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### Don Harron

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# Don Harron

(19 September 1924 – )

André Narbonne  
University of Windsor

**BOOKS:** *Charlie Farquharson's Histry of Canada* (Toronto & New York: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1972); revised as *Charlie Farquharson's Histry of Canada, Revized and (More) Expansive: As Told to Valeda Drain Farquharson When It Was Too Wet to Plow* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1992);  
*Anne of Green Gables: A Musical, Adapted by Donald Harron from the Novel by L. M. Montgomery. Music by Norman Campbell. Lyrics by Donald Harron and Norman Campbell. Additional Lyrics by Mavor Moore and Elaine Campbell* (New York: S. French, 1972; London: Chappell, 1973);  
*Charlie Farquharson's Jogfree of Canada, the Whirld, and Other Places: A Pubic School Jogfree, Autherized by Yer Depart Mentals of Edification fur Use in Pubic, High, and Continyation Schools* (Toronto: Gage, 1974);  
*Charlie Farquharson's K-O-R-N Filled Allmynack: Publ. for 1 Hole Conzecutive Yeer and Writ in Plane Simple Langwidge to Be Understood by the Commonest People* (Toronto: Gage, 1976);  
*Olde Charlie Farquharson's Testament: From Jennysez to Jobe and After Words* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1978);  
*Charlie Farquharson, Yer Last Decadent: 1972–1982* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1982);  
*Debunk's Illustrated Guide to the Canadian Establishment*, by Harron and Martha Harron (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1984);  
*Charlie Farquharson: Cum Buy the Farm* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1987);  
*Charlie Farquharson's Unyverse* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1990);  
*Keeping a Canadian Christmas*, by Harron and Catherine McKinnon (Toronto: Goddard-Zaxis, 1991);  
*Charlie's a Broad: Travails in Fern Parts* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1994);  
*The Outhouse Revisited*, photographs by Sherman Hines, text by Harron (Willowdale, Ont. & Buffalo, N.Y.: Firefly, 1996);



*Don Harron with the 2007 Earle Grey Award  
(courtesy of Claudette Gareau)*

*Anne of Green Gables, the Musical: 101 Things You Didn't Know* (Toronto: White Knight, 2009);  
*Charlie Farquharson's Vews and Mews about Yer News* (Toronto: Mafe Media, 2010).

**PLAY PRODUCTIONS:** *Adam's Fall*, London, Ontario, 1958;

*Anne of Green Gables—the Musical*, adapted by Harron from the novel by Lucy Maud Montgomery; music by Norman Campbell; lyrics by Harron, Campbell, Elaine Campbell, and James Mavor Moore, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Charlottetown Festival, 1965;

*Old Charlie Farquharson's Testament*, Halifax, Neptune Theatre, 1988.

Journalist, author, actor, director, and comedian Don Harron is known to many North Americans as the creator of Charlie Farquharson, a Parry Sound, Ontario, farmer whose plainspoken malapropisms send up Canadian society while at the same time promoting the author's strong nationalism—sometimes with barbed humor. Harron's comic persona, a Stephen Leacockean "little man" in the field, uses Horatian satire to celebrate farm life even while lampooning it. By contrast, the "political" Charlie uses Socratic irony to view urban politics from a rural perspective, speaking out on issues that threaten Canadian unity such as the October Crisis of 1970 and the long-form census. Harron is also one of the authors of *Anne of Green Gables—the Musical*, which has headlined the Charlottetown Festival in Prince Edward Island since 1965 and has had more than three thousand performances around the world.

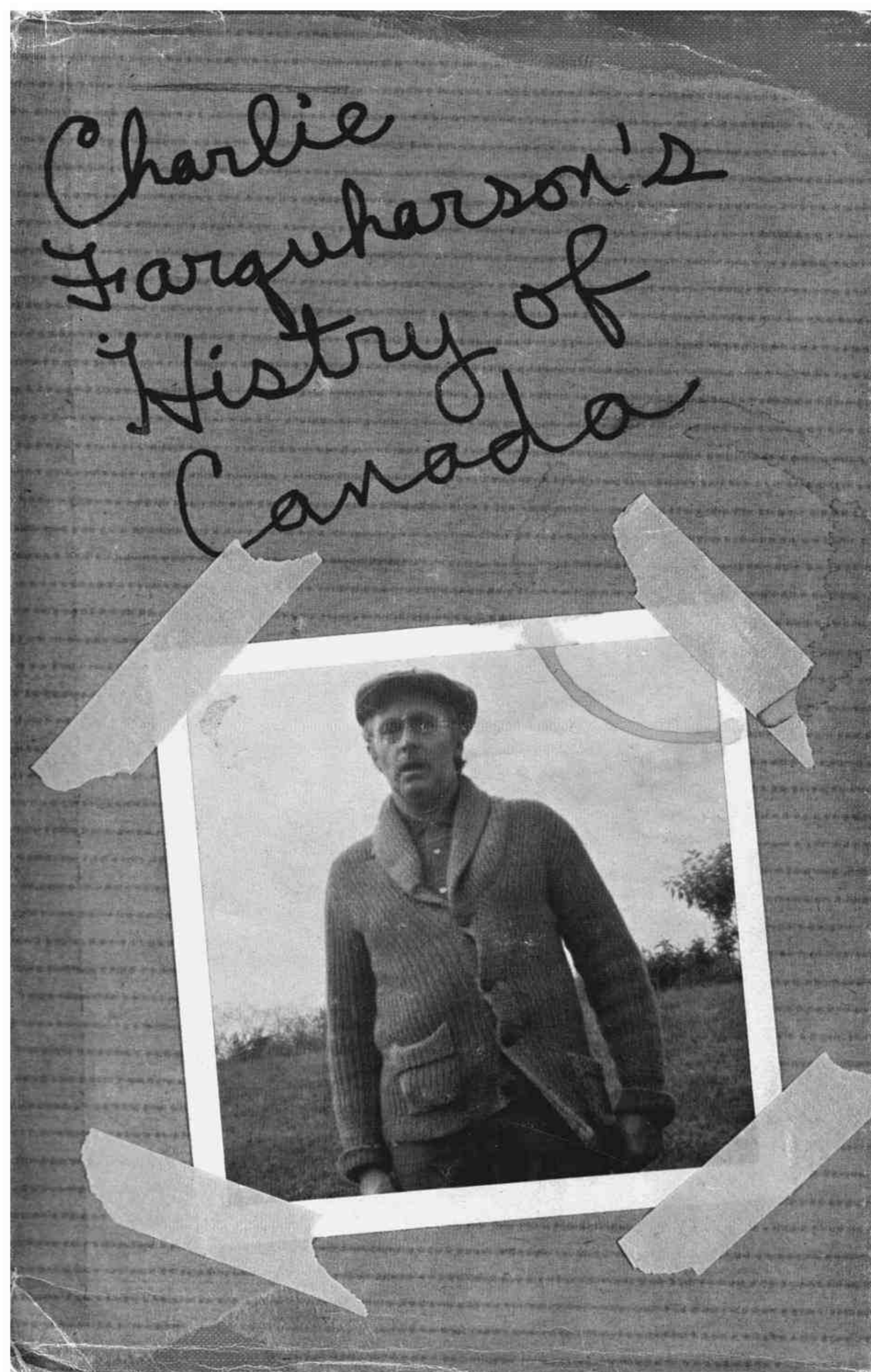
Donald Hugh "Bunt" Harron was born in Toronto on 19 September 1924 to Lionel and Delsia Hunter Harron. His maternal grandparents lived in Dunbarton, Ontario, a place that, according to the biography, *A Parent Contradiction* (1988), by his daughter Martha Harron, provided a "wonderful retreat from city life": "To the little boy from the city, that white clapboard cottage represented peace and contentment, freedom and adventure, all the finer things in life. You could say it was the birthplace of my father's alter ego Charlie Farquharson, the rural philosopher who goes against the grain because it's too far to go back to the house." Harron's father was a draftsman who hoped to become a professional cartoonist; he was offered a position with the King Features Syndicate in Chicago in 1929 but turned it down when Harron's mother objected to living there. Harron watched his father perform "chalk talks," lectures illustrated by cartoons and caricatures drawn during the course of the lecture. Harron earned his first money as an artist at age ten performing a chalk talk for the staff of Tippet-Richardson Movers at a banquet in Toronto.

