

60th Anniversary Forum

North of Sixty: Surviving CanLit

Nicholas Bradley

Canadian Literature celebrates its sixtieth anniversary in 2019—at a time when the broader world of Canadian literature has been in nothing resembling a festive mood. When the journal’s first issue was published in 1959, it would have been difficult to envision that, sixty years later, the critical conversation would be epitomized by phrases such as *Resisting Canada* (see Matuk) and *CanLit in Ruins* (see McGregor, Rak, and Wunker). Yet here we are.

At the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences at UBC in June, the journal hosted a panel discussion with ACCUTE—“CanLit and *Canadian Literature*”—intended to explore the place of institutions in a field that has been profoundly affected in recent years by acrimonious and polarizing public controversies; engaged in uneasy reckonings with its own limitations, oversights, and injustices; and riven by doubt and conflict. Panellists were asked to consider Canadian literature and literary studies by taking up such questions as: What are the necessary scholarly and public conversations today? What discourses of critique will lead to productive inquiry? How do journals and other institutions shape the field? And how can a more expansive and inclusive Canadian literature be imagined? The essays in this special forum emerge from the panel at Congress. They emphasize the importance of accountability and self-awareness for scholars and teachers of Canadian literature, and are evidence of the complexity of relationships between those individual practitioners and the institutions that influence and even sustain them.

When *Canadian Literature* turned fifty in 2009, a group of critics was invited to reflect on significant issues; their statements, as Laura Moss wrote

in her Introduction to the “Interventions” section of issue no. 204, “mark[ed] the past fifty years while thinking forward to challenges in the field in the future” (103). The following essays suggest that the future of Canadian literary studies is now less certain, or at least less clear, than a decade ago. Lily Cho and Carrie Dawson look back at the fiftieth anniversary to show how much has changed in ten years, while Gillian Roberts writes about the difficulty and ambivalence inherent in teaching Canadian literature today—in her particular case, in the United Kingdom in the era of Brexit. At fifty, a future was presumed, and could be multiply conceived. At sixty, that very future is an open question. Karina Vernon proposes that one way forward is “to remember the genealogies of struggle developed within Canadian literature as critical discourse”—to rethink, in other words, the history of the field itself.

The anniversary of *Canadian Literature* is a time of reflection, but the sober conversations taking place here, as in other venues, hold the promise of genuine transformation of the ways in which we teach and write about literature in Canada—and of renewed engagement with the reasons for doing so. Journals, presses, courses, and even disciplinary formations come and go, but the impulses that underlie literary studies exceed any single institution, no matter how venerable. Together, we are in the business of reading and writing, of listening and responding, with care, precision, and creativity. In a time of social and political disharmony—and, I would add, environmental calamity—language and imagination, and the uses to which they are put, demand our attention and commitment. Whoever we are, our survival depends on it.

WORKS CITED

- “Interventions.” *50th Anniversary Interventions*, special issue of *Canadian Literature*, no. 204, 2010, pp. 103-62.
- Matuk, Nyla, editor. *Resisting Canada: An Anthology of Poetry*. Signal, 2019.
- McGregor, Hannah, Julie Rak, and Erin Wunker, editors. *Refuse: CanLit in Ruins*. Book*hug, 2018.
- Moss, Laura. “Introduction: Generous and Grounded Connections.” *50th Anniversary Interventions*, special issue of *Canadian Literature*, no. 204, 2010, pp. 103-08.



CanLit as Critical Genealogy

Karina Vernon

For Smaro Kamboureli

In CanLit, there is no “before” the trouble. . . . *CanLit is in trouble, and it is the trouble.* How do we stay with it, and how do we make new kin?

—Hannah McGregor, Julie Rak, and Erin Wunker, *Refuse: CanLit in Ruins*

1.

In his paper “Daring the Truth: Foucault, Parrhesia and the Genealogy of Critique,” philosopher Andreas Folkers notes that in the aftermath of the revolts of 1968, Michel Foucault began to allude to an increasing “criticizability of things, institutions, practices, and discourses” (qtd. in Folkers 3). What Foucault characterized as the “dispersed and discontinuous offensives” (Foucault 5) of 1968 and after, including “the new wave of feminism, gay and lesbian movements, struggles against psychiatry, prison and medicine, anti-authority struggles, etc.,” effectively “expanded the scope of critique by rendering hitherto hidden forms of power visible” (Folkers 3). But these revolts also “manifested the limits” of certain “dominant modes of criticism” (Folkers 4). In this context, Foucault argued that genealogy could function as a new “knowledge of struggles” (Foucault 8), and “a new form of critique” (Folkers 4).

