fictional Newfoundland Separation Federation, resides in people’s sheds and attics, and whose campaign slogan is: “If you can mark an ‘X,’ you are my kind of people.” As undesirable as they are, these characters are a version of us, and the truths they declare are our own. Their undesirability and exaggerated absurdity have a dual purpose: They add the element of humour to the sketches and they allow the characters to make assertions about Canada that would not be accepted if said “straight.” So Jerry Boyle can get away with critiques of various government parties, and plastic-sword-wielding Marg, Princess Warrior can get away with telling Alberta Premier Ralph Klein to “put a cork in it.”

These eccentric and undesirable characters provide what Kenneth Burke calls perspective by incongruity. They challenge our perspective by inviting us to see a familiar situation from a new, if quirky, point of view. We are invited to contemplate the absurdities of our preoccupation with American culture at the expense of our own, to think about our willingness to sell ourselves so cheaply, to face our own complicity in the takeover of our culture. We can laugh, for instance, at the inept politician Jerry Boyle, but at the same time recognize that he validly criticizes the Liberal government

72 Greg Thomey, “Jerry Boyle,” This Hour Has 22 Minutes, (CBC) Season 7, Episode 4. 2000.
74 Burke, Attitudes 166-167.
for cutting funds to social programmes. Through their view of us, we are given another chance to look at ourselves, to spot the absurdity in the way we behave, and perhaps to do something about it. Certainly we are more willing to accept that view when it is couched in humour. Such perspective by incongruity functions for Burke as a comic corrective, suggesting a close link between these perspectives and humour and satire. Burke notes of perspective by incongruity:

It must be employed as an essentially comic notion, containing two-way attributes lacking in polemic, one-way approaches to social necessity. It is neither wholly euphemistic, nor wholly debunking—hence it provides the charitable attitude toward people that is required for purposes of persuasion and cooperation.76

Perspective by incongruity is an effective rhetorical device because it invites laughter and acceptance, which may not be available in the dogmatic tirades typically given from soapboxes. These incongruous perspectives balance humour and wit with an underlying social commentary, which is why they co-exist so well with satire. We can understand our identity more fully and willingly when we are allowed to step out of the situation and observe it from a fresh point of view. Perspective by incongruity allows us to remove our personal attachments in the situation and see ourselves as an outsider might see us.

Through its generalized pattern of repudiation and resistance, This Hour Has 22 Minutes accomplishes a variety of purposes. The programme repeats and reinforces the

75 Thomey, "Jerry Boyle," Season 1, Episode 1, 1994.
76 Burke, Attitudes 166-167.
Canadian traditions and commonplaces on which our unique cultural identity is founded. It offers an arena in which all things Canadian are featured and dominant American values are repudiated. It resists American culture through its eccentric characters and yet calls Canadians to task for often preferring American cultural products.

As we have come to some conclusions about how This Hour Has 22 Minutes operates as an antilanguage, the question arises of what can we learn about rhetoric and the creation of identity. It is this issue that I will explore in the final chapter of my thesis.
Conclusion: Canadian Resistance as Cultural Identification

This thesis has argued that popular discourses such as the Canadian television satire This Hour Has 22 Minutes can tell us a lot about the audiences to whom they are addressed. Such insights are important to a culture for whom identity has long been a troublesome and heavily debated issue. Canadian culture has for decades faced the challenge of defining itself while being inundated by another culture's media. The problem, as we have seen, is serious enough for critics such as John Meisel to argue that Canadian culture is on the verge of being swallowed up by American influences:

The greatest threat to Canada lies in the possibility (some might even say probability) that, as the result of the strong presence of American influences, our cultural development may be stunted. . . There is alas, a well-grounded fear that . . . our priorities will become so dominated by those of our neighbours that the distinctiveness of Canada will, to all intents and purposes, vanish.¹

Other commentators argue that this has already happened. The historian Jack Granatstein, for example, argues that “the line dividing Canadians from Americans is small, . . . in fact, Canadians really are Americans.”² As early as 1970, the philosopher


George Grant had already concluded that Canada had “ceased to be a nation” as a result of its “social and economic blending into the empire.”

