

A Diamond Anniversary

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On June 1, 2019, we publicly celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of *Canadian Literature*. When the journal launched in 1959, there was skepticism over whether there could be enough critical material on the small body of literature produced in Canada to keep the publication alive for a year. The skeptics were wrong. *Canadian Literature* was the first journal devoted to the critical discussion of Canadian writing but absolutely not the last. In the early days, the journal was in the vanguard. Now, it documents the accomplishments and the ruptures in the culture it anticipated. Over the past six decades, the journal has continued to grow and publish important work by scholars, critics, reviewers, historians, commentators, authors, poets, and novelists alike. It has met the challenges of an ever-evolving field and changing publishing platforms. And, in time, it has tried to be open and welcoming to many perspectives. Over the course of decades, the journal has been a venue for thousands of articles, book reviews, and original poems in 239 issues. That's thousands of voices coming together—sometimes in harmony and sometimes in dissonance—to engage in/with creative and critical writing in Canada and beyond. This issue serves as an example of the continued commitment to thinking critically about the places we stand. The articles take on the environmental crisis in Alberta, care relations in Ontario, masculinity in Manitoba, theatre in Quebec, Jewish Canadian writing, and decolonization in British Columbia.

Still, even in moments of celebration, it is vital to recognize that the fact that the journal has been operating out of the University of British Columbia for sixty years means that it has been produced on the unceded, ancestral territory of the Musqueam people for sixty years. Deep systems of

displacement, inequity, and appropriation have allowed space for the journal to exist in this place since its inception. As we reflect on our past, including on the rich body of work published by and about Indigenous writers in these pages over the past few decades, we must acknowledge that colonial history and recognize that we are accountable to it now and in the future.

Sixty years is a long time for any one thing to exist so we decided to pause, take stock, and honour this milestone. We took advantage of the fact that UBC was hosting the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences under the theme of “Circles of Conversation” in June 2019 and decided to host a few conversations of our own: an academic one on the state of the field; a creative one to share the work of some fine poets, most of whom have published in the journal; and a social one to toast the journal, its contributors, and its creators.

The academic panel was held in conjunction with the Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English (ACCUTE) and UBC Programming for Congress 2019. The topic for the day was “CanLit and Canadian Literature” with an aim to have a healthy discussion about disentangling the broad field of Canadian literary studies (including its journals) from “CanLit” and its discontents and controversies. With Reviews Editor Nicholas Bradley chairing, literary scholars Lily Cho, Carrie Dawson, Gillian Roberts, Cynthia Sugars, and Karina Vernon addressed the various challenges at work in the field of Canadian literary studies. A lively conversation ensued about the role of academic labour in the CanLit cultural industries, the responsibilities of scholars as public figures, and the kinds of publics and communities to whom we see our critical work respond, among other pressing topics. The papers that initiated those conversations have been gathered in the Forum that opens this issue.¹

From the beginning, *Canadian Literature* has been a place for creative and critical conversations to mingle. This was certainly the case at the poetry reading we hosted. In front of an overflowing crowd in the Coach House of Green College at UBC, and with Poetry Editor Phinder Dulai as the emcee, Jordan Abel, Sonnet L'Abbé, Daphne Marlatt, Cecily Nicholson, Shazia Hafiz Ramji, and Rita Wong offered a deeply engaging set of readings and range of poetic styles and voices. We heard Jordan Abel's immersive poem on black rocks and “a deep narrow chasm,” and listened to Sonnet L'Abbé read “CLII” from *Sonnet's Shakespeare*, a poem that responds to the complexities of being a mixed-race culture creator and university teacher on unceded Snuneymuxw territory. Cecily Nicholson read a piece from *Wayside Sang* that thinks through what she introduced as “a lack of patrilineage” and

poetry of the road. Rita Wong, who had been arrested in 2018 while she sat in non-violent protest in front of the TransMountain pipeline entry gate in Burnaby, BC, read a draft of the “sentencing statement” she planned to present in court in her own defence. Following the event, Shazia Hafiz Ramji noted that reading her poem “Astronaut Family,” published in the journal in 2017, in this venue was a “homecoming,” and Daphne Marlatt offered up these wise words in reflection: “to participate in this reading that celebrated *Canadian Literature’s* 60th anniversary was both a delight and excruciating: a delight to hear such diverse poets writing so clearly and so devastatingly from their lives in our so-called ‘post-colonial’ society and economy; excruciating to represent the time-span of *CL* as the oldest poet, one initially formed by that colonial structure.” Even, or especially, at this celebratory occasion, there were many important moments showcasing the power of poetry to intervene in times of crisis and accountability.