We find ourselves now in our own moment of struggle, catalyzed by a variety of social revolts against imperialism, state-sanctioned racism, and misogyny, such as #BlackLivesMatter, the TRC Calls to Action, Wet’suwet’en resistance against the construction of a Coastal GasLink pipeline on its traditional territory, and the #MeToo movement, to name only a few salient “dispersed and discontinuous offensives” unfolding in our time. In this context, scholars, writers, artists, and students, many in precarious social and institutional positions, have been undertaking the brave public work of confronting the structures of power which have sedimented in a range of Canadian cultural institutions. As the scope of critique expands beyond literary studies to include Canadian universities, creative writing programs, literary presses, magazines, and prize committees—a diverse range of

cultural sites which have their own particular and overlapping histories and practices but which are increasingly coming to be hailed under the sign CanLit—it is an appropriate time to pause and to ask questions about the modes of criticism that are emerging; the limits of discursive tactics, and whether genealogy, as Foucault theorized it, may reveal more “knowledge of [our] struggles” in CanLit.

2.

In their introduction to *Refuse: CanLit in Ruins*, Hannah McGregor, Julie Rak, and Erin Wunker write that “Canada and its literature” were “built on the same foundation of Indigenous genocide, anti-Blackness, anglophone dominance, racist immigration policies, eugenicist attitudes toward disabled people, and deep-rooted misogyny that the rest of Canada was built on” (21).

They also ask, “how do we stay with it, and make new kin?”

3.

In “Elegy for Wong Toy,” a poem Robert Kroetsch published in his 1976 collection *The Stone Hammer Poems*, the poet-speaker excavates the historical contingencies of his emergence, existence, and becoming. This process involves claiming a critical genealogy. I say “critical” because it involves thinking in radically non-essentialist terms about partial, intersecting, and contradictory histories: histories of descent, migration, and empire, including the genocidal clearing of the prairie; the construction of the transcontinental railway, and the racist Chinese Exclusion Act. It involves thinking genealogically against the grain of national history. Kroetsch writes:

Charlie you are dead now
but I dare to speak because
in China the living speak
to their kindred dead.
And you are one of my fathers. (43)

Working genealogically, as Foucault reminds us, is an “agonistic” process. What genealogies do is reveal problems and discontinuities. Instead of revealing unitary formations (e.g., “the nation,” or CanLit, or CanLit-as-the-nation), genealogies elaborate the chasms and ambiguities that have existed in discourses and institutions across time. As Ryan Fitzpatrick argued on *Twitter* in response to Simon Lewsen’s characterization of CanLit as a “broadly progressive consensus,” “Nope. What gets called CanLit is historically a site of struggle” (@ryanfitzpublic).

4.

What I am trying to say is this. Not only is there a genealogy of struggle in CanLit, there is a genealogy of struggle *as* CanLit. What I mean is Canadian literature *as a critical discourse*.

5.

“make it new,” writes Roy Miki in his collection *Surrender*.

i have altered my tactics to reflect the new era
already the magnolia broken by high winds
heals itself
the truncated branches already
speak to me. (9)

6.

Tracing a partial, agonistic, and discontinuous genealogy of Canadian literature as critical discourse would involve thinking through the connections, to varying degrees, of the critical and creative practices of scores of writers and scholars whose discourses have been directed precisely toward challenging the nation's genocidal policies, its anti-Blackness, its environmental exploitation and deep-rooted misogyny. A partial genealogy of CanLit as critical discourse would think, for instance, through the work of Smaro Kamboureli, including her transformative anthology *Making a Difference* (1996; 2nd ed. 2007), which offered a model for how to construct a CanLit that includes Black, Indigenous, and racialized perspectives. A genealogy of CanLit as critical discourse would also think through the struggle-work of Roy Miki, back through the Writing Thru Race Conference; it would think through the prescient work of M. NourbeSe Philip, whose essays in *Frontiers* were already centering issues of racism in the wider culture industries. Indeed, *Frontiers* offers a rich archive of such anti-racism work in the arts. And before that, Vision 21: Canadian Culture in the 21st Century, a group which was formed in 1989 around issues of diversity, racism, and the arts. It would think back to the group De Dub Poets, formed in the mid-1980s; it would remember Lillian Allen's groundbreaking dub album *Revolutionary Tea Party*; and before that, the 1983 *Fireweed* issue called “The Issue is 'Ism: Women of Colour Speak Out,” edited by Nila Gupta and Makeda Silvera. In these pages racialized and Indigenous women writers wrote about racism, sexism, classism, imperialism. Contributors included Himani Bannerji, Claire Harris, Sylvia Hamilton, Prabha Khosla, Cecilia A. Green, Claire Prieto (one of the first black filmmakers in Canada),

and many others. Before this issue was Makeda Silvera's Women and Words Conference, which raised the issue of racism in writing and publishing in Canada. We might continue to trace this genealogy back further through the work of Maria Campbell, E. Pauline Johnson, Mary Ann Shadd, and back further through the meditations on freedom and anti-Blackness in the Canadian slave narratives of Sophia Pooley, Reverend Alexander Hemsley, Francis Henderson, and Mrs. Frances Henderson (see Drew; Kamboureli).