Others are more optimistic. Mel Hurtig, for instance, while acknowledging perhaps more than anyone the danger of getting too close to the U.S., rejects the idea that the process has already gone too far: “Far too many Canadians, including far too many Canadian nationalists, say it’s already too late. I say to heck with that. Even if the chances are slim, . . . nothing else should be more important.” Other hopefuls claim that Canadian identity is actually thriving, and in spite of American inundation is not in danger of disappearing. Michael Adams, for example, insists that, far from becoming more Americanized, Canadian values are diverging even further from American ones, even as integrationist pressures increase.

Hurtig and Adams are part of a tradition that includes no lesser lights than Pierre Berton, Margaret Atwood, and Mary Walsh herself. In her 1992 Graeme Spry lecture, “A Hymn to Canada,” Walsh insists,

I feel that we are so inexorably ourselves that at this point I don’t really think we can become anything else. We’re so endlessly bombarded by American culture and American images and American dreams and American everything.

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4 Mel Hurtig, The Vanishing Country: Is It Too Late to Save Canada? (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2002) 419.

and still we come together and say, But we’re Canadians, and we express ourselves as Canadians, and we continue to feel that that’s an important thing.\(^6\)

Continuing to resist American cultural bombardment is necessary dance that will continue as long as the two countries are neighbours, insists Jennifer MacLennan.\(^7\)

Pierre Berton presented the same view with his *Why We Act Like Canadians* in 1982. The resistance will continue, says Berton, because Canadians “have our own distinct identity and our own way of doing things and that part of that identity is our tendency to constant self-examination... we’re not only different but that we also *like* being different and that implies no disrespect to [Americans].”\(^8\) This thesis is part of the latter tradition. I have argued that, while Canada is a marginalized culture living under the shadow of overwhelming foreign influence, our sense of cultural distinctiveness continues to persist through its shared resistance to the dominant influence of American culture.

At the outset of this study of *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*, I articulated three main concerns that I would like to explore in closing. The first was to come to some understanding of how this specific discourse operates as a rhetorical object, in an attempt to explain the basis of the appeal that has given it such popularity and success that continues even to this day.


The second concern of the thesis has been to contribute, however much a master's thesis can contribute, to the scholarly discussion of our persistent preoccupation with what Northrop Frye has dubbed "the famous problem of Canadian identity." 9 What is the meaning of such recurrent talk? What is the reason for this persistent pattern in the Canadian imagination?

Finally, in examining how this specific discourse plays a role in the Canadian identity, I have been interested to draw some conclusions about the nature of public discourse and how it contributes to building, shaping, and maintaining the identity of any given culture. This final section of the thesis will make some concluding statements about these issues.

To begin with my first concern, what have we learned about how This Hour Has 22 Minutes operates, and why is it so successful? To simply note that the programme is a resistant discourse is not sufficient to explain its longstanding appeal and its resonance with Canadian viewers. What its popularity instead points to is the importance of resistant discourses in the Canadian tradition, and the role that they play in providing a cultural and social identity for us. All cultures, and for that matter all individuals, form identity in part through a process of dissociation, of distinguishing ourselves from others. This process, as I have shown, is especially important for a marginalized group that must function, as Jennifer MacLennan notes, "amid the prevailing influence" of a very powerful "them." 10 This Hour Has 22 Minutes appeals to Canadians, in part, because it participates in what Norman Fairclough calls an


10 MacLennan, "Dancing with the Neighbours."
antilanguage. Like all such cultural antilanguages, the Canadian version provides a "conscious alternative" to the dominant discourse type, which in the case of television programming, is American in origin.