Harron attended Humewood Public School in Toronto, where he acted in school plays. At home he read the works of Charles Dickens, Ernest Thomp-

son Seton, G. A. Henty, and R. M. Ballantyne. During the Great Depression the Harrons were forced to rent out their house and move into a small apartment. By 1933 they could not afford the apartment, and the family was broken up. Harron was sent to live with his second cousins, the McKelvies, who lived in Toronto; his mother and his sister, Mary, went to Dunbarton; and his father stayed in Toronto, at his mother's house. While staying with the McKelvies, Harron read *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) and found himself identifying strongly with Lucy Maud Montgomery's celebrated orphan, Anne Shirley. The family was reunited in 1934 when Harron's uncle Tom Hunter, a successful insurance man, provided funds that allowed them to live with his parents in Toronto. Even so, for the rest of the decade they had neither a telephone nor an automobile.

In 1936 Harron was approached after giving a chalk talk at a banquet to audition for *Lonesome Trail*, a radio show that was broadcast live three days a week by the Canadian Radio Commission (later the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation [CBC]). He was hired to play the younger of two northern Ontario brothers whose adventures in the bush were featured on the program. *Lonesome Trail* ran from September to November 1936.

When World War II started, Harron was too young to enlist in the military. He worked at a variety of part-time jobs, including door-to-door *Liberty Magazine* salesman, grocery-store bag boy, and volunteer counselor-in-training at the Big Brothers Camp on Beausoleil Island in Georgian Bay, Ontario, before joining the Farm Service Force in 1942. From April to September of that year he worked twelve- to fourteen-hour days on a farm in Wick, Ontario. He was able to save enough from his wages of \$20 a month to enroll in an honors course in social and philosophical studies at Victoria College of the University of Toronto. He joined the Victoria College Drama Society and won the Victoria Drama Award for his role as Lomov in Anton Chekhov's *The Proposal* (1890). At the end of the first term, Harron went to work on a farm in Chaplin, Saskatchewan, where he was paid \$6.00 a day; his employment was curtailed by a heavy snowfall that resulted in the loss of much of the crop. He then cut wood in Estevan, Saskatchewan, to make up some of the lost wages. During the next term he became involved in *Bob*, a satirical review in which Victoria College students lampooned the faculty. He attended a class taught by the literary critic Northrop Frye and became interested in the theories of media theorist Marshall McLuhan. In "My Frye, His Blake," an unpublished book on Frye's



*Dust jacket for Harron's first book, published in 1972 (courtesy of André Narbonne)*

*Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (1947) in his possession, Harron recalls:

I was a freshman at Victoria College, University of Toronto, in 1942, but since I was enrolled in a course known as Sock and Fill (Social and Philosophical Studies), I didn't have any lectures with Northrop Frye that first year. It was months before I got to hear him in a public lecture on "Satire: Theory and Practice." I sat beside two nuns from St. Michael's College who rocked back and forth with delight as Frye quoted Pope and Swift and Dr. Johnson and added more than a few ripostes of his own. They nearly rolled in the aisle when he quoted Dante reaching the dead center of evil and passing through the arse of the Devil to the shores of Purgatory.

Harron enlisted in the army at the College Officer's Training Corps camp in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, in the summer of 1943. His military

training took him to Victoriaville, Quebec; Fingal, Ontario; Maitland, Nova Scotia; and Lachine, Quebec. In 1944 his unit was put on indefinite leave; he never saw combat.

In 1945 Harron met Dora Mavor Moore in Toronto. She suggested that he try out for her amateur acting troupe, the Village Players, which was organizing a tour of army hospitals. Moore became his mentor, teaching him how to move on stage and how to secure leading roles.

Although Harron had not fought in World War II, he received free tuition and a veteran's allowance of \$75 a month that allowed him to return to the University of Toronto and major in philosophy. He wrote a one-act farce and songs for the 1945 production of *Bob*. He had parts in a radio program on Stephen Leacock and a documentary series, *Summer Fallow*, about farm life, and single-handedly wrote the 1946 *Bob*. He did not neglect his studies while

pursuing these extracurricular activities, and he won the 1948 Regent's Silver Medal and the Sanford Gold Medal in Philosophy. Also in 1948 James Mavor Moore, the son of Dora Mavor Moore, produced the first *Spring Thaw*, a comic revue spoofing the "Canadian scene," for the New Play Society, the professional troupe Dora Mavor Moore had founded after disbanding the Village Players in 1946; Harron contributed material to the show. The program explains the "revelatory" nature of the revue's genial humor:

When *Spring Thaw* comes all sorts of things appear . . . the birds, the flowers, that old shovel you lost under the snow, holes in the road, and so on. But most particularly, mankind becomes touched with a strange lightness in the heart and the head, and therefore, without another word of excuse, we begin our revue.

