

he attempts to fool us into thinking that he has something worthwhile to say about the RCMP. Consequently, the entire exercise strikes me as an imitation on a minor note of Jean Genet's reporting of the 1968 Democratic convention in Chicago in *Esquire*. From it I learned that Genet was impressed by the cops' leather jackets, their shiny belts and their bulging behinds but that was also the sum and substance of his message. Jan Cremer's book describes Canada in very poetic terms, it also gives an idyllic portrait of the Mounties and informs us that the author enjoys drinking beer and lusting after healthy young maidens but all that does not take us beyond his boyhood dreams and his adolescent inclinations. When the RCMP invited Jan Cremer to have a look at their operation they knew what they were doing and, of course, as always they also knew that they would get their man.

A. van den Hoven

SOME COMMENTS ON A. VAN DEN HOVEN'S PAPER 'HET

ZWIJGZAME KORPS, REPORTAGE' by Jan Cremer

1. Professor A. van den Hoven reproaches Jan Cremer for not having been critical in his portrayal of the RCMP. He says that Cremer's boozing and womanizing have stultified the author's brain to such an extent that he may have lost all critical perspective, that a year's subscription to *The Globe and Mail* would have provided him with a more informed portrait of the RCMP, that the author seems never to have heard of illegal break-ins, the opening of correspondence or barnburnings, that he preferred to be indoctrinated by the Mounties' propaganda machine, and that Cremer is temperamentally ill-suited for a critical study of the force.

Here is my response.

- a) It was not the intention of Jan Cremer to write a critical study of the RCMP. Rather, he sought to give a sympathetic account of the force and show how it functions.
- b) I do not think that Cremer lost all critical perspective. This becomes clear in his portrayal of Sergeant Jones, especially in sections 60 and 57. In section 60 Cremer is informed about the composition of the training unit. He is given various data, and it is emphasized that race, colour, and ethnic origin do not play a role in the selection process. The sergeant looks around, we hear, he spots a black recruit and says: "Daar zit een nikker, misschien wel leuk voor een foto als we die er straks bijhalen. We hebben hier ook negers, weetje!" (p. 129). And the author adds: "Voldaan kijkt de Sergeant mij aan." - I detect in this passage a critical disposition; this becomes even more evident in section 57. The same sergeant has just given orders to a group of recruits to relax for some ten minutes; he turns to a young man who knows some German and tells him to say something in that language in order to please the visitor. When the recruit answers that he knows only High German, we hear the following: "Wel gotverdomme nog an toe" bitst de Sergeant kwaad, denkend voor paal te staan. "Zeg wat in het Duits. Kaputt - schweinhund - sauerkraut - zeg-wat-in-het-Duits" (p. 123). Surely, this portrayal of an RCMP official is not at all positive, but very critical. It reveals the narrow-mindedness, bias, and lack of knowledge of the sergeant.
- c) I cannot subscribe to Professor van den Hoven's view that *The Globe and Mail* would have provided Cremer with a more informed portrait of the RCMP. I distrust the media; and the tendency to dramatize events, to sensationalize, and capture with slick (or not so slick) headlines as many

readers as possible, I find disturbing. As far as RCMP break-ins, the opening of correspondence and burning of a barn are concerned, it is quite probable that Cremer did not know about all this when he wrote the book. The book was printed in 1978, and it was written, in all likelihood, in 1977. Charges were levelled at the Mounties mainly in 1978, in the course of events leading up to the federal election. In the summer of 1977 the first rumblings of RCMP wrongdoings could be heard, but the case that really aroused widespread interest was the one that was investigated publicly early in 1978 (in January/February). I refer here to the disclosure of the break-in (January 1973) of RCMP officials in the Montreal office that contained the Parti Québécois membership lists, which were taken, copied, and later returned. Now, by that time Cremer's book was probably in press, or the manuscript was finished and on the way to, or in the hands of, the publishers. Moreover, at that time the RCMP was still the most revered national institution in Canada. To reproach Cremer on a point such as this is inappropriate, I think.

2. Professor van den Hoven is accusing Cremer of having been superficial in his account of the RCMP. He says, in effect, that Cremer's visit to Canada and his study of the force are done superficially because the author is an outsider who performed the absolute minimum of homework.

Apart from the fact that an outsider is often more objective than an insider, we have to note that Cremer's book is based on impressions gathered during *several* visits to Canada (that is clearly stated in the preface). The book contains a lot of information about the RCMP and is obviously based on factual material.

3. Professor van den Hoven maintains that Cremer's account does very little to satisfy a Canadian's curiosity about the topic.

Here we have to note that the author has written the book for the Dutch reader, not for the Canadian reading public. I am sure, the book would have turned out differently, if Cremer had had the Canadian public in mind. - I might add that the author succeeded in reaching the prospective reader.

4. As an afterthought I would like to mention that we are dealing here with a "reportage," and that this particular genre has so far received very little attention from literary theoreticians. I know of no study of this type of literature that has appeared in the Anglo-Saxon world, though I have heard several papers on the subject within the past couple of years. Scandinavian and German scholars are particularly active in this regard, and in West Germany (Chr. Siegel, *Die Reportage*, 1978) a study of this genre is about to appear or has just appeared. It would seem to me that this type of literature is gaining more and more respectability, and in judging Cremer's account of the RCMP we should perhaps keep this observation in mind.

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#### REJOINDER

My critical review of Jan Cremer's book on the Mounties: *Het Zwijgzame Korps, Reportage* was first delivered at the CAANS (Windsor Chapter) Seminar on Netherlandic Studies, Fall, 1979. At that time, I promised Sigfrid Hoefert that I would print the review and his reply to it if he would allow me to attach a rejoinder.

I think that some of his points are well taken but, nevertheless, I stand by my opinion. A reportage of a police force is incomplete if it does not include the views of those who may have suffered at the hands of that force. Secondly,