As I have argued, This Hour Has 22 Minutes functions as a television antilanguage because it casts the quality of "Canadianness" into relief, making it the figure against a background of dominant American programming. In this sense, 22 Minutes functions as a kind of "perspective by incongruity," shifting our point of view in order to reveal some underlying truth. It achieves this shift in perspective by giving prominence to Canadian topics, values, attitudes, and events not normally visible in our dominant media. It also overtly repudiates the American values, attitudes, behaviour, and assumptions normally taken for granted in the bulk of programming that Canadians watch. Finally, 22 Minutes offers characters of a sort not normally presented in American media, whose exaggerated but recognizably Canadian qualities amplify the "comic corrective" provided by the show's satirical perspective, which we are invited to share. Satire of this kind is a sort of mirror, distorting the image of ourselves just enough to reveal insights we may not otherwise have been able to perceive.

My second concern, contributing to the scholarly discussion of Canadian identity, is addressed by a consideration of whether 22 Minutes is a singular act of resistance or fits into a broader Canadian tradition. Certainly for a Canadian television programme to last 13 years on the air, despite a series of major cast changes and competition from highly marketed American programming, it must be doing something


right. I have argued that this "something" is to tie itself unmistakably to a broader Canadian context. It seems clear from its format and allusive title that This Hour Has 22 Minutes is, and was always intended as, part of a Canadian discursive and broadcasting tradition. Like its namesake This Hour Has Seven Days, the programme offers a new take on news and current events. Despite their apparent differences, the following description of Seven Days suggests just how much 22 Minutes owes to its predecessor:

Clearly inspired by the earlier British satirical review of the news, That Was The Week That Was, Seven Days utilized a one-hour, magazine format that combined satirical songs and skits with aggressive "bear pit" style interviews, investigative reports and mini-documentaries. . . . Despite its non-traditional approaches, Seven Days usually dealt with mainstream concerns and issues, taking a slightly left-leaning perspective on social issues. . . . It is also clear that the team was often seduced by the power of television to embarrass guests or sensationalize issues through manipulative set-ups like the KKK interview. The series often entertained, perhaps more than it informed, foreshadowing the current concern and debate over the line between news and entertainment.¹³ The magazine-style format, the satirical songs and skits, the aggressive "bear pit" style interviews, and mock investigative reports that distinguish 22 Minutes have a clear precedent in Seven Days, which itself was inspired by a satirical programme. There can be no doubt that 22 Minutes works in part because it draws upon a prior Canadian form,

but it also works because that form itself responds to something fundamental in the Canadian mindset. As I have shown, the programme binds itself to a Canadian tradition as well by preoccupying itself with issues that are of deep and longstanding interest to Canadians – in particular, as I have shown, the nature of Canadian identity and the tradition of resistance to American influence.

This analysis of This Hour Has 22 Minutes illustrates how powerful resistant discourses are in the formation and affirmation of Canadian identity. As well, this analysis confirms the "Islandized" mythos that marks that identity as distinctively Canadian, which in part explains the paradoxical, seduction-repudiation pattern in the relationship Canadians have with American culture. The programme is clearly part of a Canadian broadcasting tradition, uniting the features of its controversial CBC predecessor with a strong dose of old-fashioned Canadian satire, which as I have already pointed out is a quintessential Canadian genre.

The patterns of resistance evident in This Hour Has 22 Minutes can be found throughout Canadian discourses, almost since the inception of the country, and these patterns are an indelible part of our shared identity as Canadians. In general, then, this thesis supports the argument that there is a distinct Canadian identity. Despite fears that our identity is either already lost or will inevitably be engulfed by American culture, it seems that these expressions of concern are themselves part of a resistant strain that will persist as long as the overwhelming pressure from outside continues. In the words of Mary Walsh, "I believe that Canada is a strong country, with a strong sense of identity and that no matter how many TV stations come in from Detroit, or how many
beam in from Bucharest or Paris, that Canada will continue to fight and struggle to be and express herself as who she is.”14

The final goal of this thesis was to draw out some implications of using a rhetorical approach to study cultural identity formation in general, not just in Canada. So what can be said about what rhetoric has to offer in the study of public discourses and how they shape and maintain identity? First, the discipline has always been about public communication, first through speeches, and later through various other means of communicating a message to a larger public.