*Spring Thaw* opened on 1 April and continued for two sold-out weekends, a fact that the writers attributed to the "Canadianness" of its themes. As a result, in 1949 the New Play Society performed nothing but Canadian plays. The parodies Harron wrote for the second *Spring Thaw* attracted the attention of CBC Radio, which asked him to write two radio series. For one of the series, *Bobby Gimby's Hoedown*, he used the pseudonym Harry Shorthorn and began experimenting with adopting a comic mask. The other series was *Keep in Touch, an English Immigrant's Life in Canada*.

Harron was offered a lectureship in English literature at Trinity College at the University of Toronto but declined it to pursue his acting and writing careers. In 1949 he married Gloria Fisher, whom he had met in a Frye class on the English Bible. In 1950 the Harrons went to London, where he acted in Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) and wrote scripts for radio programs. He had planned to stay in England for two weeks but found enough work to remain for sixteen months. According to Harron's *Anne of Green Gables, the Musical: 101 Things You Didn't Know* (2009),

one of the high points of my theatre-going career was going to the London Palladium to see the great Lena Horne. Her opening act was Bernard Miles. The character actor . . . later founded his own theatre and became Lord Miles. But in 1951, he was shuffling on stage as an old Essex farmer pushing a huge wagon wheel that looked like it was coated with pigeon droppings. He looked out at the audience and said in his rural accent "Oi found this, Oim gonna take ee ome and mike a ladder outen it!"

Seeing the character of "an old Essex farmer" gave Harron the idea for a Canadian equivalent, and Charlie Farquharson was the result.

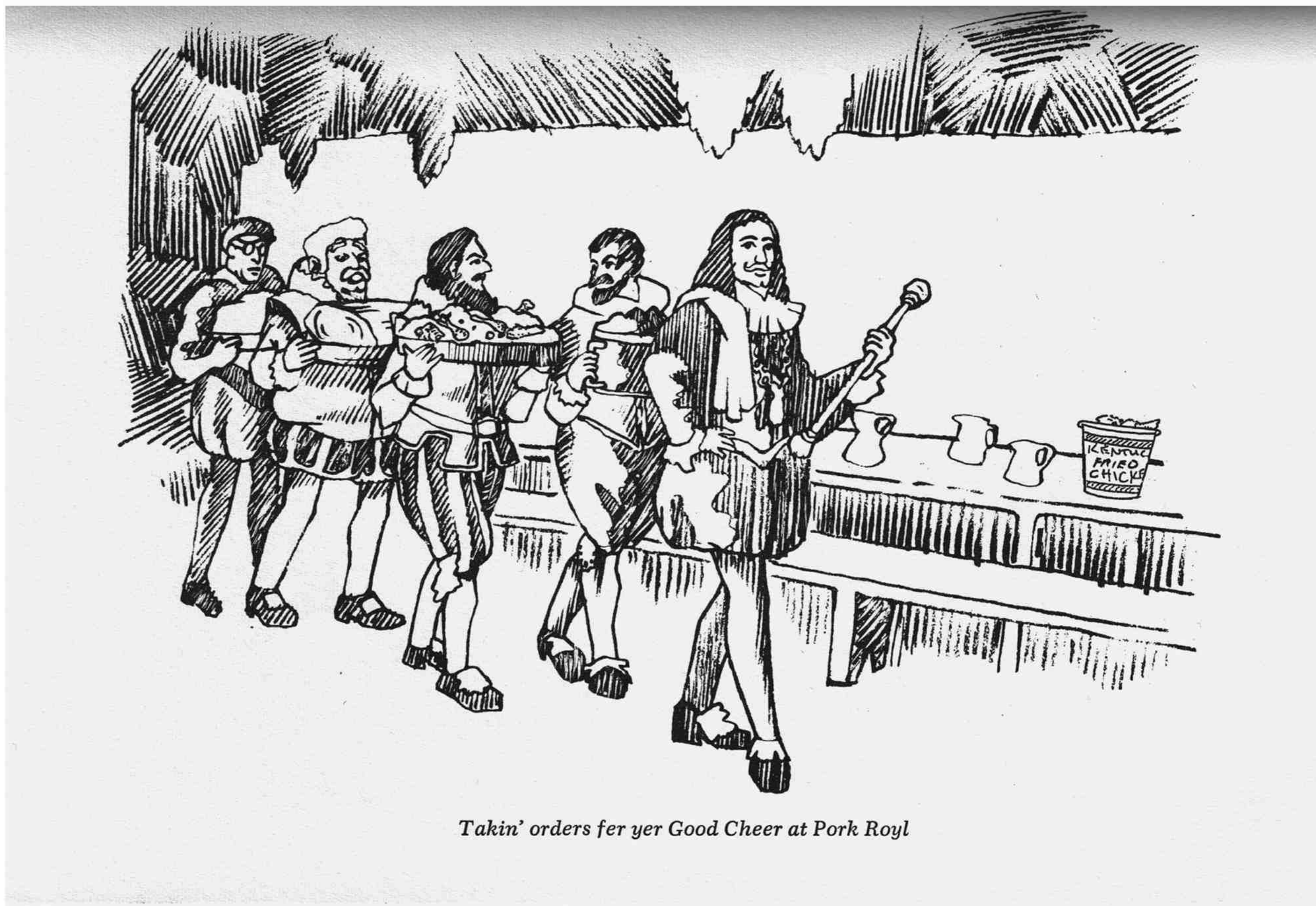
In 1951 the Harrons' daughter Martha was born. That same year Harron made his motion-picture debut in David Lean's *The Sound Barrier*, and Christopher Fry, who had seen him perform on stage, recruited him for a role in the Broadway production of Fry's *A Sleep of Prisoners*, which was followed by a six-month American tour.

