

Beyond Quebec

Canada's Other Francophone Literatures

Jane Moss, guest editor

For Francophone Canadians living outside of Quebec, the break-up of what had historically been called *French Canada* was traumatic. As Quebec emerged from the *Grande Noirceur* of the Duplessis years and transformed itself during the *Révolution tranquille*, political leaders and intellectuals made it clear that Quebec was determined to shape its own future as a distinct society. This Québécois distinctiveness excluded those French-speaking minorities beyond the borders of la belle province—Acadians and French Canadians living elsewhere. Feeling betrayed and rejected by their Québécois co-linguists and threatened by the Anglophone majorities surrounding them, Francophones began fashioning new regional identities and developing the social, educational, cultural, and political institutions necessary for their survival.

Poets, playwrights, novelists, essayists, and performing artists responded to the crisis in Francophone minority communities by giving expression to these new identities. Much of the literature written beyond Quebec's borders during the 1970s and 1980s can be characterized as identity because its historical and political consciousness appealed to the collective memory and shared aspirations of the minority group. Performances by poets, theatre troupes, and musicians were particularly important during this period because they reaffirmed a sense of community and raised awareness of what was at stake in this process of creating regional cultures. These emerging Franco-Canadian literatures were also acutely sensitive to linguistic issues because, as determined as they may have been to preserve their maternal language, the reality of bilingualness was constantly acknowledged.

After an initial period of creating socio-politically engaged literature, many Franco-Canadian authors and artists have turned to more intimist themes, universal questions, and formal aesthetic concerns in the last two decades. It is clear that the second generation of writers—those born in the 1960s and 1970s—are intent on moving beyond the identitary phase. In this move toward transcending particularism, *la relève* has been joined by writers born elsewhere (abroad or in Quebec) and by Anglophones who choose to write in French. Francophone Canadian literature has definitely entered the post-national and postmodern age.

But it has not been easy for Franco-Canadian writers to find publishers, readers, and critics. It is true that many non-Québécois writers have won prestigious awards and achieved national and international recognition: we think of Gabrielle Roy, J.R. Léveillé, and Gérald Tougas from Manitoba; Antonine Maillet, France Daigle, Herménégilde Chiasson, Serge Patrice Thibodeau, Gérald Leblanc, Emma Haché from Acadie; Jean Marc Dalpé, Michel Ouellette, Patrice Desbiens, and Daniel Poliquin from Ontario; Nancy Huston from Alberta. But with some notable exceptions, Quebec publishers and literary critics have shown little interest in Canada's Francophone Others.

It has been up to committed editors far from Montreal and Quebec City to publish and distribute the works of most Franco-Canadian authors. Given the small size of their respective markets, publishing houses are often in precarious financial straits (witness the demise of Éditions d'Acadie) and are dependent on subventions from provincial and federal sources. It is worth saluting the publishers without whom there would be no growing corpus of Franco-Canadian literature. The Regroupement des éditeurs canadiens-français currently includes publishing houses from New Brunswick to Saskatchewan: Éditions de La Grande Marée, Éditions Perce-Neige, Bouton d'or Acadie, Éditions de la Francophonie, Le Nordir, Prise de parole, L'Interligne, Éditions du Vermillon, Éditions David, Éditions du GREF, Éditions du Blé, Éditions des Plaines, Éditions de la Nouvelle Plume.

The growing literary institution outside of Quebec includes a number of excellent scholarly and literary reviews, such as *Éloizes*, *Port d'Acadie*, *Liaison*, *Les Cahiers franco-canadiens de l'Ouest*, and *Francophonies d'Amérique*. Major contributions to the study of Francophone Canadian literature have also been made by the Centre d'études acadiennes at l'Université de Moncton, the Centre de recherche en civilisation canadienne-française at l'Université d'Ottawa, and by scholars at the Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface and

La Faculté Saint-Jean of the University of Alberta. Add to this increasing scholarly activity a growing number of essay collections devoted to theatre, poetry, and fiction across Canada and other initiatives to stimulate dialogue among Acadians, Ontarians, and Western Francophones. For example, the Franco-Ontarian review *Liaison* recently announced that it will devote two issue a year to what it calls “la littérature pancanadienne” (*Liaison* 129, 2005).

Yet, much of this Franco-Canadian literature still remains relatively unknown beyond its provincial origins. Whether we label it “minor literature” (written in a major language, but in minority context) or “littérature de l’exiguïté” (see François Paré’s *Les littératures de l’exiguïté*, Le Nordir, 1993), we should be devoting more serious scholarly attention to minority Francophone Canadian literature. We should be including Acadian, Franco-Ontarian, Franco-Manitoban, Fransaskois, and Franco-Albertan texts in the study of Canadian literature and especially in the study of postcolonial Francophone literatures.

It is our hope that this special issue of *Canadian Literature*, with articles on novelists, poets, and playwrights from across Canada and poems by Acadian, Ontarian, and Manitoban poets, will encourage more interest in the richness and diversity of Franco-Canadian writing.

Après le Québec d’autres littératures francophones au Canada

par Jane Moss

(traduction en français par Réjean Beaudoin)

Pour les Canadiens francophones qui vivent en dehors du Québec, la brisure de ce qu’on avait coutume d’appeler historiquement le Canada français a certainement été vécue d’une façon traumatique. Au sortir de la *Grande Noirceur* des années duplessistes, au moment de la Révolution tranquille, les dirigeants et les intellectuels québécois ont affirmé bien haut leur détermination à faire du Québec une société à part entière qui devait s’assurer d’un avenir qui lui soit propre. Cette différence