

Rose Marie: I Don't Love You

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Pierre Berton, in his book *Hollywood's Canada*, challenges the Hollywood image of Canada, particularly the Canadian frontier. Berton states:

And if Canadians continue to hold the belief that there is no such thing as a national identity – and who can deny that many hold it? – it is because the movies have frequently blurred, distorted, and hidden that identity under a celluloid mountain of misconceptions. (Berton, 1975: 12)

Berton's queries about film images seem to suggest that without a clear understanding of history, we might be subject to the dreams and imaginations of others. In Berton's case, "the others" are Hollywood producers and directors.

Geoff Pevere and Greig Dymond state that Americans have made many more Mountie movies than Canadians have, noting that "the inadvertent or intentional kitsch value of these is almost always rooted in the image of the Mountie's impossible purity or sense of duty." (Pevere and Dymond, 1996: 183) Michael Dawson, in *That Nice Red Coat Goes To My Head Like Champagne: Gender, Antimodernism and the Mountie Image*, points out that "Mounted Policemen appeared as central characters in over 250 feature films." (Dawson, 1997) Pierre Berton notes that by the early 1920s Hollywood had made 188 Mountie movies, forty-eight of them in the feature length mode that had become popular after 1914 (Berton, 1975: 112). Dawson adds that by the 1930s and 1940s "the film industry produced a body of work that consolidated the fictional Mountie position as both a mythic hero and commercial success." (Dawson, 1997)

Rose Marie (1936) continued a theme that was associated with love and duty, but which had very little to do with "true story claims" about the Mounted Police. According to Berton at least thirty films followed this theme: "Mountie is ordered to bring in his sweetheart's brother 9, sweetheart's father 6, the man his sweetheart really loves 4, own brother (apart from twin) 3, best friend 3, twin brother 2, sweetheart sister's boyfriend 1." (Berton, 1975: 118) These romantic themes associated with the sub-genre were reminders to the RCMP and to the public that in films about the Force, fictionalized stories ruled the day. In the Mounted Police Theatre in Regina, the walls are filled with posters that reinforce the timeworn themes of the cinematic Mounties, as in *North of the Yukon* (1939): "Watch this Mountie get his man – and a gal friend too – in a song-studded saga of the wilderness." ("RCMP museum," 1995)

Much of the scholarly investigation of the Mounted Police has taken shape in the form of what Robert Thacker called "the Mountie metaphor," that is, that the Mountie was seen as an allegorical representation of Canada (Dawson, 1997). These studies have generally been Canadian reactions to the Mountie image being manipulated or shaped by outside interests, usually American. In many cases these reactions or critiques have appeared as a nationalistic backlash against those who would tinker with a Canadian icon. From a cultural perspective this interpretation has been seen in a variety of different ways. Thacker, for example, has

viewed the "control over the Mountie's image by Hollywood and American writers as a metaphor for the plight of cultural industries in Canada." (Dawson, 1997) Others, such as Pevere and Dymond, have implied that the Mounties were "dutiful sexless bureaucrats with guns" waiting to be Americanised (Pevere and Dymond, 1996: 183).

While Americans might have seen their relationship with Canadians more as "extended family," the Canadian quest for a distinct identity has been viewed more as a reaction against being American. This notion might suggest that Canadians will have their identity destroyed by watching films made in California. While such musing certainly prevails and some Canadians might believe that the transmission of American popular culture into Canada might be part of a larger cultural conspiracy theory, the true measure of Canada's national identity can best be found in the reserved demeanour of many Canadians. Such behaviour is, in many respects, a reflection of Canada's distinct political and social culture. This tradition can be seen in the emergence of Canadian political institutions after Confederation. Canada's "National Policy" was a creation of core Canadian values, a reflection of the belief that the good of the nation comes before the good of the individual, that individualism is counter-productive to the Canadian national struggle to survive. Canadians tend not to wear their nation's ideology on their sleeves; nevertheless, they are aware of how these differences play out in the public realm. Reginald Stuart notes that:

Many Canadians note a deep ambivalence towards the United States... on the one hand, Canadians cross the border eagerly and easily... watch American television, read American authors, do American crossword puzzles in the *Globe and Mail*. And, on the other hand, they shudder at American materialism, social decay, and global adventurism. They vicariously enjoy products made in America, even yankee excess and sins, all the while certain, and smug, about Canada's moral superiority. (Stuart, 1993)

Although probably no image has shaped the American perception of Canada as much as has the Hollywood Mountie, American filmmakers were unable to fit the Mounted Police within any accurate historical context. American socialisation has not placed a high premium on Canadian knowledge. The cinematic image of the Mounted Police, therefore, was based on a somewhat romantic representation of the Force, a small detachment of officers decked out in scarlet tunics, who were honest to a fault and clever in a simple sort of way. Nelson Eddy and Robert Ryan best exemplified these qualities in their on-screen performances. Even *Rose Marie* has suffered from periodic lapses into Americana. *Rose Marie* producer Hunt Stromberg, at one story meeting, succumbed to his mid-West background by noting that riverboats are plowing up the St Lawrence – shades of sternwheelers on the Mississippi (Stromberg, 1935c). Stromberg, like so many other American panders of popular culture, tended to ignore the reality that other nations operate on cultural wavelengths different from their own.

