

# Be Our Guest

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A new magazine always appears in a double guise. It is in one sense the arriving guest, anxious to exert whatever attractions it may possess on its potential host—the particular public to which it has chosen to appeal. But at the same time it sets out to become a host itself, offering its hospitality to writers and their ideas, and ready to welcome to the salon of its pages the most brilliant and the most erudite of guests.

—George Woodcock, Editorial, *Canadian Literature* 1

When you invite Indigenous scholars into your colonial institutions, as guests ... there is an implicit expectation you will be on your best behaviour. In fact, *visiting* is one of the things that deeply informs Métis being. Hosting and being hosted is one of the ways we build up our nationhood, renew kinship obligations, and restore relationality. *We take hosting, and being hosted, very seriously.*

—Zoe Todd, “Your failure of imagination is not my problem”

I can recall with clarity my first visit to this journal’s home offices, which are housed in the Anthropology and Sociology building at the northwesternmost reaches of UBC’s Vancouver campus. Upon the Point Grey cliffs, overlooking the Salish Sea and North Shore mountains, nestled between the historic, Tudor-style Cecil Green Park House and the glass-walled, post-and-beam Museum of Anthropology, the setting was—still is—extraordinary. The home of *Canadian Literature* I found tucked away amidst this splendour was, well, just a little more ordinary. *Homely*, even. I’m not sure what I was anticipating, or if I’d ever truly stopped to consider the journal existing elsewhere than its pages. As a copyeditor and aspiring Canadianist, though, I was certainly eager to enter what I imagined as the house built on George Woodcock’s foundations, since remodelled by a succession of editors. If there were in fact “hallowed halls of CanLit” (Lederman) someplace, surely the field’s eminent elder statesjournal made its home there. Yet as I descended that day into the bowels of the building in

which I'm now writing, each downward step to its semi-subterranean, concrete-blocked basement seemed a step away from my inklings of a journal whose purported "Kerrisdale values" were once debated in these pages (Ricou and Weir). In hindsight, I should have expected no more than the eminently modest, warmly austere, but spacious and serviceable offices I found, along with the convivial team of staff and students who live in them and make the journal tick. It was not that the emperor had no clothes, really, but that those clothes were much less tweedy than I'd envisioned, closer to what I wear on a modest budget—function over fashion. Today, less oblivious to the economics of academic publishing, and to the reality that literary journals tend more toward house-of-cards than hallowed hallways, I better appreciate the journal's real privilege of having any place to call home.

I'm one of many students who have found a home at *Canadian Literature*, whose institutional commitment to the support and mentorship of emerging scholars is one of several new wings added to the blueprint of its initial 1959 design. This year marks the journal's sixtieth birthday, and there's no shortage of housekeeping in our offices as we prepare to host anniversary events during Congress at our UBC home, on the unceded land of the hən̓q̓əmi̓nəm̓-speaking Musqueam people whose hospitality makes the university's work possible. Hosting—and what it means to be a good host—is very much on our minds as we extend invitations and welcome visitors to celebrate and reflect on the journal's past and future. Our public festivities will include a reading, emceed by poetry editor Phinder Dulai, featuring Jordan Abel, Sonnet L'Abbé, Daphne Marlatt, Cecily Nicholson, and Shazia Hafiz Ramji—some of the innovative writers who've appeared or been discussed in these pages over the years. A reception will follow with a short program to honour the journal's history and recognize those building its future with a 60th Anniversary Graduate Student Essay Prize. The events are scheduled for the evening of June 1, 2019, at Green College, and are free and open to the public (see [canlit.ca](http://canlit.ca) for details). We hope you'll be our guests.