And these are also my kin.
The truncated branches already speak to me.

7.

What I have sketched above is only one very partial line of critique in and as Canadian literature. With more time and space, I would elaborate other important genealogies of feminist, anti-racist, anti-capitalist, and decolonial struggle.

Tracing a genealogy of Canadian literature as critical discourse is not the same thing as recuperating CanLit. Far from it. As Foucault made clear, genealogy does not ask "what is" just to proclaim "what should be"; it poses another question: "how did 'that what is' come into being, and how can it become otherwise?" (Folkers 5; Foucault 46).

In this moment of deep and important critical work, of expanding the scope of critique by rendering hidden forms of power visible across Canadian cultural institutions, practices, and discourses, I want to remember the genealogies of struggle developed within *Canadian literature as critical discourse* in order to bring these lines of struggle-work out of the ruins and forward into the moment that is coming.

WORKS CITED

- Allen, Lillian. *Revolutionary Tea Party*. World Records, 1986.
- Drew, Benjamin. *A North-Side View of Slavery. The Refugee; or, The Narrative of Fugitive Slaves in Canada Related by Themselves. With an Account of the History and Condition of the Colored Population of Upper Canada*. 1856. Negro UP, 1968.
- Folkers, Andreas. "Daring the Truth: Foucault, Parrhesia and the Genealogy of Critique." *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2016, pp. 3-28.
- Foucault, Michel. "*Society Must Be Defended*": *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*. Translated by David Macey, Picador, 2003.
- Gupta, Nila, and Makeda Silvera, editors. *The Issue is 'Ism: Women of Colour Speak Out*. Sister Vision, 1989.
- Kamboureli, Smaro, editor. *Making a Difference: Canadian Multicultural Literatures in English*. 2nd ed., Oxford UP, 2007.

- Kroetsch, Robert. *The Stone Hammer Poems*. Oolichan, 1976.
- Lewsen, Simon. "The CanLit Firestorm: After the Steven Galloway Controversy, Canadian Literature May Never Be the Same." *The Walrus*, 24 Nov. 2016, thewalrus.ca/the-canlit-firestorm/. Accessed 7 Nov. 2019.
- McGregor, Hannah, Julie Rak, and Erin Wunker, editors. *Refuse: CanLit in Ruins*. Book*hug, 2018.
- Miki, Roy. "make it new." *Surrender*. Mercury, 2001.
- Philip, M. NourbeSe. *Frontiers: Selected Essays and Writing on Racism and Culture, 1984-1992*. Mercury, 1992.
- @ryanfitzpublic. "Nope. What gets called CanLit is historically a site of struggle." *Twitter*, 24 Nov. 2016, 11:22 a.m., twitter.com/ryanfitzpublic/status/801823282718646272. Accessed 7 Nov. 2019.

The Bosom of CanLit

Carrie Dawson

Canadian literature is thriving, but CanLit—by which I mean the network of people who write, teach, research, and disseminate Canadian literature—is hurting. In the last three years a number of controversies to do with sexual misconduct and appropriation of voice have left the people who produce and support Canadian literature divided along generational, racialized, and gendered lines. Due in part to the representation of these controversies in the popular media, the fault lines between writers and academics have also become more entrenched. For example, in "Canlit versus its scholars," an essay published in *The Globe and Mail* in September 2018, Russell Smith presented CanLit as a synecdoche for a collective of precious pedants who are loath to stray from "the bosom of academe" into "the crass world of popular success," and who are given to "ludicrous hyperbole" around considerations of sexual violence. Smith went on to contrast the fast-paced and "satisfying" work of genre writers—whom he likens to pro athletes—with the prevarications of CanLit scholars, whom he describes as "terribly troubled" by "the epidemic of sexual violence that apparently plagues the institutions that created [CanLit]." While I object to the tenor and much of the substance of Smith's very gendered argument, I think it merits attention for two reasons: firstly, he is right to say that those of us who teach and study Canadian literature do well to attend to "the world of popular

success,” including the mainstream media, even when it is “crass”; and secondly, he is also right to suggest that recent events have left many CanLit scholars “terribly troubled” by the systemic inequities and the sexual violence that continue to “plagu[e] the institutions that created [CanLit].” So, rather than grappling with the question posed to me and my fellow panellists—namely, can Canadian literary criticism be “disentangled” from “the problematic nature of CanLit?”—I have opted to briefly tangle with Smith’s representation of CanLit and the depressing realities that beset the field. If my comments contribute to the unfortunate misperception that “the scholars of Canadian literature are not very interested in books” (Smith), I hope that they might also help clarify what it means to be accountable for and in CanLit.