The Harrons returned to Canada in 1952. By this time Harron was becoming a fervent nationalist. In his unpublished autobiography, "Fifty Years of Farquharson Around: 1952–2002," which is in Harron's possession, he recalls, "It was my year and a half sojourn in England that made me more aware that I was a Canadian than all of my quarter century in Canada." He created a new character for *Spring Thaw* 1952: in a four-minute "bit" Harron played a Parry Sound farmer looking for his fictional friend, Charlie Farquharson (the real Charlie Farquharson was the head of the Ontario Medical Association, and at that time Harron had never been to Parry Sound). Harron writes in *Anne of Green Gables, the Musical: 101 Things You Didn't Know*:

My thoughts about a monologue turned to that venerable institution the Canadian National Exhibition. I had worked there the summer before I went on the farm. And combined with my actual farm experience and my memories of men with white foreheads and red necks in blue suits that were a trifle too short in the leg, I decided to do a monologue about an Ontario farmer visiting the CNE. . . . my monologue called Th'Ex was greeted by roars of laughter. I don't think it was the jokes I tried to write that caused the uproar, as much as it was the fact that my audience had never heard an authentic Ontario accent on any stage. It was what the critic Edmund Wilson called "the shock of Recognition."

In 1952 the CBC began broadcasting on television, and Harron was involved both as an actor and a writer. He performed as Charlie Farquharson for the first time in *The Big Revue*, a variety program that was the first show televised by the CBC. The future novelist Timothy Findley played Peter Pupkin in one of the thirteen scripts Harron wrote for a twenty-six-part series based on Leacock's classic Canadian story cycle, *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912); in an unpublished 21 February 2011 interview Harron claimed that the role "got Findley excited about being a writer."

Mary, the Harrons' second daughter, was born on 12 January 1953; she was their only child born in



*Takin' orders fer yer Good Cheer at Pork Royl*

*Illustration from Charlie Farquharson's History of Canada that parodies Charles William Jefferys's 1606 painting The Order of Good Cheer (courtesy of André Narbonne)*

Canada. The Stratford Festival in Stratford, Ontario, began in 1953, and Harron acted in both Stratford productions, starring as Bertram in William Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well* (circa 1602–1603) and delivering Lord Lovel's two lines in Shakespeare's *Richard III* (circa 1591–1592). During his stage career he performed with Canadian and international stars such as Christopher Plummer, Vivien Leigh, Alec Guinness, Honor Blackman, William Hutt, and Katharine Hepburn, who requested that he costar with her in the 1957 Stratford, Connecticut, production of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (circa 1596–1597).

In 1955 Norman and Elaine Campbell approached Harron about writing a ninety-minute television show for the CBC. At the time, Harron was reading *Anne of Green Gables* as a bedtime story to his daughters, and, he recalls in *Anne of Green Gables, the Musical: 101 Things You Didn't Know*, he “suggested to the Campbells that it would make a good TV musical because the heroine has such an imagination that

the only way to render her expressive bursts in dramatic form would be to set them to music.” The television production was the genesis of the later stage musical. Harron finished the libretto in New York, where he was performing on television, and the musical was telecast live in 1956. Two years later, it was produced again by the CBC with a different actress in the lead role. In 1957 Harron adapted another Canadian work, Earle Birney's picaresque novel *Turvey: A Military Picaresque* (1949), into a three-act play, *The Adventures of Private Turvey*, for the Avenue Theatre in Toronto. Michael Langham commissioned Harron to rewrite Heinrich von Kleist's 1808 comedy *Der zerbrochne Krug* (The Broken Jug) for the Canadian stage. Harron's version, *Adam's Fall*, takes place in western Ontario in 1813, during the war between Canada and the United States; the title of the play refers to the character Judge Adam, an old reprobate whose lascivious nature caused the jug to be broken over his head. It was produced in 1958 for a six-week international

tour by the Festival Company of Canada. In *Kleist on Stage, 1804–1987* (1993) William C. Reeve writes: “Apparently attracted to the burlesque aspect of the play, Harron avoided any reference to the more serious background, the less than optimistic recognition of Adamman’s *condition humaine*. The set, designed by Tanya Moiseiwitsch, an ‘open-work pot-pourri of doors, windows, steps, alcoves and foolish entrances,’ aided and abetted the acting, the sole goal of which was to promote laughter.”

In 1959, during Harron’s fifteen-month run in Paddy Chayefsky’s *The Tenth Man* (1950) on Broadway, he and Fisher divorced. In 1960 he married Virginia Leith. Their relationship was extremely combative. During one argument Leith threatened suicide, and Harron cut his own forearm with a butcher knife, leaving a four-inch scar. He told Marcia Kaye in a 2010 interview, “It was a gesture, a form of protest. I realized I’d made the wrong decision in marrying her.” He underwent psychotherapy during this period, in part as research for a role; he had a tendency to play tortured characters.

In 1962 Harron was cast as Edmund in the Shakespeare in Central Park staging of *King Lear* (1605 or 1606). He relished the role, having first performed it for the New Play Society in 1949. He then went to London to perform in Jean Kerr’s play *Mary, Mary* with Maggie Smith. While there, he fell ill with what was then known as infectious hepatitis (now called Hepatitis A). After six weeks he returned to the play, which ran for fourteen months. Returning to North America, he hosted a summer replacement series for CBC radio, *Side by Side*, then went to Los Angeles, where he again played Edmund in *King Lear* to critical acclaim. He had guest appearances on several television series, including *Dr. Kildare*, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, *Twelve O’Clock High*, and *The Fugitive*, and played a general in a three-part Disney special, *Willie and the Yank*. He tried writing comedy scripts, but his submission to *The Dick Van Dyke Show* was rejected as “a little intellectual.”

In 1964 the Charlottetown Confederation Centre of the Arts was inaugurated with a variety show that included a song from the 1954 television musical: “Anne of Green Gables Never Change, I Like You Just This Way.” Queen Elizabeth II, who was in attendance, reportedly said, “That’s a rather pretty tune, where is the rest of the show?” The next day, James Mavor Moore, the director of the Charlottetown Festival, which was to begin at the Confederation Centre the next spring, asked Harron to translate the television musical into a stage version that could be produced at the festival. When the play opened in 1965, more songs had been added,

including three by Moore. Harron visited Prince Edward Island for the first time to see *Anne of Green Gables—The Musical* and was captivated by the province. He decided to return the next year and turn his three-act play *The Adventures of Private Turvey* into a two-act musical. *Anne of Green Gables—The Musical* has run every summer since 1965 and has, by Harron’s estimate, provided work for more than fifteen thousand actors.

In 1965 Harron performed in a two-part television pilot, *The Man Who Never Was*. When the show was picked up by the ABC network in 1966, Harron was replaced by Robert Lansing. He returned to Toronto, where he began doing political commentaries as Charlie Farquharson on the CBC-TV Sunday newsmagazine, *This Hour Has Seven Days*. The show was cancelled three weeks later; but it had revitalized Harron’s comic character and started him talking about politics instead of just farm life.