Maybe it's just frequency illusion, but amidst the housekeeping, I can't stop seeing the language of house, home, and hospitality everywhere in the everyday discourse of the journal, including in this issue. For those of us who live in essays, these concepts are built into the interior design of our intellectual work—among the "metaphors we live by" (*pace* Lakoff and Johnson), whether tacitly or intentionally adopted. Composition textbooks often ask students to imagine their papers like a house, introductions a *doorway* into a many-roomed textual/intellectual space *built* with a clear

*structure*. Articles house arguments that need *support*, that rest on *solid* or *shaky* intellectual *foundations*. We *scaffold* pedagogies and *construct* interpretive *frameworks*. Behind the journal's doors, editing is done *in-house*, following a *house* style that's accessible from the *home* page of our website, which *hosts* our archives and *houses* other supplements. We track *visitors* online, *welcome* submissions, and collaborate with *guest* editors. Yes, tracing this wordplay is maybe too much fun. But it's more than an exercise in pedantry, just as these metaphors are not simply stylistic embellishments, but necessary for making sense of the often-intangible processes and domains—including the Web—wherein scholarship is materialized and exchanged. They pervade the journal's quotidia because they permeate conceptions of its social relations and the content it “houses.”

House and home. Stuart Hall distinguishes: “It is our use of a pile of bricks and mortar which makes it a ‘house,’ and what we feel, think, or say about it”—including the “words we use” and “stories we tell”—which “makes a ‘house’ a ‘home’” (3). The articles housed in this issue tell a range of stories about the complicated, often difficult politics of making home, of feeling or being at home together. The “notion of *home*,” as Aubrey Hanson reads it in Katherena Vermette's *The Break*, “is a complex one” for the novel's Métis women—an affective, relational space where “multiple understandings are interwoven.” The “word *home* appears on 113 of the book's pages”—and by my count, 124 times in Hanson's article. This is no stylistic error; iteration and recursion reveal home as a continual process of departures and returns, a space that falls apart and is held together, that maintains kinship and calls people into ethical relations. Reading Rita Wong's work, Alec Follett articulates the need for settlers who call Turtle Island home to reimagine destructive relations with water and Indigenous knowledges in support of environmental justice. James Hahn attends to the ethics of poetry that makes home in another's life story, reading Stephen Scobie's documentary reconstruction of Robert McAlmon and the literary violations of his private intimacies. Spaces of home traverse the place and partitions of house and page, negotiating home between public and private spheres, and across political and epistemological borders.

Hanson builds a Métis epistemology of home from Maria Campbell's assertion that stories are “a start to finding our way home.” Storying home, for Campbell, is a decolonizing imperative given the nation-state's displacements, including those of its academic institutions and archives of colonial knowledge-production. The colonial hostility of the Canadian

archive is Jane Boyes' concern in her reading of *Janey's Arcadia*, wherein Rachel Zolf's glitchy poetics reveal the "irony of settler 'hospitality'" in nation-building texts that construct Canada as a welcome home to some through violent erasures of others. Working in the archives of McClelland & Stewart, Deanna Reder and Alix Shield recover crucial missing pages from Campbell's 1973 autobiography *Halfbreed*, scrubbed from the original manuscript without consent by its publisher. The excised pages—and RCMP "incident" therein—recount a brutal violation of home and body; and the textual violence of their excision is part of wider histories of destructive editorial practice in CanLit's publishing houses. Reder and Shield's restorative work newly informs the legacy of Campbell's foundational text, which has long inspired Indigenous literary community across generations finding home in its pages. In their dialogue on mentorship, anti-racism, and allyship, Sharanpal Ruprai and Sheniz Janmohamed describe the formative influence of path-clearing texts for South Asian women of colour writers navigating CanLit's structures. Their note takes conversation to the page as a model of mentorship and positionality, asserting the need to build community spaces of exchange while acknowledging "when to step out of conversations and give space and respect by listening."

Which brings me back home, to the house this journal's pages started building six decades ago. How has the house become a home? How does *Canadian Literature* enact hospitality? Whom does it welcome as visitors? What conversations can it still productively host? How might it become a better guest? Where is its welcome worn, and when is it time to step away and listen? On one hand, these are practical questions of *feasibility* in a rapidly changing publishing landscape, particularly as the move to open access shifts the foundations of traditional publishing models. Like other journals, we are deeply invested in welcoming more visitors and subscribers, and in making the journal the kind of accommodating space that all sorts of scholars see as a valuable home for their work.