The allegations of sexual harassment and sexual violence in Creative Writing programs at UBC and Concordia are scandalous, but more scandalous still are the results of the 2018 Ontario provincial government survey of some 110,000 university students, wherein 63% of respondents reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment at university (“63% Report”). Being accountable to those students means actively resisting the structures discouraging victims from coming forward and advocating for programming that educates faculty, staff, and administrators about how to respond to disclosures of sexual violence; it means demanding frank conversations about the preponderance and under-reporting of sexual violence on campus; it means being willing to tangle with those who caricature such efforts as “ludicrous hyperbole.”

More generally, being accountable for the “problematic nature of CanLit” means reckoning with inequitable structures of power and failures of mentorship therein. For example, I’m thinking of the recent national survey conducted by the Canadian Association of University Teachers, which revealed that the number of university teachers working part-time in Canada increased by 79% between 2005 and 2015, while the number of tenure-stream positions increased by only 14% in the same period (CAUT). Recognizing that younger colleagues, women, and people of colour are overrepresented amongst contract academic staff, we need to be clear about the ways in which the casualization of academic work has fuelled the gendered and generational divides that were made so plain under the banner UBC Accountable. So, for those of us who have tenure-stream positions in Canadian literature, being accountable for CanLit must mean mentorship: it must mean building alliances with precariously employed colleagues (co-publishing, co-authoring grants, and co-organizing conferences), but also ensuring a more equitable distribution of labour by raising our hands for the

laborious service jobs and large introductory courses that contract academic staff do not have the luxury of refusing.

Writing in *Refuse: CanLit in Ruins*, Kristen Darch and Fazeela Jiwa argue that unless those of us who occupy positions of power and privilege within the field become accountable to those who are most vulnerable, “CanLit stands to lose the voices and the contributions of all those . . . who find its institutions hostile” (179). To wit, Oji-Cree poet and novelist Joshua Whitehead recently followed in Rinaldo Walcott’s footsteps by publishing a “breakup note” with CanLit, which he memorably likens to a hall of mirrors that includes Indigenous stories only where they can be reanimated, reoriented, or redacted so as to reflect narratives of national progressiveness (191, 194). “Maybe I’ll come back to you CanLit, if you can tell me who you’re accountable to, but until then, I ain’t got time to heal you, too[,]” he writes (197). With an eye to Whitehead’s “breakup” note, I wonder how many of the 69,300 Ontario students who recently reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment on campus would make a similar argument about the ways in which narratives of institutional progressiveness shield violent realities and hamper the timely, transparent adjudication of harassment complaints? How many of those students abandoned their studies? How many were “broken up” by the experience of harassment? Whether or not such breakups are deemed newsworthy, those of us working in English and Creative Writing programs on Canadian campuses know them to be part of the sorry legacy of recent CanLit controversies. And we remain “terribly troubled.”

Ten years ago, I was part of a similar panel on the future of Canadian literature. One of the most prescient contributions came from Herb Wylie, who asked that we pay close attention to the particular material conditions in which CanLit is produced, disseminated, and studied, in order that we can be clear about the ways in which neo-liberal ideologies structure our work in the field. Asked where CanLit was going, Wylie, one of the discipline’s most thoughtful and principled stewards, argued that the question “implies a degree of agency that we may not have,” and so reframed it as, “what is going to happen to Canadian literature?” (108). Because being accountable in and for CanLit also means being accountable to those who have shaped the discipline, I want to conclude by posing Herb’s question as a challenge. And so, I suggest that we look back to the thinkers who have guided us, that we look closely at the inequities that have always divided us, and that we look beyond the narratives of “progressiveness” that have sometimes blinded us,

as we face the problem of “what is going to happen” and what has happened “to Canadian literature.” Only then can those of us who enjoy some agency within the sometimes uncomfortable and sometimes unsafe “bosom of academe” really tangle with the forces that render it hostile for some.