The influence of American values and perspectives portrayed on the screen would have an influence beyond American borders. According to Doug Saunders, as early as the 1920s, American cinematic influence was holding sway abroad (Saunders, 2000: A14). In a 1927 editorial, Britain's *Daily Mail* commented:

The bulk of picture-goers are Americanized to an extent that makes them regard the British film as a foreign film... They talk American, think

American, dream American; we have several million people... who, to all intents and purposes, are temporary American citizens. (Saunders, 2000: A14)

For international film audiences it suggested that they were "all effectively living in one country, the United States of Entertainment." (Saunders, 2000: A15)

The American connection or influence in these Mounted Police films leads, of course, to Canadian reactions about cultural intrusions and control from south of the border. An interesting footnote to this so-called cultural paranoia is the on-going concern by Canadians to protect their cultural identity. Canada is one of the few countries in the world that has had to regulate the amount of foreign content to be aired on its radio and television waves. The Canadian Radio and Television Commission (CRTC) was instituted in the 1960s to regulate Canadian media content, the fear being that Canada was in danger of being swallowed up by American culture. Cable television from south of the border meant that Canadians were being bombarded by American news and entertainment programming. The CRTC's mandate was also to make sure that the Canadian arts would flourish – in short, to make sure that Canadian culture could survive in spite of Canada's powerful neighbour to the south. It is not surprising, therefore, that some Canadian nationalists have been suspicious of those who would tinker with Canadian cultural icons. The Mounted Police are clearly one of those icons. The most recent issue concerning the Mountie's image has been the sale of the RCMP's marketing rights to Disney, a contract that has since expired and has not been renewed. The fear of seeing Mickey Mouse in scarlet created anxiety in many sectors of Canadian society; the underlying apprehension, of course, was that American image makers would be in control of a revered Canadian institution.

Some might argue that such external influences have inhibited the development of Canada's film industry. Chris Gittings' *Canadian National Cinema* traces the evolution of feature film in Canada focusing on key historical moments that have shaped the temperament of Canadian film. Gittings speaks to the rich ethnic and cultural diversity of Canadian cinema, negating the somewhat typical nationalistic notions that perpetuate fear of foreign incursions, concerns such as those raised by Canadian author Margaret Atwood, who refers to American cultural dominance as the "disease from the south" (Gittings, 2002: 104).

Retrospectively, those same concerns have tended to make the study of Hollywood's images of the Mounties a defense of "The Canadian Way," a condition that appears to have paralleled the jingoism that was so prevalent in American affairs throughout the last half of the twentieth century. Mountie films were not attacks on Canadian cultural images and icons; rather, they were misguided attempts to convey images of Canadian historical culture and geography. The producers and directors of these films, for the most part, failed to conduct adequate research about the country's political and social culture, which resulted in some rather careless images of Canada and the Mounted Police. But in a political culture that tended to be self-consuming and introspective, their mistaken images of Canada could not be seen as deliberate distortions; they were simply errors made by filmmakers trapped within their own cultural experience.

There is certainly a great deal to criticize in *Rose Marie*, if one wanted to treat the film as an accurate historical representation of the Mounted Police. Cecil B. DeMille's *Northwest Mounted Police* (1940), for example, was the source of much ridicule for its portrayal of the Mounties and their role in Canada's North-West Rebellion. *Rose Marie*, however, might have been the wrong target for those wishing to protect the cinematic Mountie's historical and

cultural purity. *Rose Marie*'s clichéd promotions of Canada would certainly rival the fraudulent historical advertising for Raoul Walsh's *Saskatchewan* (1954), a film that many Canadians saw as a national joke (Berton, 1975: 184). Nelson Eddy, however, was not a re-incarnation of North-West Mounted Police Inspector James Walsh, an historical composite in some of the other Mountie films. *Rose Marie* was, make no mistake, a musical, not an account of an historical event taken from the files of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). Yet for those who occupied administrative posts in the organization, *Rose Marie* became the measuring stick on how not to make a movie about the Mounted Police. As RCMP Commissioner Clifford Harvison suggested to film director Burt Kennedy during the making of *The Canadians* (1961), the Force was not overly fond of the image of singing Mounties, implying that the RCMP did not want a remake of *Rose Marie*. Harvison would later comment: "fiction has outweighed fact and created an image of the RCMP that is closer to the Hollywood-style, *Rose Marie* kind of Mountie than the real thing." (Marquis, 1998) But the Commissioners, too, might have been caught up in the fictive web of the Mounted police stories. William Cobban and Bill Cameron, in *Mountie: Canada's Mightiest Myth*, comment:

Hollywood was not bothered by reality... The commissioners tolerated American crooks driving cars while the Mountie was still on his horse. They didn't mind that most of the bad guys had corny French Canadian accents. Or that the Indians were played by white men wearing wigs. (Cobban and Cameron, 1998: 8)

Rose Marie as well as the other Mounted Police films suffered from this type of cultural misrepresentation, prompting Cobban and Cameron to observe: "As long as Hollywood got the uniform right, as long as the Mounties prevailed, the Commissioners allowed Canadian horsemen to act like American cowboys." (Cobban and Cameron, 1998: 9) *Rose Marie* was no Western, but it had mountains, Indians, and sinister trappers with those corny accents. As for the accents, the producers of *Rose Marie* were pretty accurate – the story takes place in the Quebec bush, but Stromberg and Van Dyke, it seemed, would never be quite sure about the geography in the film!