Bob Johnston, the new producer of *Spring Thaw*, approached Harron about writing a 1967 show of sketches based on a British perspective of Canada. Harron balked at the colonialism of the project, preferring to do what Martha Harron’s biography calls “a Canuck’s-eye view, a comic history of Canada from the Age of the Dinosaurs up to Confederation in 1867.” That summer, Harron’s musical *Turvey* played at the Charlottetown Festival; Harron met the actress and singer Catherine McKinnon at the festival and persuaded her to join *Spring Thaw* ’67 when it toured Canada. The show proved to be the most profitable of all the *Spring Thaw* runs staged from 1948 to 1971, but it was in many ways a disappointment for Harron. He discovered that many of his jokes were not appreciated by audiences who did not know Canadian history. Whenever the show met with negative criticism, Harron felt that he had let the entire country down. In Moosejaw a member of the crew was killed when he fell while rigging lights. While Harron was on tour with *Spring Thaw* ’67, finally, his marriage broke up when Leith left him to return to the United States.

In 1968 Harron wrote and performed for two weeks at the Canadian National Exhibition in *Sea to Sea*, a series of sketches about the building of the Canadian National Railway. He collaborated with Lucio Agostini on a dramatic adaptation of Paul Hiebert’s novel *Sarah Binks* (1947), which had won the Stephen Leacock Memorial Medal for Humour in 1948 and which Harron calls “the funniest book written in this country” in “Fifty Years of Farquharson Around: 1952–2002.” The play ran for six weeks in Toronto.

Harron married McKinnon in 1969. That same year he joined the cast of the American country humor and music television series *Hee Haw*, playing Charlie Farquharson as a newscaster on radio station KORN and telling double-entendre-filled stories about the show's fictional locale, Kornfield Kounty. While Harron was performing steadily in a show that, according to Martha Harron's biography, he considered "Sesame Street for adults," *Anne of Green Gables—The Musical* was running in London's West End; it won four Plays and Players Awards, including Best Musical. Harron's third daughter, Kelley, was born in Trinidad, where Catherine had been hired to sing at the Holiday Inn in Port of Spain, on 9 January 1970.

In 1971 *Hee Haw* was cancelled by CBS, but it soon returned in syndication with new shows. In the meantime, Harron began incorporating material from *Spring Thaw '67* and *Sea to Sea* into a literary parody of the one-volume histories of Canada by William Stewart Wallace that were used in schools and universities. For *Spring Thaw '67* Harron had obtained permission to reproduce the late Charles William Jefferys's illustrations of Canadian history, seven of which were used. According to Martha Harron, "The artist had done seven, and done a good job, but more were needed for the book. [Harron] provided McGraw-Hill's illustrator with a list of captions, and kept asking to see the new drawings. . . . The new ones were so bad he was convinced his book was ruined." Harron had not been consulted about the addition of the new cartoons. Despite Harron's misgivings, *Charlie Farquharson's Histry of Canada* surpassed all expectations for sales when it was published in the fall of 1972. Like Leacock in *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* and Hiebert in *Sarah Binks*, Harron uses an erroneous sense of scale to ridicule Canadian pretensions. His history begins with the Big Bang and continues through "a million skillion years B.C. (that'd be Before Confederation)," the Pleistocene Epoch, and the first Ice Age before arriving at the aboriginal cultures with which traditional histories of Canada begin. Harron's playful language allows for puns, gentle satire, double entendres, and humorous homonyms. Anachronisms abound in *Charlie Farquharson's Histry of Canada*, demonstrating Charlie's "little man" naiveté. The parody of Jefferys's illustration of the Order of Good Cheer includes a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken. Farquharson's exuberance is at times reminiscent of that of the narrator of "The Marine Excursion of the Knights of Pythias" in Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*, who cannot tell a story without interrupting himself with asides to the

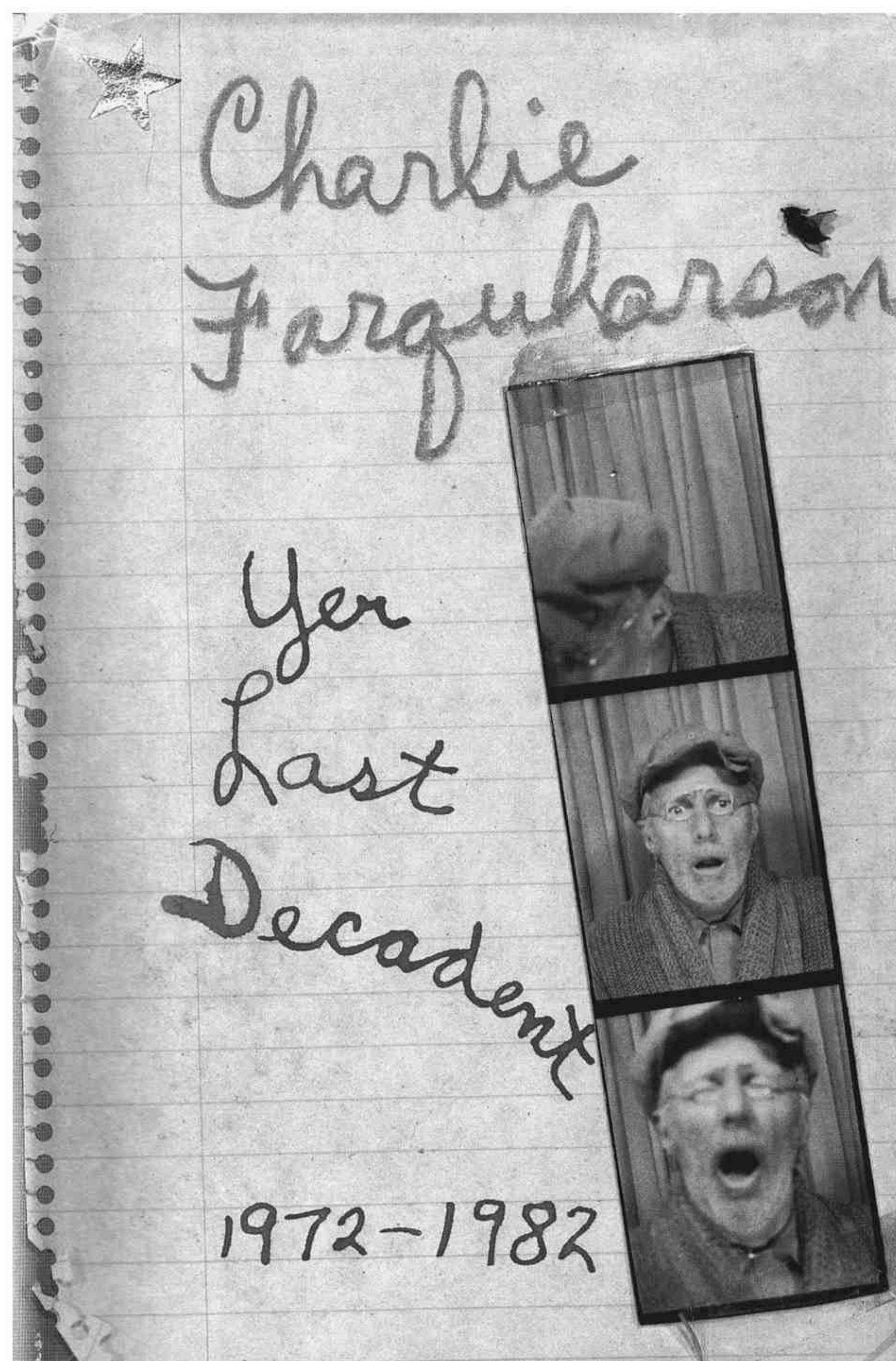
reader; Farquharson's exposition is interrupted by "feetnotes," which, like the "Indecks" with which the work concludes, burlesque academic scholarship.