WORKS CITED

- “63% Report Experiencing Sexual Harassment on Campus, Ontario Survey Shows.” *CBC News*, 19 Mar. 2019, cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ont-campus-sexual-assault-1.5062892. Accessed 1 Nov. 2019.
- Canadian Association of University Teachers [CAUT]. “CAUT Releases Results of First National Survey of Contract Academic Staff” *CAUT*, 4 Sept. 2018, caut.ca/latest/2018/09/caut-releases-results-first-national-survey-contract-academic-staff. Accessed 1 Nov. 2019.
- Darch, Kristen, and Fazeela Jiwa. “Whose CanLit: Solidarity and Accountability in Literary Communities.” *Refuse: CanLit in Ruins*, edited by Hannah McGregor, Julie Rak, and Erin Wunker, Book*hug, 2018, pp. 177-83.
- Smith, Russell. “Canlit versus its scholars.” *The Globe and Mail*, 18 Sept. 2018, theglobeandmail.com/arts/books/article-canlit-versus-its-scholars/. Accessed 1 Nov. 2019.
- Whitehead, Joshua. “Writing as a Rupture: A Breakup Note to CanLit.” *Refuse: CanLit in Ruins*, edited by Hannah McGregor, Julie Rak, and Erin Wunker, Book*hug, 2018, pp. 191-98.
- Wylie, Herb. “Neoliberalism and the Future of Canadian Literature.” *50th Anniversary Interventions*, special issue of *Canadian Literature*, no. 204, 2010, pp. 108-10.

CanLit and Canadian Literature: A Long-Distance View¹

Gillian Roberts

In addressing the discussion of whether there is or can be a Canadian literary studies apart from the problematic nature of CanLit, I find myself primarily responding from my personal and professional position: a Canadian who teaches Canadian literature (among other things) in the UK. The fact that I work not in an English department but rather in a Department of American and Canadian Studies, at a British university, and the fact that my job title is Associate Professor in North American Cultural Studies, inevitably inflect my response to the question with which we’re grappling. My job title is appropriate for what I do insofar as I work

not just on literature but also on film. It's also appropriate because I do tend to take a cultural studies approach in my research and my teaching. And it's appropriate because, actually, very few students come to our programme already interested in Canadian culture, which means I often have to smuggle it in in cross-border courses that have some US content, too. (In fact, at present, most of my department's undergraduate students are primarily interested in US foreign policy, so literature more generally, regardless of which side of the border it comes from, has come to be considered rather niche.) But the real reason behind my job title is that my department had to pretend they weren't hiring a Canadianist, even when they specifically wanted one (before I was hired, there was only one other Canadianist in our department of American and Canadian Studies, my colleague Susan Billingham, who was outnumbered by Americanists by a ratio of 17:1). And the reason my department had to pretend they weren't hiring a Canadianist is because the Vice Chancellor (i.e., president) of the university at the time had declared, "There's no money in Canada."

As a former head of department liked to point out, in fact, the Canadian government was long the biggest funder of our department through Canadian Studies grants provided by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), grants that "had supported the development of interdisciplinary Canadian studies in fifty countries around the world for almost forty years" (Haynes et al. xii). Despite the fact that, as Jeremy Haynes, Melissa Tanti, Daniel Coleman, and Lorraine York point out, such grants were economically and politically driven, available only in countries with whom Canada was "interest[ed] in establishing trade or political alliances" (xiv), these grants were axed by Stephen Harper's government in 2012.² But while in my interdisciplinary department in the UK we two Canadianists have no obligations whatsoever to reproducing a Canadian literary canon (who's going to make us? certainly not each other), for many years, for UK-based Canadianists, funding by Global Affairs Canada (formerly DFAIT) prompted such questions as, "Are Canadianists in the United Kingdom simply lackeys serving the interests of the Canadian federal government? Or is CanLit part of a neo-colonial project?" (Fuller and Billingham 114). In such a position, then, in an absolutely fundamental way, there was no escaping "the problematic nature of CanLit" for us, because the Canadian state was helping to pay our salaries.

So I find myself in a contradictory position, as I'm sure many Canadian literature scholars and teachers do: the field I teach, as Hannah McGregor,