In spite of the Mounted Police reservations about their singing image and the laughter that went along with the film's light-hearted story, *Rose Marie* is one of the few Mountie movies that have aged gracefully. Hunt Stromberg's cinematic gem was, in spite of its somewhat threadbare story, a symbolic tribute to Canada's mounted gendarmes, and remains one of the few Mountie movies that can be easily recalled by cinephiles. For the RCMP, however, the legacy of *Rose Marie* would become a kind of "organizational ghost." While Mounted Police officials appeared to be comfortable with their cinematic image when it was made, in later years it would seem to have a haunting presence and come to represent everything that was "un-Mountie" about the Force. As Harvison implied, it was more make-believe than the real thing. On closer examination, however, perhaps *Rose Marie* by the very fact that it was not intended as an historical representation of Canada and the Force, might have become, indirectly, one of the RCMP's best public relations efforts. The film's music and comedy, as studio correspondence and theatre surveys suggested, had made it an instant hit with the public. But for the Mounted Police and some Canadian nationalists like Pierre Berton, it would be another example of self-absorbed Americans messing with Canada's history and culture.

Rose Marie might seem like an uncomfortable mix along side some other films in the Mountie sub-genre. Although the propensity of Mountie films would rely on the fictive formula, a number of Mountie films were set in the late-nineteenth century and used the "true story" claim (i.e. *Northwest Mounted Police*, and *Saskatchewan*) to enhance their cinematic credibility. *Rose Marie*'s visual heritage was certainly "Western" with the California Sierras serving as a panoramic backdrop for the film. Its frontier legacy, however, is questionable as the story is placed in the 1930s (Hunt Stromberg used the phrase "present time" in his June 3, 1935, conference notes). It is not set in a period of westward expansion or settlement; therefore, the intrusion of notions associated with the taming of the frontier is absent. What *Rose Marie* does have is a strong symbolic attachment to the Mounted Police. The Mounties on more than one occasion had questioned their singing image in the film. Other film directors such as Cecil B. DeMille screened *Rose Marie* for ideas during the filming of their own Mountie stories. In fact, DeMille's barracks scene in *Northwest Mounted Police* appears to have had its genesis in *Rose Marie*. *Rose Marie* has come to represent, rightly or wrongly, what the Mounties were not. According to Cobban and Cameron, "Well, where else would you start? 1936. *Rose Marie*. The Canadian Mountie – America's favorite cop...The Mountie was Canada...the Canadian trademark and beau ideal." (Cobban and Cameron, 1998: 1) The notion that he might have been "America's favourite cop" has implied that Canadians have had little control over the shaping of that image. That perspective has been fuelled over time by Canadian reactions to Hollywood's playing with a cultural icon. *Rose Marie* certainly was guilty of major geographical gaffes, but the film needs to be revisited minus some of the cultural paranoia associated with "How could they?"

The *Bulletin of Authorship Records*, which Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios had received on January 27, 1936, noted that the film was based on the stage production of Arthur Hammerstein from the play by Otto A. Harbach and Oscar Hammerstein. The Stage production of *Rose-Marie* had opened in 1924 and there had been a total of 557 performances ("Rose Marie Credits"). A successful silent film version of the film had been made in 1928 starring Joan Crawford, so it made good sense that there would eventually be a sequel. The 1936 version had Jeanette MacDonald playing Marie de Flor, a glamorous opera star. MacDonald had not been M-G-M's first choice for the female lead. The role had been originally set for Grace Moore, but when the film was ready for shooting, she was not going to be available until after Eddy was to leave on his annual concert tour. According to an undated excerpt from *The Films Of Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy*: "Since so much of the film was to be shot on location at Cascade Lake and Emerald Bay, Lake Tahoe, during the summer months of 1935, there was no possibility of delay and the role fell to Miss MacDonald." (Prod. Notes) Stromberg, at his June 3 conference meeting had not, it seems, made a decision on the female lead for the picture. Contrasting their strengths, Stromberg noted:

Grace Moore's greatest credit is of the opera – singing these arias, she is divine – has more power and scope than MacDonald. But she isn't as easy to make a picture with as MacDonald – she doesn't have the youth and beauty. In the first place, she isn't the actress [sic] MacDonald is lighter, cuter – Moore hasn't the range in acting that MacDonald has. (Stromberg, 1935a: 4)

It appeared that Stromberg had decided, in his own mind, that MacDonald was best for the part.

MacDonald and Eddy were well known to film audiences and it was their on-screen musical chemistry that Stromberg hoped would appeal to the public. The film story would open with de Flor completing an evening performance in Montreal when she gets word that her brother Jack (Jimmy Stewart in one of his early roles) has escaped prison and killed a Mountie. She decides that she must go to him. During her search she encounters Sergeant Bruce (Nelson Eddy) who is on the trail of her brother Jack, and a romance ensues. A synopsis in *Studio News* set the story at civilization's outpost, noting:

On arriving at the last outpost of civilization, Marie prepares to buy suitable clothing for the remaining part of her trip. Boniface (her half-breed guide) steals her purse, and the shop-keeper advises her to tell the Northwest Mounted Police about it. ("Brief Synopsis," 1936)

She then encounters Nelson Eddy, and the trek to her brother's hideout begins. The film's trek to box-office success would be noted in the January 11 *Studio News* headline: "Critics See Golden Harvest... In 'Rose Marie.' MacDonald, Eddy Musical Wins Ovation At Preview." *Rose Marie* was coming on the tails of MacDonald and Eddy's successful musical, *Naughty Marietta* (1935), and Stromberg was sure that *Rose Marie* would capitalize on the immense popularity of the two singing stars.

