Editorial

Home, Memory, Self

Margery Fee

I have an embarrassed idea that people assume that I, as editor of *Canadian Literature*, must be familiar with all of the issues we have produced since 1959, and further, must be even more familiar with the ideas and practices of my predecessors. Certainly I was fortunate to publish a few reviews and an article when Bill New was editor; I learned even more about the workings of the journal as an associate editor for Eva-Marie Kröller. But as I struggled with piles of books that needed reviewers and piles of reviews that needed editing, I didn't pay attention to the whole process. And of course, the process has changed along with technology, trends in professionalization and funding (the requirement for blind peer review), and an increase in publication in the field (at one time, the journal aspired to review every relevant book of literature or criticism).

When Bill spoke at the recent *Canadian Literature* 50th Anniversary Gala, he mentioned how he worked on the layout at George Woodcock's kitchen table. Once, Woodcock being in hospital, Bill was entrusted with the task; he nonetheless took the proofs to the hospital for a final editorial look-through. Of course, this work is done on computers now, off-site. Proofs arrive electronically. At least the woodcuts by George Kuthan are still part of each issue. Those little floating seeds—what a great symbol for what SSHRC calls scholarly dissemination! Long may they float!

Since this is the first issue for which I have been the designated editorial writer since our 200th issue, and as part of my resolve to learn more about the history of the journal, I decided to see how Woodcock marked important anniversaries. For the 10th anniversary he held a symposium, and put out a

collection of papers based on it, *The Sixties: Canadian Writers and Writing of the Decade*. Included were eight Canadian writers reflecting on their own writing and five critics writing about the novel, the short story, poetry, and criticism during the decade. Following this lead, we are planning to publish in an upcoming issue a selection of the presentations given at the symposium that was part of the recent gala. Checking my bookshelves, I discovered that I own *The Canadian Novel in the Twentieth Century*, which he edited, a collection of essays culled from *Canadian Literature* to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the journal. (Since the price was $2.50, I must have purchased it just as I was starting my doctorate.) He notes that the amount of text in the journal in 15 years was about the equivalent of 30 full-length books (which makes me feel better about not having read the equivalent of 100 books that we have published now). He also comments that not everything dates well, and that he writhed a little re-reading "some ineptitude" that he had accepted enthusiastically several years earlier. Blind peer review—by our wonderfully helpful but stringently selective readers—means that very few "ineptitudes" creep in to the journal nowadays, and if they do, the editor has company with which to writhe.

To celebrate the 50th anniversary, W.H. New, Réjean Beaudoin, Susan Fisher, Iain Higgins, Eva-Marie Kröller, and Laurie Ricou put together another retrospective anthology of writing from the journal, with one new piece, a short history of the journal. *From a Speaking Place* (Ronsdale 2009) includes many famous names, but also the names of friends, teachers, colleagues, and students of all of us in the field. This mode of celebrating anniversaries will not likely continue long. Just as technology has meant that proofs are no longer assembled on kitchen tables, so now it means that those who want to browse through the back issues of the journal will be able to do so via the internet. We have just started to put the back issues of the journal on-line: issue number one, up for only a few days, has already had 30 hits. We hope to have the first 150 issues up by the time you read this. Then we'll pause while we turn to transforming our submission process so that instead of requiring authors to stick those colourful little paper squares on envelopes to send in their articles, it will all happen on the web.

Our more recent issues are available electronically to anyone who belongs to a library which has a subscription to one or more of the aggregators to which we licence the journal, which certainly includes most university libraries in North America and Europe, and many public and school libraries in Canada. However, on a visit to Hungary last spring, I discovered that not all

university libraries can afford either the paper or the electronic subscription. Even universities with courses in Canadian literature fall into this category, and there are many such universities in the world now, thanks to the efforts of the International Council for Canadian Studies. So we will keep moving to make more and more of the journal freely available, insofar as this is possible without becoming a drain on the university's finances.

Although this is a general issue, three of the articles focus on "home" as a theme. Laura Potter, whose "Short History of Canadian Literature" is the only piece written specifically for *From a Speaking Place*, only became interested in Canadian literature when she became an exchange student at the University of East Anglia. She writes, "Immersed in a new environment and different experiences, I suddenly found home foreign and intriguing." She promptly applied for a position as our Arts Work Co-op student, a position for which we raised funds at the gala by auctioning off art by Canadian writers. She credits the experience she gained at the journal with landing her a job with V&A Books, affiliated with the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Woodcock was always proud to remind people that he was Canadian-born (some never believed him, preferring to see him as another agent of the colonizing of the Canadian mind). Significantly, in 1959 he and his wife were able to purchase their house on McCleery Street in which they lived all their lives, in part at least because of his new position as editor. In the editorial for issue #8, he argues that one makes oneself at home through "living oneself" into a place: he writes of Malcolm Lowry that he "is not writing about Canada as a transient outsider. He is writing about it as a man who over fifteen years lived himself into the environment that centred upon his fragile home where the Pacific tides lapped and sucked under the floorboards, and who identified himself with that environment—despite trials of flesh and spirit . . . passionately. . . ."

This "almost rhapsodic identification with place" may be possible for some immigrants; nonetheless, Lowry might be seen as a transnational intellectual *avant la lettre*, nowadays, as might Woodcock himself: his travels were legendary. However, in three of the following papers, by Amy J. Ransom, Jimmy Thibault, and Christa Zeller Thomas, the difficulties of achieving such an identification are the focus. In Wendy Roy's paper on Alzheimer's narratives, the difficulty is not of identification with a place as home, but

with identification itself. How can someone feel at home, when she cannot remember her own name? Alzheimer's patients often wander, as if looking for something that they cannot remember, perhaps indicating they do not feel at home where they are. This issue of a journey for meaning arises in Katie Mullins' paper on the quest of a male protagonist of a comic book / graphic novel, a quest that implicates the genre itself as male. Peter Jaeger's paper on Jeff Derksen's formal techniques might seem to be far removed from these concerns, but for Derksen's insistence that his "modular form" (or what someone called "socialist one-liners") result from and are productive of social relations in the minds of his readers. Social relations derive from particular locations and their web of economic and political connections: what counts as "home" often boils down to finding a lucky conjuncture of relationships, economic among them, that support one's identifications. This is what we must hope for *Canadian Literature*, which has survived because of a lucky conjuncture of people (writers, critics, readers, editors) places (Canada, Vancouver, UBC, the Faculty of Arts), institutions (Canadian literature scholarship, curricula, associations, agencies, government awards), and something much more intangible—the 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.