The cover of *Charlie Farquharson's Histry of Canada* looks homemade. According to Martha Harron,

The publisher assigned a twenty-year-old named Frank Hammond to design it, and the results far surpassed Don's expectations. . . . Hammond used plain brown wrapping paper, an Instamatic snapshot of Charlie stuck on with gaffer's tape and, for the crowning touch, the tell-tale ring of a teacup stain on one corner of the photograph. . . . It did create some problems, however. The owner of a bookstore in Sudbury sent his whole order back, complaining that some careless drinker in the shipping department had stained all two hundred copies.

The success of *Charlie Farquharson's Histry of Canada* made the Charlie character a household name in Canada. Harron was hired by CFRB, a Toronto radio station, to perform a pair of three-minute editorials as Charlie that were aired twice every Saturday and Sunday. The CFRB editorials lasted for eleven years—until, Harron claims, he was fired by Conrad Black, whose media empire included the station, for being too left-wing. In 1972 Harron wrote a screenplay based on Mordecai Richler's satirical novel *The Incomparable Atuk* (1963) that was not made into a movie and coauthored with Norman and Elaine Campbell a ninety-minute CBC-TV musical, *The Wonder of It All*, based on the life of the painter Emily Carr.

Harron was invited to speak at the prime minister's dinner in 1973. In 1974 he followed *Charlie Farquharson's Histry of Canada* with *Charlie Farquharson's Jogfree of Canada, the Whirld, and Other Places: A Pubic School Jogfree, Autherized by Yer Depart Mentals of Edification fur Use in Pubic, High, and Continyation Schools*. Harron had been so dissatisfied with McGraw-Hill Ryerson's illustrations for his first book that he fired his publisher despite the fact he was under contract to write two books for the firm. When they demanded a second title, he offered his play *The Broken Jug*, which they declined. His new publisher, Gage, ensured that the illustrations for *Charlie Farquharson's Jogfree of Canada, the Whirld, and Other Places* were of a more professional quality. The book, which was written in a one-month flurry at a cottage in Barrie, Ontario, includes photographs, a "Releef Map" showing Farquharson urinating on Niagara Falls, and, again, an "Indecks." While *Charlie Farquharson's Histry of Canada* has a loose but linear structure, *Charlie Farquharson's Jogfree of Canada, the Whirld, and Other Places* is formally divided into parts



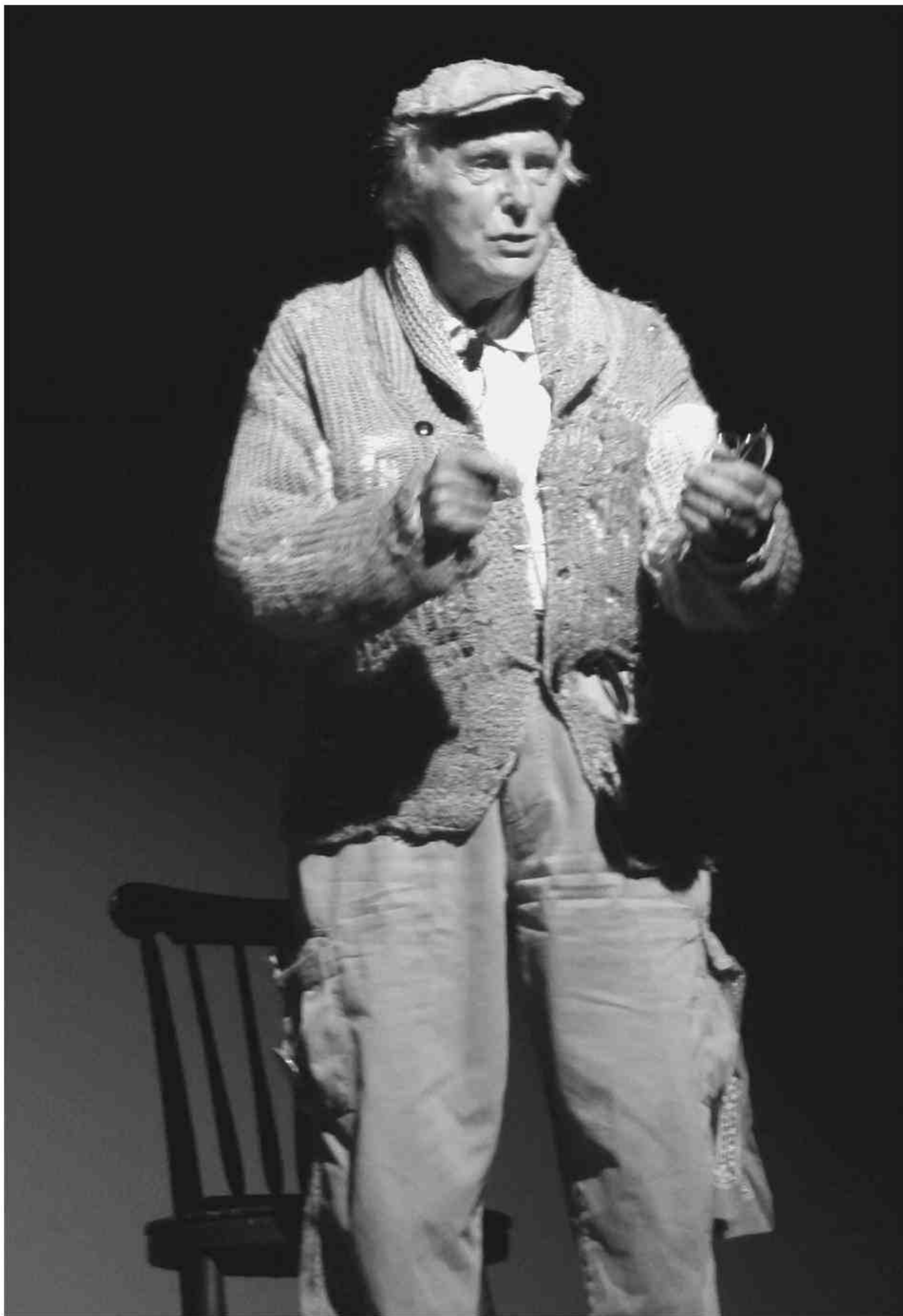
Dust jacket for Harron's 1982 book, based on his CFRB radio editorials (courtesy of André Narbonne)