Rose Marie certainly cannot be mistaken for a Western, yet it has an interesting connection to the genre. The producer of the film, Hunt Stromberg, started his career as a reporter in the American Mid-West, migrating to the West Coast as a publicist. He later became an independent producer before hooking up with M-G-M in 1925 (Schatz, 1988: 45). David L. Selznick earned his early managerial spurs at M-G-M supervising Tim McCoy "B" Westerns at the studio. One of the upcoming Hollywood directors at this time was W.S. "Woody" Van Dyke who would go on to direct *Rose Marie* (Schatz, 1988: 54). Van Dyke, who had started in the movie business as an actor and assistant to D.W. Griffith, was assigned by Selznick to help manage the McCoy "oaters" (Schatz, 1988: 54). McCoy had observed, "Van Dyke became a giant among Hollywood's creative geniuses." (McCoy, 1977: 226) McCoy and Van Dyke had co-scripted *War Paint* (1926), the story resulting, according to McCoy, from Van Dyke's rather pointed demand, "Now tell me what you know about Indians." (McCoy, 1977: 228) McCoy probably knew more than Van Dyke did, given Van Dyke's questionable portrayal of Native Americans in *Rose Marie*. *Rose Marie* might have been more of an operetta than a frontier saga, but Van Dyke had been around Western movies long enough to understand the basic ingredients that made them work. It is not surprising, then, that Jeanette MacDonald would later comment that: "He doesn't wear a flowing tie, and he looks and talks like a cowboy, yet he's an artist, and a well trained one, just the same." ("Star praises Van Dyke," 1936)

Rose Marie does not belong to the Western genre; it is a straight-out musical that most filmgoers would have found quite enjoyable – unless they were members of the Mounties, of course. Pierre Berton has suggested that the Mounted Police came to loath the musical (Berton, 1975: 138). There were geographical and cultural blunders associated with the picture, but as a story and as entertainment it certainly was not out of place when compared to other Mounted Police films. The Commissioner of the Mounties at the time, James MacBrien, appeared to have enjoyed the film and the Mounties' representation in it (Berton, 1975: 138). There is an attempt on the part of Stromberg to pay attention to Mountie regulations in the film. In his projection room notes of December 2, 1935, Stromberg mentions, "Find out from

someone (Carruthers) what the RCMP would say when going on manoeuvres." Cobban and Cameron note that:

The Force was an active accomplice in the production of the Mountie operetta, *Rose Marie*. Those guys riding behind Nelson Eddy were actual, genuine, and real serving members of the RCMP. And in the end the Commissioners kind of liked *Rose Marie*. The uniform was right, and the fellow was a gentleman. (Cobban and Cameron, 1998: 9)

Hollywood's resident Mountie sleuth, Bruce Carruthers (ex-Mountie who served as a consultant on some Hollywood Mounted Police films), had been hired earlier as a technical director for the film, and had already produced a synopsis of the story. The problem with the film, however, from a RCMP point of view, continued to be the image of the Mounted Police. Mounties were law enforcement officers, not singers, and a musical did not seem to be the proper genre for the men and women in scarlet. It is somewhat ironic, however, that the Mounties are famous throughout the world for their musical ride.

Like so many of the other Mountie films, this story evolved from an American's perspective of the Mounted Police. Stromberg had mentioned in his June 3 conference notes that his Mountie would be "simple and sincere...terribly clever in a simple, honest way." (Stromberg, 1935a: 3) In setting the location for his story, Stromberg requested that one of his researchers look up geographical information about the locale. One could expect that there were going to be some cultural and geographical errors associated with the film. Canadian history, after all, was not an essential component of the American Civics curriculum. In the case of *Rose Marie*, these flaws would be apparent right from the start of the picture. It does not take too long to notice that the Premier of Quebec speaks with a slightly toffee British accent, and that the mob scene outside the Montreal Theatre features a policeman with a British bobby hat. The distorted image of Canada was already becoming "old hat."

The promotional material for the current M-G-M/Turner video release has the story taking place in the heart of the Canadian Rockies. After more than half a century, Americans were still having problems, it seems, placing Canadian geography correctly in Mountie films. *Saskatchewan*, of course, was in a league of its own. Rosenberg and Walsh filmed that Mountie tale in Alberta, thinking they were still in Saskatchewan. In *Rose Marie* the story takes place in Quebec, but the geographical backdrop suggests immediately that the story was filmed somewhere west of the "Great Divide." There are plenty of tall Ponderosa pines. Had the film been shot in Canada, it would have been in British Columbia, but it was not. *Rose Marie* was filmed in Northern California at Lake Arrowhead and Lake Tahoe. The mountains in the background were not the lowly Laurentians but the towering Sierras. If the story was unfolding in Canada's northwest country, it was going to be an awfully long ride for Sergeant Bruce. All of this geographical and landscape confusion is somewhat surprising because Stromberg makes references that the story takes place in Quebec on a number of occasions during his production meeting of June 3 (Stromberg, 1935a).