At the reception after the poetry reading, we connected with former editors, contributors, students, and friends of the journal to mark the milestone with cheer. We were joined by the UBC Dean of Arts, Gage Averill, and the Head of the Department of English Language and Literatures, Siân Echard, who each eloquently highlighted the ongoing support of the faculty and the department for the journal. *Canadian Literature* is fortunate to have such strong institutional, academic, and community backing. I want to thank everyone who came to Green College to celebrate the journal’s diamond anniversary with us. The sense of joy in shared society that evening was tangible and heartening. There have been few moments in my professional life where I have fully set aside my innate skepticism and incredulity and have been so delighted to be a part of something so big. This was one of them. Sixty years is a long time to survive in scholarly publishing. It deserved a good toast.

Canadian Literature has endured in no small part because of a handful of people who have kept the journal alive. The job of editing the journal has moved from George Woodcock to W. H. New to Eva-Marie Kröller to Laurie Ricou to Margery Fee to me. It was lovely to be able to recognize the service of the past editors who were at the reception and are still a part of the *CanLit* family. And, wonderfully, we could also applaud the work of associate and assistant editors of the past and present who were also present (Glenn Deer, Ceilidh Hart, Iain Higgins, Kevin McNeilly, Karis Shearer, Shannon Smyrl, and Herbert Rosengarten, to name a few). There are also many people whose commitment and labour are less well-documented but who have been no

less dedicated to the production and dissemination of this journal. George Vaitkunas has been designing the journal since 1993. Donna Chin has been managing editor for over twenty-three years, keeping the publication on course through many obstacles and changes. And Beth Veitch has been the journal assistant for sixteen years, corresponding indefatigably with contributors and subscribers. Their combined institutional knowledge is staggering. Brendan McCormack has been the editorial assistant for four years and is an absolute editorial rock and gem. Over the past sixty years, there have been women and men who have worked on subscriptions, circulation, book ordering, cataloguing, correspondence, copyediting, proofreading, promotions, grant writing, cleaning, and design. The journal would not be celebrating sixty years without their time, energy, and care. It says something beautiful about the journal's community too that several former students who used to work in the office volunteered to come back to help us with the sixtieth anniversary. Kelsea O'Connor, for instance, who was an undergraduate student at the fiftieth anniversary events, came back for the sixtieth, and Mary Chen and Christy Fong returned to take photos and be part of the festivities at Congress.

As luck would have it, in addition to being editor of the journal, I also served as the Academic Convenor in charge of UBC Programming for Congress 2019. In this role I was tasked with bringing the theme of "Circles of Conversation" to life. A key goal of my team was to create spaces for dialogue and debate among scholars, educators, students, artists, activists, and the public at large, so that people could speak with one another, listen, and learn together. Another goal was to showcase the arts and creative critical engagements within and across disciplines. A final goal was to emphasize the vital public impact of research being done in the humanities and social sciences. The goals I set for Congress are similar to the goals that were long ago set for the journal. Create space. Dialogue. Listen. Engage. Make a difference. May they continue for years to come. Happy sixtieth anniversary, *CanLit*.

NOTE

- 1 Cynthia Sugars has opted not to publish her piece in this issue.

WORKS CITED

- L'Abbé, Sonnet. "Quick Question." Received by Laura Moss, 16 Dec. 2019.
Marlatt, Daphne. "Follow Up Humble Query." Received by Phinder Dulai, 5 Dec. 2019.
Ramji, Shazia Hafiz. "Follow Up Humble Query." Received by Phinder Dulai, 4 Dec. 2019.