Julie Rak, and Erin Wunker note in their introduction to *Refuse: CanLit in Ruins*, “has always been tied to a colonial project of nationhood” (19). The substance of what I teach—in terms of the writers I select for my students to read—works to critique and undermine that project. As Laura Moss writes in her *Refuse* piece, “On Not Refusing CanLit,” while “[e]xclusion and elitism have always been part of CanLit, [so] has resistance” (147). But my students, unlike the students of my Canadian-based colleagues, know absolutely nothing about Canada. The vast majority of them have never been here, although some will eventually come here on their equivalent of a Junior Year Abroad. Like Sarah Neville in her recent review of *Refuse* with Brecken Hancock, I teach Canadian literature to “people who have zero nationalistic response to it.” Unlike Neville, however, I myself am a Canadianist. Moreover, I have literally been in the position of advertising Canada, when I was director of our Study Abroad programme. Teaching Canadian literature and culture at all in my institution is, in some sense, to promote Canada. So even if I teach from a position of critique of the settler-colonial project that is Canada, and even if Global Affairs Canada no longer funds my doing so, I don’t think I can escape—again, on some very fundamental level—this sense of promotion. In a higher education system in which tenure was abolished by the Thatcher government, I’m uneasy about the fact that, in some ways, my job depends on this promotion, however contradictory, of the Canadian nation-state. In other words, if students stop studying Canada, I stop having a job.

Canadian literature is not just one thing. The editors of *Refuse* write that “‘Canadian Literature’ means literature written and published in Canada” (17-18). I would add that it is also literature written and/or published by Canadians outside Canada. The problematic nature of CanLit is clear in the litany of dumpster fires of the past few years, examined so brilliantly by the editors of and contributors to *Refuse*. Can there be a Canadian literary studies separate from CanLit? I don’t think there can. Should there be? While I don’t think Canadian literary studies is the same thing as CanLit, equally, I don’t think we can separate them. I don’t think there is a Canadian literary studies without a CanLit industry. To research and teach Canadian literary studies while ignoring the formation that is CanLit is not something I can imagine. Even if we teach resistant texts, we are always already addressing that which they are resisting. And although I agree with Moss that resistance has always been part of Canadian literature, I would also argue that the long history of that resistance alongside the long history of exclusion and

elitism functions hegemonically: that is, Canadian literature can absorb that resistance and continue to function to exclude, even if it does so in what appears to be a “kinder, gentler” way that perpetuates CanLit’s reputation as “an environment where diverse writing, and writers, can flourish” (McGregor, Rak, and Wunker 11).

I’m also mindful of the contradiction of writing about and teaching resistant work under the umbrella of Canadian literature when that work actively refuses Canada itself. What does it mean that I write about the attempts to impose Canadian-state citizenship on Indigenous peoples in an act of settler-colonial violence but teach Indigenous texts on Canadian courses (in which I teach my students about the imposition of Canadian-state citizenship on Indigenous peoples in an act of settler-colonial violence)? Oji-Cree writer and scholar Joshua Whitehead, in his contribution to *Refuse*, asserts, “I am not CanLit, I am Indigenous Lit. . . . Indigenous Lit will survive without CanLit, we have already, but I am not sure if CanLit can do the same” (197). As Métis scholar Chelsea Vowel says in her *Secret Feminist Agenda* interview with Hannah McGregor, Indigenous literature gets treated like “the sesame seeds . . . on the bun” of CanLit—there for a bit of flavour and texture, essentially. To what extent do we end up complicit in this sesame seeds analogy when we fold Indigenous texts into Canadian literary scholarship and/or teaching? Yet can we imagine Canadian literary scholarship and/or teaching *without* Indigenous works, as Whitehead prompts us to consider?

Perhaps it’s easy for me not to break up with Canadian literature, because I’m in a long-distance relationship with it. At the moment, I only teach one course with the word “Canadian” in the title. My current research examines Canadian film adaptation in a comparative project that also considers the literature and cinema of Aotearoa/New Zealand, Australia, India, the UK, and the US. But I have responsibilities as a scholar and teacher of culture produced in the land claimed by Canada, especially as a scholar and teacher who was herself produced on stolen Indigenous land. When I stand in front of my classroom, I inevitably stand there as a representative of Canada. Like many Canadian literature colleagues, I try to use this position to interrogate Canada’s settler-colonial mythologies, to displace the voices of power, to centre works by BIPOC writers and artists. Doing this work is a structural challenge in a country where so few of the writers I want to teach are published. What Danielle Fuller and my colleague Susan Billingham wrote in 2000 continues to be true: “The material constraints imposed by

the political economy of the (Canadian) publishing industry impact directly on the classroom in predictable ways” (120). Margaret Atwood is, unsurprisingly, the author I could teach most easily in material terms, the only Canadian author my students are likely to have heard of, thanks to the presence of *The Handmaid’s Tale* on the UK’s English Literature A-level syllabus and the Hulu TV adaptation’s success. If students in the UK are interested in Canadian literature, it is likely because of their interest in Atwood; at this point the students’ and my own interests are at odds with each other as I want to avoid centring texts and figures who are already occupying the centre.