If an understanding of and adaptation to audience is critical to the creation of effective public discourses, as Aristotle so long ago pointed out, then it stands to reason that we should be able to examine such public discourses to uncover how they were adapted to that audience. If the discourses are as successful and influential as 22 Minutes, we should expect this examination to provide an understanding of the assumptions that the audience shares and takes for granted. Indeed, this is exactly what Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca argue: that the discourses addressed to a given audience can provide significant insights into their attitudes and accepted beliefs.15

Cultural discourses contain and reaffirm the familiar patterns of assumptions that mark what Margaret Atwood has called a “national habit of mind.”16 As a result, by


using rhetoric to look at the most popular and appealing discourses in a culture, then we can contribute to our understanding of the identity of that culture. This is an assertion that others have elsewhere carried into the examination of popular television programming.\textsuperscript{17} My analysis of \textit{22 Minutes} affirms that a culture’s assumptions about itself are encoded in its public discourses, even those that are primarily intended as mere entertainment.

It confirms, as well, the necessity of the presence of an element of “against whom” as well as a “with whom” in the formation of any human identity, whether it is individual or social, professional or cultural. This process of differentiation is always present, but can of course be intensified into overt resistance by outside cultural pressure. A rhetorical approach that examines “who is saying what, to whom, and for what purpose” reveals the habitual associations that provide a culture with its sense of “us,” along with the habitual dissociations the same culture uses to distinguish itself from those who are “not us.” It also allows us to understand fully the implications of those associative and dissociative patterns for the creation and maintenance of a distinctive public identity.

This analysis also affirms the significance of ritualized repetition in the formation and maintenance of any identity. As Kenneth Burke points out, every statement of identity is only a temporary achievement that needs to be repeated in order to be sustained. This is true of all identities, but is even more urgent for those that are under pressure from outside influences. The relationship between an identity and its discourses is therefore symbiotic: we know who we are in part because we continually

\textsuperscript{17} Paul Cantor, \textit{Gilligan Unbound: Pop Culture in the Age of Globalization} (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001).
see our sense of self reflected back to ourselves in our cultural discourses. This necessary process not only sheds light on the specific case of Canadian identity, but on the dynamics of identity in general. If identity is formed in discourse, then the patterns that affirm it must be repeated if that identity is to be sustained. Not surprisingly, then, a culture’s public discourses feature repetition as an inescapable component of identification.

Finally, I believe that the most important contribution of this analysis is its confirmation of Kenneth Burke’s challenge to the traditional understanding of persuasion. It is commonly believed that we attempt to build common ground with others for the practical purpose of obtaining their cooperation. In other words, it is assumed that we create identification with others primarily in order to persuade. Burke argued, instead, that rhetoric, properly understood, is not simply about the practical nature of persuasion. Identification for Burke is not a secondary strategy, a means to engender the cooperation of others. Instead, it is our desire for cooperation from others that is the secondary element in our rhetorical efforts, which are chiefly aimed at fulfilling our central, most important, “edenic” goal, that of achieving a sense of identification.¹⁸

If Burke is correct that the primary motive of human communication is identification or community, then of necessity the study of identity formation would involve rhetorical methods and rhetorical approaches. To establish an identity, to establish a sense of community, inescapably involves the bringing together of shared assumptions and values – involves, that is to say, persuasion. The public discourses that

reflect our identity back to us, forming and affirming our membership in a broader cultural community, are persuasive discourses even when they appear to be otherwise. Thus it is that discourses like “Talking to Americans,” “Connie Bloor,” and other sketches and skits from a programme such as *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* can be understood as efforts to persuade. As persuasion, their intent is not primarily to bring about a tangible change in the world, but enable their audience to share and participate in a vision of themselves as Canadians.
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