and chapters. The work begins with an account of the solar system and concludes with world geography; Canada is placed at the center of creation.

Despite bad reviews, *Charlie Farquharson's Jogfree of Canada, the Whirld, and Other Places* shot to the top of the best-seller list in its second week. To avoid saturating the market, Gage suggested that Harron wait two years before writing another Charlie book. *Charlie Farquharson's K-O-R-N Filled Allmynack: Publ. for 1 Hole Conzsecutive Yeer and Writ in Plane Simple Langwidge to Be Understood by the Commonest People* was published simultaneously in Canada and the United States in 1976. It is the only Farquharson book that is not specifically Canadian in content: it is based on Harron's *Hee Haw* character, whom most television viewers in the United States assumed to be a New England farmer. The work is a parody of farming annuals, a staple in rural communities, with miscellaneous information arranged according to the calendar. *Charlie Farquharson's K-O-R-N Filled Allmynack*

includes comic advertisements that are satires of real ones; their humor, which is not based on malapropisms, is more sophisticated than that of the rest of the book. A "Letter from a Prescriber" in an advertisement for "Lavinia, Pinkerton's Opiate Compound" reads: "I cannot laud enough your Opiate. Haunted by faintness, flatulency and bloat during my last menstrual days, a friend suggested your vegetating substance. Now I lay in a bed of no pain, sing to myself and pluck the daisies off the wallpaper." Farm life is rife with fertility, growth, and reproduction, all of which are ripe for Harron's naughtiest jokes: one of Fortunato Agliandolo's illustrations goes so far as to suggest carnal knowledge of a sheep. Although Harron toured the United States as Charlie for four months in support of *Charlie Farquharson's K-O-R-N Filled Allmynack*, sales in Canada were five times greater than in the United States.

In 1977 Harron became the host of *Morningside*, a nationally broadcast CBC radio program that



Harron performing as Charlie Farquharson in 2010  
(courtesy of Claudette Gareau)

aired for fifteen hours a week. The show gave Harron an opportunity to hone his knowledge of national politics by interviewing politicians such as Robert Stanfield, John Diefenbaker, and Jean Chr tien. He held the position until 1982, during which time he published two more Charlie books. *Olde Charlie Farquharson's Testament: From Jennysez to Jobe and After Words* (1978) is a *Spring Thaw* version of the Old Testament, including the chapter, verse, and line structure. Harron writes in "Fifty Years of Farquharson Around: 1952–2002": "I had been taught the wonders of the Old Testament by Northrop Frye, and I was determined to avoid deliberately making the text comical, but merely to express the words of the King James version in Charlie's down to earth terms." *Olde Charlie Farquharson's Testament* includes Gustave Dor  engravings touched up by Agliadoro to include Charlie. The book has a soft morocco-bound cover in deep burgundy with gold lettering. The opening pages are designed along the lines of a Victorian family Bible and contain a family tree; a page for births, marriages, and deaths; and another to

record the arrival of a baby and insert a birth certificate. *Charlie Farquharson's Histry of Canada* and *Charlie Farquharson's Jogfree of Canada, the Whirld, and Other Places* had been put on the recommended reading list for high-school students in Ontario; *Olde Charlie Farquharson's Testament* found favor with clergymen and chaplains and was used as a teaching tool in some Sunday schools in the United States and Canada. The book went through seven printings, with sales of more than sixty thousand in Canada. Although rarely receiving good reviews, in 1972, 1974, 1976, and 1978 Charlie Farquharson books outsold works by the Canadian literary icons Pierre Berton and Farley Mowat. Harron received the Order of Canada in 1980 and an honorary LLD from Mount Allison University and a North American Volunteer of the Year Award in 1982.

*Charlie Farquharson, Yer Last Decadent: 1972–1982* (1982) is based on Harron's CFRB editorials; Charlie discourses on topics such as the 1972 Canada-Russia summit series, the Arab oil embargo, streakers, Watergate, the 1975 International Women's Year, the 1976 Montreal Olympics, test-tube babies, the 1979 Year of the Child, the 1980 referendum on Quebec separation, and the 1981 Year of the Disabled. Hammond designed the cover for *Charlie Farquharson, Yer Last Decadent* in a style similar to that of the one for *Charlie Farquharson's Histry of Canada*.

In *Debunk's Illustrated Guide to the Canadian Establishment* (1984) Harron adopts the persona of Valerie Rosedale, a relative of Charlie's. He had created Rosedale, and cross-dressed to perform the role, on the television show *Shhh! It's the News* (1974–1975). Charlie provides a "Fore Word," footnotes, and brief commentaries. In her preface Rosedale acknowledges Charlie's role:

I can only say that I deeply regret that constraints to my timetable have forced me to fall back on the assistance of my very distant relative, Charles Ewart Farquharson, to provide me with introductions to each of the provinces represented by a prominent Dynasty Clubber. I have made it clear to the editors at Debunk's that I can bear no responsibility for Mr. Farquharson's egregious lapses of taste, or for anything else he might do or say. Blood may be thicker than water, but in the unfortunate case of Mr. Farquharson and myself, the blood's of two very different and noncomplementary colours.

