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ALEX BEAM

The Boston Globe

## What, me apologize? Not this year

By Alex Beam, 12/30/2003

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Earlier this month, Canada's governor general, Adrienne Clarkson, formally apologized for the 18th-century expulsion that forced thousands of French-speaking Acadian settlers to find new homes in Maine and Louisiana. I wonder whether an apology was really necessary. The men and women who suffered under the British -- not the Canadian -- yoke long ago met their maker.

Furthermore, from this evil sprang much good. Brattle Street's own Henry Wadsworth Longfellow got himself an often-cited, little-read hit poem, "Evangeline," with its famous first lines "This is the forest primeval," blah blah blah. And, absent the Acadian expulsion, we would enjoy no zydeco music, no Cajun (Louisiana-speak for "Acadian") cooking, and possibly no louche movie starring the forgotten Ellen Barkin, "The Big Easy."

The moral: Don't be profligate with apologies. They are so often unnecessary.

Every year I receive many letters with the phrase, "I think you owe an apology to so-and-so." But apologizing is the furthest thing from my mind. In May, Boston poet George Manos objected to my characterization of poets as "worthless malingerers angling for the main chance." "I find these comments regarding the poetic community totally unwarranted and objectionable and feel Mr. Beam should apologize for them," Manos wrote.

Reader Ray Waldron piled on: "To categorize all poets in this manner is akin to someone calling all columnists petty, small-minded fools. . . . I am going to put your column on the floor for my dog to relieve himself. That is what I think of you and your opinion."

Calling Ralph Waldo Emerson's galpal Margaret Fuller a fruitcake and an "earthy Transcendentalist diva" proved too much for Jessica Lipnack, who named her first daughter after Fuller, her "heroine and guide." "Retract your blasphemy about her and Emerson," Lipnack insisted. "He was lucky to have met her and should have kissed the ground she walked on, because without her having published him, he might be among the great unknowns."

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When I poked gentle fun at Sweden, the land of "sex, suicide, and

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socialism," this summer, reader Eva Tasaki had a lot more than an apology in mind. "This attitude of debasing people in foreign lands gets so disgusting that I am contemplating approaching a lawyer with a suit for libel," she wrote.

Yikes! My notion that Swedes were mollicoddled sissies prompted this angry rejoinder: "As to the safety issues that you seem to be opposed to -- Sweden is famous for that. We sell many products here and in the rest of the world for that reason. However, we are also tough and strong, not wimpy as you imply. We are able to bike to work in the middle of the winter, thereby keeping our cities cleaner and our bodies stronger. If you wish to know more about this I will invite you to view a PowerPoint on the issue."

Shortly thereafter I received an avalanche of angry mail responding to what I thought was a tame outing on the controversy surrounding Mel Gibson's movie "The Passion of the Christ." Charles Colson, known as the "evil genius" of the Nixon administration, eviscerated me in a column posted on freerepublic.com. Reader J. Lee Crumrine noted that "The Devil works overtime to see to it that doubt reigns supreme over belief. And he has many in his service."

The very first e-mail to arrive after I published an innocuous list of rowing movies I happen to have enjoyed bore the subject line: "Shame on you!" Reader Ginny Cummings assumed that "sexism and ignorance" were responsible for the omission of the locally made "A Hero for Daisy" from my list. Actually, I thought the movie had already received plenty of publicity. "Daisy" director Mary Mazzio graciously refrained from complaining, and she sent me a copy of the film, which I of course enjoyed.

"You owe Mr. [Paul] Krugman an apology," Maria Rhodes wrote me last month, after I suggested that the New York Times columnist suffered from a mild persecution complex. In that same column, I inquired if anyone had ever read a book by Stanley Bing, a pseudonym for the well-networked CBS publicist Gil Schwartz. At least four readers, most of them claiming not to be related to Schwartz by blood or marriage, wrote in to say they have enjoyed Bing's books.

Perhaps an apology is in order? Naaah. Happy new year to all.

*Alex Beam is a Globe columnist. His e-dress is [beam@globe.com](mailto:beam@globe.com).*

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