

# Editorial

In a way, this editorial puts the cart before the horse. It introduces *Canadian Literature's* new crew not only well after their names first appeared on the masthead last fall, but also after the new associate editors, Margery Fee and Iain Higgins, have each contributed editorials which admirably illustrate the intellectual energy they have already brought to the journal. Together with Laurie Ricou, who agreed to be Acting Editor (in addition to his arduous duties as Associate Dean of Graduate Studies), Margery and Iain's collegiality permitted me to go on leave, and this is a welcome opportunity to thank all three for their generosity.

In a reflection, published in *Canadian Literature* 148, on Canada's status as "imagined community" after the Quebec referendum, Margery Fee demonstrates the intersections of history and linguistics that make her research unique. To her task as reviews editor, she brings expertise in Commonwealth and postcolonial writing, in the history of English in Canada (with a special emphasis on Quebec English), and in questions of lexicography and usage. Her work on institutional aspects of teaching Canadian literature has been particularly influential and, judging by the number of citations it has generated, appears to have almost single-handedly launched a field of research. As poetry editor, Iain Higgins draws not only on his broad knowledge of Canadian, American, and European (especially Eastern European) poetry and cultural history, but also on his own love for, and accomplished skill in, the rich complexities of language: his meditation, in number 149, on *Canadian Literature's* traditional commitment to the study of poetry and poetics also reads like a personal credo. Possessed of a Celtic sense of irony that can be as challenging as Laurie Ricou's straight-faced prairie humour, Iain furthermore specializes in travel-writing from Mandeville to the present in research which complements Margery's focus on imperialist rhetoric and my own interest in intersections of literature and the visual arts. We have agreed that we will take turns writing editorials

for the journal. Occasionally, we will sing as a trio (discordant or harmonious, as the case may be) by looking at an issue together. As well, we plan to invite guest editors from time to time. As of this issue, we will also be able to draw on the advice of an editorial board, and we thank the national and international scholars who have accepted our invitation.

Although we all enter this new phase in the thirty-seven-year old history of the journal with considerable enthusiasm, we could not have begun our work at a worse time in publishing. As I write, massive cutbacks in government grants have forced Coach House Press (surely one of Canada's most important avant-garde presses and producer of some exquisitely designed books) to stop publishing, despite its successful efforts in recent years to turn into a "for-profit business" with innovative marketing and distribution strategies, the emphatic support of the Canada Council, and the passionate intervention of the literary community who celebrate the "courage and talent" of Coach House Press as "things that can't be measured by bookkeepers," as one of many dismayed and angry letters to the *Globe and Mail* put it (see *Globe and Mail* of July 16, 17, and 20, 1996 for coverage.) Including books by Brossard, Laferrière, LePage and Verdecchio, the fall 1996 list (which will now have to be published elsewhere) demonstrates, among other things, the commitment of the press to writing from Québec and to multi-cultural writing. Furthermore, Alberto Manguel had launched an international programme which featured translations of experimental writing by Duras, Cortázar, and others. In other words, the press provided a generous corrective to the intellectual parochialism that the rise of narrowly defined nationalisms and the currently advocated flag-waving may easily produce. As such, Coach House was instrumental in mapping out "a new 'imagined community' that really works," to quote Margery Fee once again. The press was not, as the Ontario government appears to have concluded, a dispensable luxury.

Ever closer to home, scholarly journals depending on the support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada have been threatened with cuts so extensive that if they are ever fully implemented, they will spell the end for many of these publications. It is thanks to the swift action and intensive lobbying of the Canadian Association of Learned Journals and the Humanities and Social Sciences Federation of Canada that a disaster has been averted, at least for the time being. The journals have had to make concessions to survive, and they may have to make many more. One of the more daunting prospects is the probability that, in near future,

editors will have to be trained accountants to satisfy the exigencies of politicians such as the one who concluded that the demise of Coach House signalled their inability to “compete in the marketplace” and “probably speaks to their management abilities” (“Publisher poorly run Harris says,” *Globe and Mail* July 17, 1996). Another, more ambivalent, development concerns the increasing tendency of funding agencies to measure publications in the humanities against conventions and standards applied in the sciences and social sciences, apparently without recognition that the humanities march to a very different drummer indeed. Thus, journals specializing in literary criticism will be as concerned as their fund-givers to publish work of outstanding quality. They will also agree that standardized criteria are important to establish “accountability” and, at the same time, satisfy tenure and promotions committees. However, there must also be room for the unquantifiable, for the type of opinion, polemic, and reflection that cuts across divisions generated by scholarly specialization and career advancement.

In an essay on the cultural function of magazine publications in Canada, Ioan Davies comes to the depressing conclusion that specialized academic journals rarely participate in the conceptualization of Canadian culture and, at best, serve the function of reference guides. I disagree with this contention as much as I do with Davies’ definition of “theory and creativity” (5) as inherently incompatible with writing in the daily press or in journals, like *Canadian Literature*, which have been known to leave their lofty pedestal to address themselves to “high schools and the ‘general public’” (15). I do however think that Davies unintentionally paints a picture of the dismal things to come, if the autonomy of the humanities is not respected and if, as Timothy Findley puts it in support of Coach House, “[t]he pressures of the corporate vision of ‘everything that moves is ours to manipulate’ [become] overwhelming.” The prospect that Findley rightly fears must be resisted, and *Canadian Literature* will do its share. E-M.K.

WORKS CITED

- Davies, Ioan. “Theory and Creativity in English Canada’s Magazines, the State and Cultural Movement.” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 30.1 (Spring 1995): 5-19.