Although the story was set in the twentieth century, it had a somewhat rustic, late frontier sort of appeal. The instructions given to Marie de Flor by her guide – "train to Quebec, then by boat, then woods" – had a distinct "Coureur de bois" character to them (these travel instructions clearly suggest that the story is moving to the woods of Northern Quebec not to the Canadian Northwest). When her wallet is stolen by her guide in the lakeside village general store, the owner states, "you can't trust those half-breeds." Marie de Flor then asks for

singing work in a saloon. All of these scenes seem more typical of a western frontier environment than of rural Northern Quebec. It might have all been reasonably believable, except that the village is set against the backdrop of Lake Tahoe with the Sierras in the distance. California explorer John C. Fremont would have recognized the region extremely well. These observations should not have come as a surprise to Hunt Stromberg, the film's producer. He had mentioned in his June 3, 1935, conference notes: "On the presumption that we will open in Quebec (present time) and characterize Grace Moore as a French opera singer named Rose Marie, our first requisite is to invent a situation that will take her to the frontier country." (Stromberg, 1935a: 1) "Frontier country" is a phrase that could have been associated with many Western epics, but it is not a term that would have been used to describe the region of Northern Quebec. In fact, Stromberg's observations at a June 8 story meeting suggested that his knowledge of Canada was of the armchair variety (long on generalizations, but short on reliable information about Canadian geography and culture). Stromberg, in somewhat stereotypical fashion, noted:

We go to the scene of the Indian. He cannot talk English very well. He takes from his pocket a letter and hands it to her...It is a letter from her brother who tells her that in escaping from prison he killed a guard and is now a fugitive in the wilderness of the Saskatchewan country. (Stromberg, 1935b: 2)

This sort of questionable geographical representation and terminology, however, would not be Stromberg's chief concern. His production notes confirmed that the musical would need a geographical setting that would provide a breathtaking backdrop for the story (perhaps Stromberg knew something about the thickly wooded areas of Northern Quebec after all). He settled on Northern California, noting at one of his production meetings that Eddy and MacDonald "truck along this ridge – on the world's greatest location." (Stromberg, 1935a: 7) As with the other Mountie films, there was a probable assumption that American movie audiences would overlook such minor details.

Stromberg, in spite of the obvious geographical flaws in the movie, wanted to provide some geographical authenticity for the story. At the June 3 meeting, he requested information about the geography, stating, "While I think of it, have Charlotte Wood dig up all geographical data on the locale of the region." (Stromberg, 1935a: 1) Stromberg was convinced, however, that audiences would go to see the film for the music, more so than the story. He noted at the June 8 story meeting: "I daresay that nine tenths of the public will go into the theatre to hear the score and the songs they remember so fondly more than they will go into the theatre to see the story itself." (Stromberg, 1935c: 2) Stromberg's comments during most of the story meetings implied that history and geography were of secondary importance to the operatic elements of the film. During a June 8 story meeting, his observations indicated a questionable sense of Canadian history and geography. He noted in a reference about Jack: "It is a letter from her brother who tells her that in escaping from prison he killed a guard and is now a fugitive in the wilderness of the Saskatchewan country." (Stromberg, 1935b: 2) This reference is an interesting one because *Rose Marie*, according to Stromberg, was going to be set in the present time – and Saskatchewan had been a province since 1905. During the same discussion Stromberg added, "We go from this episode to the riverboats which plow up the St. Lawrence (or whatever river our northwest region is on) to the frontier in which our story is laid." (Stromberg, 1935b: 2) Stromberg's mid-West background might have suggested to him that this story was taking place on the Mississippi River.

Stromberg's attention to First Nations' culture needed some attention as well. The fact that there was a totem pole dance in the film suggested that Stromberg and Van Dyke had failed to do their cultural homework. Totem Poles are peculiar to West Coast tribes and would not have been part of the Native cultures of Eastern Canada. In *The Imaginary Indian*, Daniel Francis notes, "In *Rose Marie*, a film set in Northern Quebec, an Indian festival features huge West Coast totem poles and Natives wearing Plains Indian feather headdresses, a style of headgear unknown to the eastern woodlands outside the movies." (Francis, 1992: 80) Such notions and mistakes suggested that Stromberg's geographical and cultural sense of Canada was probably not any better than Walsh's or Rosenberg's.

But Stromberg was right on one score, and it was a musical one. While the Mounted Police supposedly loathed their singing image in the film, particularly the scene with Eddy leading the Mounties in song as they rode along, Stromberg had observed in his production notes of June 8, 1935, that "Soldiers do sing on the march – to keep up their spirits and to pass the time away." (Stromberg, 1935c: 1) In fact, Eddy's stirring version of "The Mounties" could probably serve as a mini-anthem for the Mounted Police today.

The producers of these films, it seemed, had come to view Canada as a series of cultural metaphors – northern lakes and woods, canoes, the wilderness, and of course mountains. *Rose Marie* was being placed contemporarily, yet all of these cultural and geographical stereotypes suggested a rural Canada set in the not too distant past – not quite a part of the twentieth century. Stromberg could not seem to deviate from this image. In his story notes for June 8 he states, "It is early spring and trappers and traders are moving into the little village with their annual cargo of fur and game taken during the winter months." (Stromberg, 1935b: 2) This would be great stuff in a DeVoto novel about the frontier, but seemingly out of place in the 1930s. For these Mountie filmmakers, such Hudson's Bay Company type images seemed to define their understanding of Canada.

