

Editorial

WHAT EXACTLY IS PRIVACY? Is it a good thing? If so, how much of it should a person have? If not, why do people persist in wanting it? These are questions that arise, some of them quite openly and some of them by implication, in the articles printed in these pages.

The idea of privacy, along with the questions about it which I've just identified, is of course embedded in a very complicated cultural ecology. Privacy doesn't necessarily mean the same thing to us as it did to the ancient Greeks, and it's not necessarily of equal value to persons separated by large geographical spaces or historical intervals. When Sir Thomas More set out the requirements for the ideal society in his *Utopia* (1516), for example, he explicitly ruled out the kinds of guarantees of privacy that most of us take for granted. There's no private property in Utopia, and in making this decision More is both following Plato and anticipating Marx. But More goes much further than simply abolishing ownership. The inhabitants of Utopia, for example, follow the universal practice of never locking residential doors. Why should anyone bother to lock up, since, as More's narrator explains, "there is nothing within the houses that is private." And in the uniformly well-lit streets of Utopia, there's no room for private vice: "There be neither wine-taverns, nor ale houses, nor stews, nor any occasion of vice or wickedness, no lurking corners, no places of wicked counsels or unlawful assemblies. But they be in the present sight, and under the eyes of every man." So there's a price to be paid for the achievement of the ideal society, and in *Utopia* that price is expressed in part as the virtual abolition of privacy.

It is this very thought that provokes George Orwell's powerful answer to such utopian projections in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). Here a citizen's activities can be monitored by means of a "telescreen" inserted into the wall of his or her residential space. This instrument, which receives and transmits messages simultane-

ously, can detect any sound “above the level of a very low whisper” and every visual impression within its radar-like range; these messages it is submitting constantly to the Thought Police, who, as Orwell’s protagonist Winston Smith observes, may (or may not be) reading your particular set of messages at any given time: “You had to live—did live, from habit that became instinct—in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinized.” The complete eradication of privacy is encapsulated in the slogan which accompanies the Party’s ubiquitous poster, “BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU.” Orwell, unlike More, is constructing a dystopian fantasy: a nightmare world in which human creativity can’t flourish, or even survive, except if protected by the most ingenious acts of evasion and subterfuge. Even then, as the interrogation of Winston by O’Brien will prove, it takes courage of a high order to prevent the system from breaking down the last vestiges of privacy.

I mention these two literary examples as a way of suggesting that the connotative meaning of privacy will depend in large measure on our point of view. For a writer outraged by the spectacular growth of a few private fortunes in the midst of poverty and hunger, privacy is a sign that says ‘keep out’ and that ought to be, by the rules of natural justice, disobeyed and torn down. For a writer concerned with the ideology and technology of surveillance, privacy is a precious and fragile guarantee of whatever it is that makes us human. In most cases there will be a less perfect divergence between one writer’s take on privacy and another’s, but I think the articles and creative works which follow will demonstrate that privacy is still very much a subject in dispute.

“McClure’s Monologue,” to begin with the only work of fiction published here, is a beautifully sustained reminiscence by a retired schoolteacher, now sixty-three, of private moments shared with former pupils, almost all of them boys between the ages of nine and twelve. From the point of view of the society that put him on trial for these activities, he looks like a sexual predator. From his own point of view, McClure has done nothing more criminal than search “for friends to jump around with.” The author, Gideon Forman, refuses to tip this extremely delicate balance, and that indeed is the great strength of the story.

The poems printed here are not directly about privacy, but each of them brushes up against the subject in various informal

ways, perhaps by relying on images or memories associated with intimacy. In Matt Robinson's "Morning, Laundry," the speaker reads the bedsheets in the morning as if they are "a reluctant mapping of last night"—a mapping that will be consigned to oblivion in the "steamy forgetting haze" of the laundry. Robinson's trope of soiled laundry is taken up more systematically by Brian Johnson in "Private Scandals/Public Selves: The Education of a Gossip in *Who Do You Think You Are?*" In Alice Munro's text Johnson finds various modern equivalents of the ancient practice of exchanging gossip at the washing place, where of course the secrets and stains of each family would have to be revealed on every washday. The character Flo has a talent for "mak[ing] public what she finds in the laundry bag," and by quoting this simple but telling image Johnson has captured in one stroke the central tension between privacy and gossip which he locates, with great subtlety, both in the thematics of Munro's book and in its narrative technique.

Reinhold Kramer's article, "Section 8 of the Charter and English-Canadian Fiction," begins by posing a serious question about privacy: when, and under what circumstances, does the state have the right to invade the human body in its search for the information it says it requires? I will not describe the steps by which this question leads to the construction of two opposing meta-narratives (here called "Expiation" and "Civil Liberties"). Nor will I try to encapsulate what Kramer has to say about particular novels by David Arnason, Margaret Atwood, Robertson Davies, Timothy Findley, Frederick Philip Grove, Robert Kroetsch, Michael Ondaatje, Mordecai Richler, Leon Rooke, Chris Scott, Margaret Sweatman, Guy Vanderhaeghe, and David Williams. This article offers an ambitious synthesis of cultural materials, ranging from *The Confessions* of St. Augustine to the position of motor vehicle law on the question of obtaining blood samples from drunk drivers, and with admirable dexterity it brings all these materials into play in the interpretation of fiction.

Dorothy Osborne would be no more than a footnote in history (the woman who married William Temple, the diplomat, essayist, and employer of the young Jonathan Swift) if she hadn't written a series of seventy-six letters to the man she loved during the two-year period (1652–54) before she married him. This "clandestine correspondence" is the subject of Carrie Hintz's article, "All People Seen and Known: Dorothy Osborne, Privacy, and Seven-

teenth-Century Courtship.” For Hintz these letters are a significant sign that the efforts of a young woman in the early modern period to choose her own marriage partner could indeed be meaningful. But in order to protect her right to choose, Osborne had to safeguard the privacy of her communication with Temple, often by using devious strategies of manipulation and concealment. Such duplicity sets up a mental struggle for Osborne, because of her strong belief in the value of frankness. And what she values in life she values in writing too: “all Letters mee thinks should bee free and Easy as ones discourse, not studded, as an Oration, nor made up of hard words like a Charme.” In her exploration of the personal and cultural nuances embedded in these letters, Hintz has given us a rare glimpse of privacy as the lived experience of an early modern Englishwoman.

The first and last of the articles collected here are contrasting pieces, not only in terms of the positions they take on the subject of privacy, but also in terms of discursive practice. In “A Philosophical Definition of Privacy,” Shaun MacNeill goes to work with the tool-kit of analytical philosophy and comes to the view that privacy can be defined exclusively with reference to the information that other people acquire about a person. It’s a very fine tool-kit to be using, and MacNeill’s essay is an impressive performance which aims at (and achieves) a very high degree of precision. The first article, “The Rhetoric of Privacy” by K.J. Peters, is a wide-ranging examination, in the manner of Michel Foucault, of the ways in which privacy can be *constructed* by speakers and listeners. It begins with an account of the controversial television interview of Newt Gingrich’s mother by Connie Chung in January 1995. It goes on to study the rhetorical behaviour of Socrates in the *Phaedrus*, the protected discursive space of the confessional in the penitential handbooks of the fourteenth century, and the perceived relationship between privacy and authenticity, between interiority and truth. Peters’ essay is suggestive and speculative, in the best senses of both words. It urges us to think of privacy as a cultural practice, inflected by historical change, and yet available (in different ways) to widely separated societies. So it stands in the opening position, at the beginning of a new phase of the debate about privacy which the writers in these pages are offering to renew.