

The year it all changed

Everything changed in 1967. Fifty years ago, Canada celebrated its 100th birthday, hosting an Expo in Montreal and, at least in the narrative we like to tell ourselves, came into our own as a country.

We became a country in 1867, “came of age,” historians tell us, at Vimy Ridge, in 1917, gained full autonomy from Britain’s Parliament in 1931, and adopted our very own constitution in 1982. But 1967 is when we stopped being a baby-country and became a confident, adult-like state on the world stage.

It’s possible that few Canadians pinpoint 1967 as a particular turning point. The various measures of Canadian pride – the U.S. exchange rate, hockey titles, military engagements, pop cultural contributions – have ebbed and flowed in the successive decades. National unity saw multiple flashpoints, from the October Crisis just three years after the euphoria of the Centennial, to the referenda of 1980 and 1995, the latter of which almost ended the nation. Free trade and globalization altered us once again.

“Canadianness” itself changed dramatically in this half-century, from a concept rooted in British heritage to a recognition of “two founding nations” to celebrating multiculturalism and a belated recognition of the rights and tragic history of indigenous peoples resulting directly from our national project. In this time, too, Canada has gone from a staid, comparatively conservative place to one of the most liberal countries in the world. Institutionalized antisemitism, which was still rife in the Canada of 1967, has become almost entirely absent (although incidents and acts of antisemitism, like much else, continue to occur).

While nothing really substantive changed overnight, 1967 is a symbolic moment in Canadian history.

For Israel, 1967 had symbolism but, in very real, tangible and irreversible ways, it was a year when everything changed. While it didn’t happen overnight, it did take a mere six days. The Six Day War, which began June 5, 1967, literally and figuratively reshaped Israel, the Middle East, Diaspora Jewry and global diplomacy.

In its early years, Israel experienced exponential population growth like almost no country on earth has seen. It went from the proverbial desert to a blooming success, first through innovations in agriculture and, later, in technology and almost every other sector of human endeavour. A successful nation was born. But

the Jewish state was never accepted by the neighbours it defeated in 1948-’49 and, in 1967, war came again.

Yet the result was so quick and so decisive that some viewed it as a sign of Divine intervention or evidence of chosenness. More realistically, it was a people holding their ground because there was no alternative.

The experience affected not only Israelis but Jews everywhere. Canadian Jews and others in the Diaspora volunteered, sent money, prayed and organized. Less than two decades after it had begun, Jewish self-determination in the ancient land and modern state of Israel hung by a thread. And then victory.

The anxiety before and jubilation after transformed into something new and unexpected. The control by Israel over the West Bank (formerly part of Jordan) and the Gaza Strip (which had been under Egyptian control) led to a new dynamic in Israel – and in the world’s approach to Israel. Having been seen as the underdog, Israel in 1967 transformed – in the eyes of the world and, to an extent, in the eyes of Israelis themselves – into a powerful regional force.

The occupation has been the defining foreign policy concern for Israel for half a century now and affects the way Israel is treated on the global stage. Jerusalem, reunified under Israeli control during the war, is a flashpoint of local and international conflict over competing claims. Israelis will likely be forced to reckon with the legacy of 1967 for many years to come, as it seeks to protect both the democratic and Jewish natures of the state, as well as reaffirming its commitment to minority rights and to pluralism.

Despite this overarching conflict and its associated violence and threats, Israel has developed an economy and culture that is a human-made miracle of the modern world. The list is familiar and endless: scientific and academic achievement, technological innovation, global emergency response, lifesaving medical advancements. Even Israel’s intelligence capabilities, born of necessity, are so advanced that the president of the United States foolishly can’t help bragging to adversarial foreign despots that he has insider intel.

Amid all these challenges and hard work, Israelis self-report in international studies to be among the happiest people on the planet. (Canadians also rank high.) Even with room for improvement, this reality is perhaps the greatest achievement of all. ■

The art of creative criticism

CYNTHIA RAMSAY

In the program of the inaugural Max Wyman Award for Cultural Commentary, Dr. Rabbi Yosef Wosk describes Max Wyman as “a cultural paragon whose clear vision, incisive writing and fearless voice have both grounded and encouraged us. In his half-century here in British Columbia, he has been an unparalleled personality, a cultural critic and midwife of creativity whose influence is sure to be modeled by future generations.”