Over time the RCMP had developed a keen interest in how their cinematic image was evolving, and the *Rose Marie* situation was no exception. Bruce Carruthers, late of the Mounties, had been hired as a technical consultant on the film and on June 14, 1935, sent a note to Stromberg indicating that he had completed a summary of the story. He mentioned: "I have written my own summary of the plot in order to keep my feet on the ground and believe you might be interested in it." (Carruthers, 1935: 4) Carruthers, as was previously noted, was the "self appointed guardian of the Mountie image" in Hollywood, and he reported his observations periodically to the Force. Geoff Pevere observed:

He would first of all take a look at the script which he thought misrepresented either history or the way the Mountie would behave. I mean you can't imagine what, what an immense pain in the ass this guy must have been to a lot of these screenwriters and producers. (cited in Cobban and Cameron, 1998: 9)

Rose Marie would be one of his earlier "policing" efforts, but his summary smacks of someone wishing to impress. It is filled with references to how the Mounties would be deporting themselves in the story, as well as some name-dropping of Quebec towns along the St. Lawrence. Carruthers noted that "Trois Rivieres is a town of 32,000 persons, its main industry is paper-pulp and they have good docks." (Carruthers, 1935: 4) Stromberg might have heeded, however, the geographical observations made by Carruthers, who noted later in his story summary: "The country is well-wooded and hilly, not mountainous, the higher and more wooded Laurentians are in the distance. It is a beautiful setting." (Carruthers, 1935: 5)

The ex-Mountie's consultative research must have impressed enough people within the movie-making establishment because Carruthers would still be around four years later offering his services to DeMille on *Northwest Mounted Police*.

Although *Rose Marie* never measured up to the expectations of the Force (a good singing voice was not a prerequisite for enlistment), its depiction of the Mounted Police in general seemed to be satisfactory. Commissioner MacBrien had given his approval to the Mountie dress and regulations, and Eddy's performance, although a bit stiff (Stromberg admitted he was not a great actor [Stromberg, 1935a: 8]), seemed to capture the understated deportment of the Mounties. Eddy had an interesting perspective on his role in *Rose Marie*, believing that his role was a better characterization than the one that made him a star in *Naughty Marietta*. ("Eddy prefers," 1936) The singing star noted that his scouting role in *Naughty Marietta* was "primarily a humorous man, easy going and fun loving." But in *Rose Marie*, Eddy believed he had captured the spirit of the Mounties, stating, "Sergeant Bruce... is hard as nails. As a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, he must be. He must do things in line of duty which would balk most men... I have hope of delineating him to everyone's satisfaction." ("Eddy prefers," 1936) Commissioner MacBrien did not seem to have a problem with the role but his successors would not be so easily pleased. The producers of *Rose Marie* had made no attempt to characterize this film as "history," nor had they suggested that it was based on a true story. It was a musical with songs and lyrics that the public appeared to enjoy. The Mounties, on the other hand, might have wished that the film had been based on a true story!

The story and production meetings dealt primarily with the operatic thrust of the story. Stromberg was determined that *Rose Marie* would provide audiences with a unique film experience. At the June 3 meeting, Stromberg emphasized that the construction of the film story should:

open on opera – then come to the wild country and then go into the type of music of ROSE MARIE – then, if possible, take her back to the opera – the other setting. This would give us a marvellous cycle of music. As a matter of fact, it's never been done before – combining a whole story of an *operetta* such as ROSE MARIE with the *operatic* element we will inject into the story. (Stromberg, 1935a: 4)

And while most of his attention was devoted to the film's musical quality, Stromberg was still able to dress the Mounties correctly in his film, unlike Rosenberg and Walsh. The Mounted Police, perhaps, should have fretted more about *Saskatchewan* than *Rose Marie*!

Stromberg's production expertise was in the musical area, to be sure. He seemed to be most comfortable at the production and story meetings when he was setting the musical story of the film. Stromberg's judgement can be questioned when it came to the film's geographical backdrop, but he had a strong sense of the code of justice or honour that guided the Mounted Police. He made sure in the film that Sergeant Bruce would not deviate from the notion that the Force always did the right thing. It is clear in the story that Bruce initially had been using de Flor to track her brother Jack. It is also clear as they made their way through the woods that they were both falling in love. Stromberg, in his June 3 notes, points to the impending arrest of Jack as the key element in the mental construction of the story observing that "He might have been honest enough to tell her, without hiding behind the romance and love he so clearly surrounded her with." (Stromberg, 1935a: 6) Stromberg then added, "Then he makes

some grandstand speech 'Well, after all – we have our code as well as you have yours – I had my duty to perform and was going to do it, that's all.'" (Stromberg, 1935a: 6) Stromberg sees the story reaching its climax at this point, stating, "there is hate in her heart for this man now – she has pleaded with him – done everything in her power to dissuade him – but to no avail." (Stromberg, 1935a: 7) Bruce, himself, is caught in a personal crisis as well. Stromberg brings closure to the scene by suggesting that even Jack has sensed that Bruce is doing the right thing even though it will cost Jack his life. Stromberg concludes:

Eddy doesn't say a word, but he feels this thing deeply, wishes he could let this bird go – he not only loves Marie, but he likes this kid – but he did kill a person, and he's a member of the Northwest Mounted. (Stromberg, 1935a: 7)

In the film this idea plays out rather well as Jack, sensing Bruce's anguish, talks about all sorts of things except his impending fate. Stromberg had injected the Mounties "maintain the right" very nicely into his story. Bruce's sense of duty had prevailed. The Mounties, one might have thought, would have been pleased with this cinematic representation. It is surprising, therefore, that some members of the Force had become so fixated on the image of the singing Mounties. Eddy's acting at times might have appeared to be somewhat wooden, but there was no mistaking his Mountie appearance. The same could not be said of the cowboy-like demeanour of Alan Ladd in *Saskatchewan*.