The book is a spoof of *Debrett's Illustrated Guide to the Canadian Establishment* (1983), edited by Peter C. Newman. Harron's daughter Martha conducted research for the work and wrote more than half of

it, and it was illustrated by Graham Pilsworth. Sales of *Debunk's Illustrated Guide to the Canadian Establishment* were disappointing; it was remaindered, a fate that had never previously befallen a Harron work.

Harron returned to the "Charlie mask" in *Charlie Farquharson: Cum Buy the Farm* (1987), a book that looks at agribusiness in the age of free trade and is "respectfully dedicated to the vanishing Canadian—our 'small' farmer." Charlie, who has been pressured to sell his farm, also comments on such topics as the Canadian census of 1986, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Ronald Reagan, Marshall McLuhan, the Toronto Blue Jays, the Palestine Liberation Army, and televangelists Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker. The book concludes with Charlie running for election with a new party, the Farmer's Union (for which the acronym is F.U.). In 1988 Harron turned *Olde Charlie Farquharson's Testament* into a musical that toured Canada.

*Charlie Farquharson's Unyverse* (1990) had its genesis in a forty-minute film Harron made for the McLaughlin Planetarium at the Royal Ontario Museum that ran from May to December 1990. Harron's research piqued his interest in astronomy to the point that, as he says in "Fifty Years of Farquharson Around: 1952–2002," he "felt emboldened to balance Charlie's Old Testament with a book on Science." The work describes theories of the universe and the beginning of life on Earth; refers to such scientists as Stephen Hawking, Edwin Hubble, Max Planck, and Werner Heisenberg; and includes a flowchart tracing a line from the "universe" through "clusters of galaxies," the "milky way," "the sun," "our planet," "our continent," "our country," "our province," and "Parry Sound" to "R.R.2," where Charlie lives. *Charlie Farquharson's Unyverse* received the best reviews, yet had the lowest sales, of any Charlie book to that time.

In 1991 Harron was awarded a doctorate of sacred letters by his alma mater, Victoria College. That same year he collaborated with McKinnon on *Keeping a Canadian Christmas*, an occasional book with stories, recipes, Christmas projects, games, quizzes, and photographs. The next year he published *Charlie Farquharson's Histry of Canada: Revized and (More) Expansive: As Told to Valeda Drain Farquharson When It Was Too Wet to Plow*. The second Quebec referendum was held in 1992, and Harron's dedication is indicative of his purpose: "To Ben and Zoe my grandchildren in the hope that they have a Canada to grow up in." In the "Pro Log" Farquharson echoes his creator's concerns, recognizing the need to bring the first book "up to dait wile we still has a

country to tock about." Unlike the 1972 edition, the work is divided into three parts; the last part includes new material and focuses on the period from the Canadian Confederation in 1867 to the Meech Lake Accord in 1987.

*Charlie's a Broad: Travails in Fern Parts* (1994) is Harron's most novelistic book to date. Charlie Farquharson and his wife, Valeda Drain, win a quarter of a million dollars in the lottery and use the money to travel to Cuba, Ireland, Great Britain, The Netherlands, Germany, France, Italy, Rome, Greece, and Egypt by plane, the *Queen Elizabeth II*, and the Orient Express. In 1997 Harron wrote a version of *Anne of Green Gables—The Musical* for physically disabled performers.

In 2000 Harron made the first of eight appearances as Charlie Farquharson at the Royal Bank Senior Jubilee at Roy Thomson Hall in Toronto. Also in 2000 he received the Order of Ontario. In 2003 he left McKinnon for Claudette Gareau, with whom he had been having an affair. In 2005 he toured Ontario in *Don Harron and Friends*. For the next five years he toured in *Charlie Farquharson and Them Udders*, in which he also portrayed his city cousin Valerie Rosedale and his Scottish cousin Hamish Moultrie Farquharson, and costarring pianist David Warrack. He received the Earle Grey Award for lifetime achievement in 2007.

Harron did not publish another book until *Anne of Green Gables, the Musical: 101 Things You Didn't Know* in 2009. He followed it the next year with *Charlie Farquharson's Vews and Mews about Yer News*. It opens with "How to Read This Book":

**This book should be read out loud.**

The origins of literature go back at least three thousand years and the tradition was of necessity an oral one. The bards and seers of ancient times passed on their myths and legends, songs and stories from mouth to ear. This includes Homer, blind poet of the Iliad and the Odyssey, and the creators of the Old Testament.

Even the Bible, that age-old source of our beliefs, passed its stories from mouth to ear to convey God's dealings with man. In our own time the Bible is still read aloud, both in the family circle "wherever two or three are gathered together" and the Sunday sermon. In other societies the Celtic and early Anglo-Saxon chroniclers, the Australian aboriginals, and the North American Indians required no books to pass on their legends.

This 14th book of mine continues the practice of mangling our language with wordplay, misspellings, Malapropisms and outrageous puns. But misspeaking our language has also had a noble cultural heri-

tage. Shakespeare in *Much Ado About Nothing* had a policeman called Dogberry who came to the conclusion that “comparisons are odourous.” The word malaprop itself comes from the name of a female character in a play of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, *The Rivals*. He created a female character, Mrs. Malaprop who made a faux pas every time she opened her mouth.

The practice of misspeaking goes back at least twenty-five hundred years ago when the Greek playwright Aristophanes in his comedy *The Frogs* invented a rustic character who came into Athens town from the Peloponnesian sticks and made everyone snicker with his attempts to express himself. As it turns out, he’s the only one in the play who makes any sense.

Don Harron was inducted into the Canadian Country Music Hall of Fame in 2010. He sees himself as the keeper of *Anne of Green Gables—The Musical* and has seen it performed more than two hundred times. He regularly attends the Charlottetown production and is working on the screenplay for a movie version of the musical to be produced in 2013.

#### Interview:

Marcia Kaye, “The Life, Loves and Regrets of Don Harron,” *50Plus* (20 May 2010) <<http://www.50plus.com/Lifestyle/BrowseAllArticles/index.cfm?documentID=8558>> [accessed 9 March 2011].

#### Biography:

Martha Harron, *A Parent Contradiction* (Toronto: Collins, 1988).

#### Reference:

William C. Reeve, *Kleist on Stage, 1804–1987* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993).

#### Papers:

Don Harron’s literary papers are in several libraries in Canada; he has bequeathed the lion’s share to Victoria College of the University of Toronto. The Toronto Reference Library has the manuscript for *The Broken Jug* and a prompt script for *Turvey: A Comedy in Three Acts*. Harron’s sketches for *Spring Thaw* are among James Mavor Moore’s papers at York University.