In establishing the biennial, province-wide award – which will include a \$5,000 honorarium and allow the recipient to choose an emerging commentator, who will receive \$1,000 – Wosk will help ensure Wyman’s continuing influence, as well as “catalyze the art of creative criticism.” The award will be “presented to a writer for an outstanding piece or body of work that will raise the level of cultural conversation and, ultimately, human creativity.”

Wyman was the first recipient of the award that bears his name. He received the honour at a gala at Vancouver Playhouse on April 18 – 50 years plus a day after Wyman’s first shift at the *Vancouver Sun*. “Pure, lovely serendipity,” Wyman told the *Independent* about the timing.

Born in England, Wyman immigrated to Canada in 1967. He was a longtime arts columnist, dancer and theatre critic, and books editor with the *Sun* and with the *Province*. He is an actor, radio and television personality; cultural commentator; arts policy consultant; author of several books; educator and arts advocate; former mayor of Lions Bay; and an Officer of the Order of Canada. Among other things, he was involved with the Canadian Conference of the Arts, Canada Council for the Arts and the Canadian Commission for UNESCO. He was a juror for numerous competitions, chair of several cultural committees and served on the board of the British Columbia Achievement Foundation.

That Wosk wanted the cultural commentary award to be in Wyman’s name “brought a tumult of responses,” said Wyman.

“I was astonished, deeply touched, profoundly humbled and, of course, delighted,” he said. “Delighted not just for the personal recognition (every ego likes to be stroked, after all), but, more importantly, because the award would lead us to a clearer understanding of how serious and intelligent criticism – creative criticism, the informed observation and contextualization that is an essential tool of the examined life – could best function in these momentarily changing times.

“My joy, astonishment and grati-



Dr. Rabbi Yosef Wosk, right, presents Max Wyman with the inaugural Max Wyman Award for Cultural Commentary.

tude have not diminished now that the project is up and running. I have been in awe of Yosef’s social activism for years: he seems to live the essence of the Hebrew phrase *tikkun olam*, the notion that we should perform acts of kindness to repair the world. He puts his resources where his idealism is.”

The idea for this type of an award was first raised some years ago at a dinner at Wosk’s home, said Wyman. “The topic came up again more recently at the inaugural meeting of another of Yosef’s initiatives, the SFU [Simon Fraser University] Jack and Doris Shadbolt Community Scholars, and, early in 2016, Yosef brought forward the proposal to establish a prize to stimulate and recognize creative criticism in various disciplines.”

“I have thought about championing the idea and the ethical practice of criticism for many years,” Wosk told the *Independent*.

Shying away from criticism when he was younger, Wosk said, “In our tradition, we are told that God created the world through words. Rabbinic teachings emphasize guarding our tongues, not speaking badly about others and not spreading rumours. Life and death, we are reminded, is often controlled by words. Just look at the prevalence of bullying in schools and the

tragedy of so many youth who are driven to suicide in an effort to escape the unbearable embarrassment of verbal abuse. I had to work through numerous stages of emotional and intellectual maturity before learning that intellectual opinions or personal preferences were not the same as *lashon ha’rab*, derogatory speech about another, nor was it the same as moral rebuke. “Criticism, I learned,

could be a gift. It involved courage, clear sight and expression. Saying ‘no’ to one thing also means saying ‘yes’ to something else. I rejected mean-spirited criticism but embraced creative criticism.”

Wosk first heard of Wyman when Wyman was at the *Sun*. “I admired his work,” said Wosk. “From the sound of his name, I thought he was probably Jewish. Later, I found out that he wasn’t but, as I got to know him, I realized that he certainly had ‘a Jewish soul’: he was kind, smart, sensitive, humble and active in helping the world be a better place. I got to know him better when we were both involved in the Canadian Academy of Independent Scholars at Simon Fraser University. When I was appointed a Shadbolt Fellow at SFU in 2015, I invited Max and his wife, Susan Mertens – also a critic and a brilliant scholar of esthetics with a doctorate from Cambridge – to be in the first cohort of Shadbolt Community Scholars, with a mandate to knit together the academy, the arts and the community.”

Wosk said he approached Scotiabank Dance Centre with the idea for the Wyman Award because, although “Wyman was recognized as a culture critic in general, he was most famously known as a dance critic.”

Wosk sought the advice of the centre’s executive director, Mima