At the production meetings, the legacy of Stromberg's earlier work was also apparent. Sounding much like DeMille at his story meetings (DeMille used *Union Pacific* [1939] on a number of occasions as a story example for *Northwest Mounted Police*), Stromberg wanted to adapt some aspects of earlier film work, including his own *Naughty Marietta*, to *Rose Marie*. He noted at his June 3 conference meeting:

our first requisite is to invent a situation that will take her to the frontier country. In this connection, we will check on Marshall Neilan's picture made quite a long time ago *River's End*. As I recall the idea, it had to do with a great triangle situation involving the decision of a Northwest Mounted Policeman to indict for murder the brother of the girl he loved. (Stromberg, 1935a: 1)

Stromberg adds that "Eddy is a Captain of the Northwest Mounted Police... he should be terribly clever in a simple, honest way, but not quite so indifferent as the character in *Marietta*." (Stromberg, 1935a: 3) Overall, however, the pulse of these story meetings were devoted to the musical elements in the picture as evidenced by Stromberg's comments at the June 8 story meeting:

Now in *Rose Marie* we must be careful and as credulous in the arrangement of our musical composition. I don't think it's possible to tell the story without keeping the musical construction foremost in our minds... I think this was the case in *MARIETTA*. They remembered the Herbert melodies and they wanted to hear them. The fact that we served up an appetizing story and a clean, delightful romance as added measure was the difference between just ordinary success and extraordinary success. (Stromberg, 1935c: 2)

While Stromberg and Van Dyke, for the most part, had focused on *Rose Marie* from a musical perspective, the advertising and exploitation of the film would be based on those

stereotypical wilderness images of Canada. When M-G-M promoted the film it was going to be like a trip to "frontierland."

The promotion for the film was well underway by late 1935. M-G-M made sure that the in-house promotion of the film was very strong. M-G-M was promoting the movie as an exciting outdoor extravaganza. In the October 12, 1935, issue, *Studio News* ran a headline stating, "Film 'Rose Marie' in Rugged Paradise" with the story lead stating:

On the shores of this vast azure lake on the very summit of the jagged Sierra Nevada Mountains has risen a colourful village of Indian wigwams. Hollywood has discovered this last frontier, and in this lonely place is being attempted the most unusual feat in all motion picture history – the filming and recording of a complete light opera in an all-outdoor setting. ("Film 'Rose Marie,'" 1935)

M-G-M devoted nearly its entire January 11, 1936, issue of *Studio News* to the film noting that "MacDonald, Eddy Musical Wins Ovation At Preview." Most of the story leads in the issue were devoted to the film's rugged location, noting "Altitude Aids Voices of 'Rose Marie' Stars" and "Jeanette MacDonald's name 'Rippling Water.'" Another related story emphasized that it was the first important musical to be filmed outdoors.

The commercial exploitation of the film soon moved from Lake Tahoe to the Canadian "back country" or "frontier." M-G-M still was not quite sure whether the story was taking place in Northern Quebec or the Canadian Rockies, and the promotional ideas for the film were smacked full of those "maple syrup" images of Canada. M-G-M's exploitation of the film was rooted in the notion that Canada was still the "Kingdom of the North." Perhaps Americans had seen one too many postcards of Lake Louise and Banff, suggesting a majestic north country with lots of trees, rivers, lakes – and few people except for indigenous Canadians. What showed up in the advertising campaigns, therefore, were canoes and bow and arrow contests. M-G-M promotional material about a bow and arrow contest suggested that, "The Indian angle of *Rose Marie* warrants a tie-up of this nature and this angle may be mentioned in your contest publicity." ("Advertising for *Rose Marie*": 35) The most confusing and geographically disorienting promotion was the woodchoppers' contest, which recommended: "Due to the giant forests of the Canadian Rockies a 'Woodchoppers Contest' may be a possibility in certain localities." ("Advertising for *Rose Marie*": 35) The fact that the story takes place in Quebec did not seem to faze M-G-M's sense of geography at all. *Rose Marie*'s promotional gimmicks were full of such stereotypical assumptions about Canada. Had Americans ventured north of the 49th parallel based on M-G-M's vision of the Dominion, they might have come equipped with snowshoes and fishing tackle. One promotion suggested using a fur connection: "The Canadian Rockies seem to suggest the Hudson (sic) Bay Company which in turn seems synonymous with fur trading. Fur tie-ups should be very much in order under the circumstances." ("Advertising for *Rose Marie*": 42) Another promotional idea loaded up on every wilderness stereotype imaginable suggesting: "The Canadian Northwest locale of *Rose Marie* permits... Indian pottery and blankets, snowshoes, canoe paddles and similar atmospheric props. Your box office may be given a cabin treatment... slabs of bark." ("Advertising for *Rose Marie*": 38). If the Mounted Police had needed to worry about their image, the Force could have directed that concern towards the promotional material for the film rather than the screenplay. A promotional idea called "Canadian Mountie Ballyhoo" might have been the most unflattering Mounted Police connection to the film. The exploitation suggestion began with:

If you are successful in finding a costumer who has an attractive Canadian 'Mountie' uniform, this may be used as street ballyhoo. Have your 'mountie' astride a good-looking horse. Keep the stunt as dignified as possible. He may make the rounds of your city where crowds are in evidence. If a banner is desired, same may be placed on the 'mounties' back – reading 'I'm looking for Rose Marie.' ("Advertising for Rose Marie": 36)

The RCMP could have arrested the entire M-G-M promotional department for "fraudulent misrepresentation."