But it’s one thing to claim you don’t have to adhere to a canon, another to negotiate your long-distance relationship so that you can actually produce teaching material. With Brexit’s impact on the value of the pound, bringing in Canadian texts from Canada is an increasingly expensive prospect for UK students whose tuition fees tripled under David Cameron’s Conservative government. These material considerations matter to my students, and they affect what I teach. I hold these considerations along with the aspirations of the Canadian literature I want to present to my non-Canadian students. Ultimately, if I’m going to be, however problematically and reluctantly, a “representative” of Canada in the classroom, what—or *whose*—Canada, whose Canadian literature, or whose literature from the lands claimed by Canada I present to that classroom: those choices matter, even if we can’t divorce Canadian literature from CanLit—maybe especially *because* we can’t divorce them.

NOTES

- 1 Thank you to my colleagues Susan Billingham and Catherine Rottenberg for their suggestions.
- 2 See Eva Darias-Beutell for a discussion of the decline of PhD students in Canadian Studies outside Canada since the funding cuts instituted by the Harper government (7). As Haynes, Tanti, Coleman, and York observe, however, there were no Canadian Studies associations eligible for DFAIT funding in “Africa, the Caribbean, or the Middle East aside from Israel” (xiv) even prior to the cuts.

WORKS CITED

- Darias-Beutell, Eva. “Rescaling CanLit: Global Readings.” *Canadian Literature*, no. 238, 2019, pp. 6-11.
- Fuller, Danielle, and Susan Billingham. “CanLit(e): Fit for Export?” *Essays on Canadian Writing*, no. 71, 2000, pp. 114-27.

- Hancock, Brecken, and Sarah Neville. "Staying with the Trouble." *The Puritan*, no. 45, 2019, puritan-magazine.com/canlit-in-ruins-hancock-neville/. Accessed 29 Oct. 2019.
- Haynes, Jeremy, Melissa Tanti, Daniel Coleman, and Lorraine York. "Introduction." *Beyond "Understanding Canada": Transnational Perspectives on Canadian Literature*, edited by Tanti, Haynes, Coleman, and York, U of Alberta P, 2017, pp. xi-xxvii.
- McGregor, Hannah, host. "Interfering with the Legitimacy of the Settler State with Chelsea Vowel." Interview with Chelsea Vowel. *Secret Feminist Agenda*, s. 3, ep. 22, 22 Mar. 2019, secretfeministagenda.com/2019/03/22/episode-3-22-interfering-with-the-legitimacy-of-the-settler-state-with-chelsea-vowel/. Accessed 29 Oct. 2019.
- McGregor, Hannah, Julie Rak, and Erin Wunker. "Introduction: Living in the Ruins." McGregor, Rak, and Wunker, pp. 9-28.
- McGregor, Hannah, Julie Rak, and Erin Wunker, editors. *Refuse: CanLit in Ruins*. Book*hug, 2018.
- Moss, Laura. "On Not Refusing CanLit." McGregor, Rak, and Wunker, pp. 146-48.
- Whitehead, Joshua. "Writing as a Rapture: A Breakup Note to CanLit." McGregor, Rak, and Wunker, pp. 191-98.

Canadian Literature at 60: Inhabiting Discomfort

Lily Cho

In preparation for this panel, Laura Moss and Nicholas Bradley sent the panellists copies of the collected interventions in *Canadian Literature* no. 204 (2010) that were published to mark the journal's 50th anniversary. Like some of you here today, I remember being in that room a decade ago as we gathered at UBC to celebrate that anniversary, and to collectively discuss the future of the field at the time. What a great privilege it was for me to be part of that conversation then. And what a huge privilege it is to be here with you now on the occasion of *Canadian Literature's* 60th anniversary.

Reading over the interventions in issue 204, I couldn't help thinking about what has changed, what hasn't, and more than anything about the new voices in the field, and those that we have lost. I think about the questions that Laura and Nicholas ask us in preparation for this panel, ten years after 204. "Is there, or can there be, a Canadian literary studies apart from the problematic nature of CanLit?" They also ask, "where can or should the field go in the near future?"

Thinking about these questions brings me first to the most immediate loss. Gregory Younging passed away on May 3, 2019. He died two days before he was to give a plenary address, alongside Julie Rak and Keavy Martin, at one of the signature annual events in Canadian literary scholarship, the Canadian Literature Symposium, organized this year by Jody Mason and Jennifer Blair under the title “Institutional Work.” My remarks today are informed by the papers and discussions we had coming out of that symposium, and especially the healing circle the symposium organized to mourn Gregory Younging in place of his plenary address.