On the other hand, these are ideological questions of *responsibility* for a journal such as this, whose creation in 1959 not only reflected the cultural nationalist climate that made its title possible, but helped support the institutional framework of a cultural formation, "CanLit," that now appears so inhospitable, so *unhomely*, and for many always has been. While *Canadian Literature* is not reducible to CanLit, it's also not *not* CanLit, and *that* house, to read the conceptual metaphor in the title of the important recent collection *Refuse*, lies in *ruins*—open to renovation, up for new

ownership, or slated for demolition, depending on perspective. The mythic home of CanLit as a “tight-knit community” (Lederman) was always gated. In “refuse: a trans girl writer’s story,” Kai Cheng Thom asks: “can you reform/remake/revolutionize / a place you never lived in?” (108). For some, home is—must be—elsewhere. For those still dwelling in that ruinous house and contemplating their complicities in the state of its edifice, the question remains, as the editors of *Refuse* suggest, how to “imagine and build other ways of being together” (13). At this moment when CanLit is at once uninhabitable and ripe for rebuilding, it is incumbent upon its institutions—including its journals—to reimagine their hospitality and social relations.

When Woodcock first introduced *Canadian Literature* to its readers sixty years ago, his opening words enacted an ideal of intellectual hospitality that was broadly construed (addressing “no clan, little or large”), though implicitly elitist (welcoming “the most brilliant” and “erudite” guests), and paradoxically reciprocal. Announcing open-house for the first scholarly “home” of its kind in Canada, he footed the threshold between journal and literary public by knocking on both sides of the proverbial door: welcoming as guests those same people and institutions whose hospitality the journal’s existence would depend on as hosts. Fifty years and two-hundred issues later, Margery Fee described how “home” for *Canadian Literature* still persisted within that “lucky conjuncture” of reciprocal relations—material and social—supporting the journal’s identifications, along with something less tangible linking the web: “a belief that puzzling out social meanings is vitally important, and one of the best places to focus that effort is in the production and study of literature, broadly defined” (9). Ten years later still, I think this belief holds, though the lucky conjuncture supporting *Canadian Literature*’s real or imagined identifications is increasingly disjunctive, the relational web precariously woven. And the Web itself is where puzzling out social meaning in CanLit now happens on social media; tweeting, blogging, podcasting, and other non-traditional publishing enable an immediacy of engagement attendant to the times.

*Canadian Literature* is no longer the “new magazine” Woodcock introduced, though, and technology has expanded the “salon of its pages” in directions difficult to conceive in 1959. (Woodcock’s final editorial cautioned against the culturally corrosive effects of mass media he perceived in 1977. What would he write about Twitter?). The verbal definition of *hosting* itself has evolved with the digital age, now encompassing the work of computers and servers that host data and make it accessible over networks and the

Internet. Last year, the open-access *CanLit Guides* educational project, housed online by *Canadian Literature* to support literary study and bring the journal's discourse into the classroom and homes of the public, successfully launched sixteen new chapters hosted at [canlitguides.ca](http://canlitguides.ca). That site has already been visited nearly 200,000 times since, by a global audience reaching from Australia to Angola to Azerbaijan. What the journal houses, the way visitors access it, and the publics it serves have not remained static, and nor will they.

Reder and Shield's article on *Halfbreed* that leads this issue was first published on [canlit.ca](http://canlit.ca) in May 2018. The editor of *Canadian Literature*, Laura Moss, decided to launch it online immediately in recognition of the significance and timeliness of the intervention. It was just too important to sit on in-house. It's been visited nearly 10,000 times on our website, half of those in the first weeks, when the article and Campbell's pages it documents made national headlines. Certainly, its wide dissemination communicated the value of the kinds of literary scholarship happening in Canada, and housed in journals like this, to a wider public. Reder and Shield conclude with hopes of a re-release of *Halfbreed* keeping with Campbell's original intentions, and a new edition—with the once-excised pages returned home—is now slated for shelves later this year. The story of that article and its afterlife invites sober reflection on the violent impositions upon particular homes, bodies, and texts in the colonial house of Canada and literary houses of the nation's publishers, but also on the potential of committed writers and scholars to host conversations built upon alternative foundations and platforms. Just what kind of house this journal can or should be for these conversations is a question now sixty years in the making, and part of our necessary homework.

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