Promotional materials for the film were still sending mixed geographical signals. Exploitation literature had pointed to the Canadian Northwest wilderness and the Rocky Mountains as the story's location, but one promotional review finally seemed to get a proper geographical bearing: "Again Sergeant Bruce meets and falls in love with Rose Marie, in the backwoods country of Quebec." ("Advertising for Rose Marie": 49) It is surprising that film publicists were continually confused about the film's geography. An early clue in the film would have set them straight right away. Bruce is called in to meet with the Mountie superintendent and is told, "I'm sending you back to the woods." Bruce answers, "I just got down sir." That brief conversation, to most Canadians, would have signalled a north-south track, not one running east to west. Yet, promotional references and film scenery suggested that the story was unfolding far to the west. M-G-M, it appears, was unable to figure out that the Rocky Mountain region of Canada was about 2000 miles to the west of the province of Quebec. But that did not stop the studio from puffing that "with all the outdoor scenes having been made against natural backgrounds of surpassing beauty, in the mountain-lake country of the Sierra Nevadas, 'Rose Marie' is a pictorial work of art." ("Advertising for Rose Marie": 50) Perhaps there had been a sudden shift in Canada's geographical plates – but a better explanation would simply have been that once a Hollywood story was set outside the United States, the geographical learning curve of the producers and directors fell off dramatically.

In the end, M-G-M promoted *Rose Marie* rather energetically. Other films such as *Pony Soldier* (1952) and *Saskatchewan* were probably perceived by some film audiences as run-of-the-mill Westerns. Both films would be hindered by limited budgets. But *Rose Marie* was being projected as a major 1936 box office bonanza for the studio. One of the studio advance promotions claimed: "This is the year of 'big Metro successes'... 'China Seas' – 'A Night at the Opera' – 'Mutiny on the Bounty'... put 'Rose Marie' into that class of picture." ("Advertising for Rose Marie": 3) It must have been successful advertising, for one of the follow up communiqués noted that: "Reports from all over the country from managers who ran the M-G-M production trailer tell of the applause from the audiences that greeted the *Rose Marie* announcement." ("Advertising for Rose Marie": 4) As theatre curtains fell on the final showing of *The Canadians* twenty-five years later, there might have been sighs of relief that the Mounties had finally ridden off into the sunset. Teresa Stratus would prove to be no Jeanette MacDonald, and *The Canadians* would be no *Rose Marie*. As film entertainment, *Rose Marie* would be the "Real McCoy," or was that Tim McCoy?

The reviews of the film judged *Rose Marie* for what it was – excellent musical entertainment connected to an interesting story, one where the songs actually seemed to move the plot along. The January 18, 1936, issue of *Boxoffice* stated, "*Rose Marie* is truly a magnificent production from every angle... produced with an eye to pleasing both class and mass." The *Hollywood Reporter* in its January 28, 1936, issue ran a number of New York reviews including the *Herald-Tribune* and the *Journal*. Both reviews seemed to capture the spirit and

the intent of the film. The *Herald-Tribune* mentioned that the film "stands high among the cinema's musical successes. Rose Marie darts freely about the lakes and Mountains of the Canadian northwest and never loses its poise and its sense of wellbeing." Striking a similar tone, the *Journal* stated, "Nelson Eddy has become a serious threat to Clark Gable for the honour of being the Movies' No. 1 idol. The picture blends music, humour, action and pictorial affects with both gaiety and charm." *Rose Marie* appeared to be a film that had charmed its audiences. It might not have charmed Canadian geographers, however. *Variety*, in its January 9th issue, noted: "Picture is about 90% exteriors, all made in the Lake Tahoe country which is perfect. Scenery is eye-filling and Van Dyke has backed every scene with the grand country." The problem, of course, was that it was 2,500 miles to the southwest of La Belle Province.

Examining *Rose Marie* in retrospect certainly raises criticisms about the geographical representation in the film. Examining the film from an historical perspective, however, critics could afford to be more forgiving. It was basically a musical and light entertainment and did not need to fall back on the "true story" malarkey that had crept into some other films. The film should have attained a more elevated status within the Mountie genre than the others because it capitalized on the mythical elements associated with the Force. In *Rose Marie*, such notions as "they always get their man" and "they were brave and decent and honest as a summer's day" seemed to fit the image of Sergeant Bruce. Many of the other Mounted Police films seemed to be trying to make some sort of historical statement that in the end was more contrived than real. *Rose Marie*, on the other hand, was pure musical entertainment. As the reviews seemed to suggest, it was light-hearted and fun. Hollywood filmmakers, to be sure, made monumental historical and geographical blunders associated with these films, but *Rose Marie* could have been given the benefit of the doubt. Most film audiences probably saw the Mountie representation in the film for what it was, parody and hyperbole – the Mounted Police and some Canadian nationalists, on the other hand, would come to see this representation in a somewhat culturally demeaning manner. *Rose Marie* had been the wrong target. If the Mounties' maxim has been that they "always get their man," in this case it might have been applied to films as well – and they could have started with Raoul Walsh and *Saskatchewan*.

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