I offer a resounding yes to the first question. Yes, there can and is and will be a Canadian literary studies apart from what has been the discourse of the dumpster fire, which Dale Tracy so admirably unpacked at the Canadian Literature Symposium.

One question then: how do we separate out the problematic? I understand the question more precisely, and along the lines that Carrie Dawson so presciently identified ten years ago by tracing an unlikely line between Northrop Frye, Sara Ahmed, and Dionne Brand, as the affective register of Canadian literary criticism, the depth of the feelings that we have for our critical work, as what hurts (111).

When I read over the interventions from ten years ago, they largely identify problems as external to our work. There were issues but we, as a critical and literary community, would confront them together.

Now, the problems, or what hurts, are the divisions within our field, how we have broken apart, often rightfully so, and how we haven’t decided how, or if, we should come back together. The first writer mentioned in Laura’s editorial introduction to the interventions in issue 204 is Steven Galloway (103). Then, we took it for granted that Canadian literary writers and critics wanted, more or less, the same things (and here I am quoting Laura’s introduction): “strong public support for arts and culture in Canada” and for the “critics of the future [to] have enough distance and generosity to read the literature and the theoretical debates of the turn of the twenty-first century with respect” (108).

Whatever side of the discursive dumpster fire you’re on, I think we still want those things. But I’m not sure we are all together now.

Every time I think we are closing in on closure on the painful eruptions in our field over the last few years, something happens—a new petition, a *Twitter* thread, a paper given where I’m not sure I totally believe what I am hearing—and I realize that we are really far from it.

Instead, now, I think that we have to inhabit those divisions. We can't prematurely close off the discomfort of the current moment. I think we are in a period of real discomfort and we have to stay there.

We have to be uncomfortable with seeing afresh what decades of sexism have done to our field. Here, I think about what it would mean to read a canonical story such as Alice Munro's "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" in the wake of #MeToo. That is, not as a way to engage with issues of aging and dementia, or of literary adaptation, which is what most of the critical work has done so far, but as a chronicle of a serial sexual predator—of an English professor who fails to honour the privilege of being a member of a professoriate and who abuses the power he has over his students and refuses throughout the entire story to recognize what he has done. We have not yet engaged in such an analysis of this iconic story. And there are many more such stories that demand rethinking and renewed analytical attention. I do not know how we engage in this necessary critical work without calling out the analyses that have come before, the essays that focus on many other important aspects of this story, and of others, without discrediting the work of the critics who may not have examined the protagonist of Munro's story as the predator that he is. That is the work that is to come for Canadian literature as a field and for this journal.

We inhabit again a moment of historical reckoning. We have been here before. And we have to find a way to do it without losing the work that has already been done. I think this will be an uncomfortable time.

In particular, we have to be uncomfortable with what I now see as a generational divide that is especially painful because it is between generations of feminists. Some of the most difficult dumpster fire divisions are those that have erupted between people who should be allies.

We have to be deeply uncomfortable with the fact that the field has been founded on legacies of settler colonialism that continue to permeate every facet of our work, that we haven't mourned the role of the field in the colonial project (and not just in terms of obvious places such as Duncan Campbell Scott, but also in the less obvious ones such as the unfinished work of hearing Lee Maracle's call, made almost fifteen years ago at the first TransCanada conference, for understanding how diasporic subjects can, however unwittingly, serve as settlers [56]). We have to be uncomfortable with the fact that Gregory Younging passed away before his *Elements of Indigenous Style* became required reading on every Canadian literary comprehensive field exam.

We are in an uncomfortable place and I think we should plan to be here for a while yet. It is a sign of how far we've come that we can be so uncomfortable now. Happy birthday to *Canadian Literature*. I want to be uncomfortable with all of you, fellow travellers in this field and this journal, for a long while yet.

WORKS CITED

- Dawson, Carrie. "How Does Our Garden Grow?" 50th Anniversary Interventions, special issue of *Canadian Literature*, no. 204, 2010, pp. 110-13.
- Maracle, Lee. "Oratory on Oratory." *Trans.Can.Lit: Resituating the Study of Canadian Literature*, edited by Smaro Kamboureli and Roy Miki, Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2007, pp. 55-70.
- Moss, Laura. "Introduction: Generous and Grounded Connections." 50th Anniversary Interventions, special issue of *Canadian Literature*, no. 204, 2010, pp. 103-08.
- Tracy, Dale. "Doing the Work with Metonymy: Three Insights from Canadian Theatre." Institutional Work: Mediating CanLit, Canadian Literature Symposium, 3-5 May 2019, University of Ottawa. Conference Presentation.
- Younging, Gregory. *Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing by and about Indigenous Peoples*. Brush Education, 2018.

