

# Past, Present, and Future

Margery Fee

**W**e are still dining out on stories of the 50th *Canadian Literature* Anniversary Gala, which was a rich literary and intellectual feast. We have titled this issue after the interventions provided by many of those who came to our workshop. Laura Moss, who took the lead on this wonderful event, has more to say about these pieces below. However, suffice it to say here that we asked the participants to comment on the future both of the field of Canadian literature and the journal. They provided us with many specific suggestions on how the journal might meet the challenges to come. With the help of our Editorial Board (many of whom were present), we will consider all of this advice seriously.

It is gratifying to point out that one of the articles in this issue, Ching Sela's "Les mots/ maux de l'exil/ ex-île. Les romans de Marie-Célie Agnant," deals with an author promoted by Winfried Siemerling in his intervention as deserving more attention in English Canada. (This Haitian author's novel *Le livre d'Emma* (2001) has now been translated by Zipha Ellis as *The Book of Emma* (2006); some critical material is also available in English.) *Canadian Literature* has recently published articles that deal with several other Quebec Haitian authors, including Dany Laferrière, Emile Ollivier, and Gérard Etienne (see Amy J. Ransom's article in #203, for example). Indeed, many of our articles in French deal with writers from a variety of diasporas. Michel Nareau's article in this issue examines the influence of Latin American literature on Quebec literature through the writing of Francine Noël, for example. Another transcultural connection is made in Bart Vautour's account of how the Spanish Civil War impacted Canadian poetic modernism through

work published in *New Frontier* (1936-37). The problem is, as a couple of the interventions point out, that we publish these articles in French *or* English, although many of our readers are monolingual. We could do more to promote interaction between the “two solitudes” by translating some articles from French to English and vice versa (although this requires funding). Another article in this issue compares book publishing in Quebec and English Canada: a French version will appear elsewhere. Collaborations like the one between Josée Vincent and Eli MacLaren are another way to promote both comparative literary studies and cross-cultural understanding—and these articles are of interest to both literary communities and, indeed, almost require translation to fulfill their research mandate. The final article in this issue, by Sarah Krotz, deals with an area of cross-cultural misunderstanding, or perhaps even worse, incomprehension. “Shadows of Indian Title,” on Duncan Campbell Scott’s poem “The Height of Land,” shows how he failed to engage even with the idea of Aboriginal title by looking more closely at the actual landscape he travelled as a treaty commissioner and used as the setting of his poem.

The interventions, which follow the articles, focus on the future of the field and the journal; reading them piqued my curiosity about what’s happening in the present for the journal. Are we already in the future? I wondered. I made a quick survey of the last ten issues (194-203), which contain fifty-nine articles, nine in French. Given the increasing pressure to publish, it’s not surprising that there were so many graduate students (14) and post-doctoral fellows (5) among the authors, as well as tenure-stream assistants (11) and contract instructors (3). Twenty-five tenured authors (assistants, associates, senior lecturers, and full professors) also contributed. One article was by a writer. Special issues tend to skew any analysis of subject matter, although contemporary fiction certainly has the lead. Dionne Brand was the subject of three articles, and two were on what are variously referred to as graphic novels or comix. However, we also had articles on such past canonical figures as Margaret Laurence, L.M. Montgomery, Susanna Moodie, Réjean Ducharme, and Alfred Garneau. Our submissions are holding steady (since 2002 averaging ninety-two a year). For these ten issues, no clear story about how the canon might be changing emerges, perhaps because although *Canadian Literature* is an important site of critical activity, many more journals are publishing work on Canadian literature now than there were fifty years ago. And of course, the present is always a puzzle because we are immersed in it. The past, however, is yet another country, one whose terrain

always seems more manageable. The challenge of charting how *Canadian Literature* has represented Canadian literature over the years is one that requires more space than any editorial can provide, but I hope there is a graduate student out there with a talent for literary and institutional history willing to take it up.

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### **50th Anniversary Acknowledgement**



*Canadian Literature* is very grateful to have had the support of staff, volunteers, colleagues, sponsors and partners that made the 50th Anniversary Gala such a tremendous success.

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