

Pine For No Knotty Quotes

Does anyone know what Margaret Atwood is working on currently?

QUERY POSTED TO CANLIT-L
5 SEPTEMBER 1995

I first heard of Earle Birney's death via the Canadian Literature Discussion Group—a listserv established by the National Library of Canada.¹ My title comes from a punning allusive toast to Birney posted to the list that same morning by Rod Anderson. Because Birney's death marked for me the first time that usergroup news was 'new, the incident became a defining moment, my personal delight—and shudder—about the entangling net.

This journal is knotting that net as well. This issue of *Canadian Literature* announces the establishment of our home page. Sandra Christensen has done much work to establish us on the World Wide Web—her introduction to Canadian Literature's home page concludes this editorial.

For someone just over 50, who still prepares first drafts with pen on paper, I assume the same entitlement to skepticism—and to being wrong—that my parents felt about Elvis and television 40 years ago. In my office, e-mail has become almost as insistent as the telephone. When I see a new posting I find it almost impossible to resist clicking on, and almost as difficult to resist replying immediately. When I turn back to what I was doing, it takes several minutes to resume momentum, by which time Eudora may be telling me there is another correspondent pulsing somewhere out there. Hence, the skepticism: the culture of the NET promotes restlessness, and quickies, rather than sustained contemplation and considered revision.

In two months of following the Can Lit list, I have compiled a list of Maritime stage plays suitable for a high school drama club, and Canadian

mystery novels; I have followed a short amusing thread searching for the “most anachronistic contemporary Canadian novel” (initiated by an enthusiastic claim for Annette Saint-Pierre’s *La fille bégue* (1984)). I’ve been unable to answer questions about which poem was read at the opening/closing ceremonies of the Calgary Olympics, or where to find bpNichol’s computer poems, or Susan Swann’s papers. When I posted my own query for this editorial, asking for instances of the value of the Internet to researchers and teachers in Canadian literature, I received something about Turkey, and a glowing self-promo, but, at first, few specifics.

All this suggests that the Net is useful for quick inquiry, but unreliable: a posting to a news group is no guarantee of comprehensiveness, and no complete substitute for more conventional means of search, even if you can get to Library catalogues a lot more quickly. The only other list I subscribe to is ASLE, the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment.² Certainly on any given day this makes for much more engaging reading than what I’ve seen so far for Can Lit. This list trades info and queries, but it also has its poets, its cynics, its curmudgeons, who will debate the nature of nature, the death of the lyric poem, or the wisdom of the wise-use moment for weeks at a thread. Maybe I just don’t know about the best of the Can Lit lists. Certainly this journal would be happy to help by publishing a list of lists and putting them in our web site. Let us have the information at our e-mail address: feedback@cdn-lit.ubc.ca

As one of my friends says, e-mail is like living in a 21st century version of *Pamela* or the *History of Emily Montague*, where letters are written and picked up and delivered in a morning, and replied to by dusk. The demand to reply doesn’t leave you time to forget. On the other hand, usergroups may be more for people who prefer to talk—and not to listen, to display rather than to make dialogue.

My skepticism about all this extends to the virtual classroom. The nuance of the gesture, the intimation, the eye contact, is too important to me. Yet, among responses to my own query, those on the possibilities for teaching were the most persuasive, most intriguing. Here is a sample of what I’ve discovered is going on:

“I have expanded my circle of writing friends through Internet listservs, and one of these literary roundtables has led to my being offered a writer-in-residence job here at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota (my home is in Ottawa). One pleasant duty here is to teach a half-course in Canadian Literature, which wasn’t

offered at Concordia before I arrived. My students are benefiting from a listserv originated by Will Garrett-Petts at University College of the Cariboo in Kamloops, which enables students in different countries and regions to exchange ideas and perceptions about the Canadian literature they are studying. So far, my American students have received the impression that Canadians are people who worry about what being Canadian means. For them, possessors of that American 'blank unselfconsciousness' Clark Blaise mentions in an essay we have read—"The Border as Fiction"—this has already been a learning experience."

Colin Morton (morton@gloria.cord.edu)



"Will's list, called Canliterati, links his Canadian literature class with mine in Moorhead and Joan Dolphin's in Thunder Bay. To subscribe, send e-mail to MAILSERV@CARIBOO.BC.CA and leave the message SUBSCRIBE CANLITERATI."

Colin Morton (morton@gloria.cord.edu)



"Greetings again from South Dakota!

We're now embarking upon our semester of Canadian literature in our state reading series, in which scholars discuss literature with series participants in approximately 30 communities across the state. With the help of this group, we have selected Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel* and Thomas King's *Medicine River*, and Carolyn Redl has put together a fine study guide for us.

Since I begin with Laurence in *Kadoka* on Sunday, and in *Deadwood* the following Saturday, I thought now would be a good time to ask people on the list who might have taught these books what approaches they have taken and what questions are good to ask.

In a few words, what do you think is important to convey to them and to ask them about these books? How could we help them relate the books to their own experiences and attitudes?

I've volunteered to relay your responses back to the 20+ discussion leaders, so please know that you are providing a great service for more than a few of us."

Michael Day (mday@silver.sdsmt.edu)



"I operate a teaching home page where I post information for my students, mostly the kind of things that you might photocopy and hand out, but I'm experimenting with using hypertext for poetry analysis. You can check out my page at: http://130.179.92.25/Arnason_DE/Arnason_DE.html

As well, I create local newsgroups for my students where they are able to post questions and comments on the various courses. You get some very interesting and wide ranging discussion. The key advantage is that people who don't like to talk in class will write great long diatribes at 3 am. It helps to frame the conversation by setting up discussion topics every couple of weeks. The downside is that almost no women take part in the electronic discussion groups, and most of the

women in my classes have no access to the Internet and are afraid of setting up accounts, even when they have the hardware to do so.”

David Arnason (arnasn@cc.umanitoba.ca)



David Aranason writes that the Net is going to be the university of the future, and most scholarly publishing will move to the Net. If this journal, while it clings to paper format, can extend the Can Lit classroom as here outlined, we would be happy to help.

E-mail and electronic bulletin boards will certainly help those who would rather write than phone. And, perhaps, as Colin Morton's note implies, their potential anonymity may appeal to some absence in the mythic Canadian psyche. Or it might unsettle—what with the impossibility of identifying electronic authors, and the creation of electronic texts too mutable to be cited—as in any other carnival. L.R.

Canadian Literature on the Internet's World Wide Web

Where can you find *Canadian Literature*? If you have a web browser, type <http://www.swiftly.com/cdn_lit> at the prompt to retrieve CLs home page. CL is part of the Swiftsure Arcade, which claims to be putting BC culture on the Internet; this site includes directories, lists, information and creative productions—all of which are interactive.

What will you find at CLs home page? The journal's history, recent and forthcoming issues, ordering information, submission guidelines and advertising information. We have also included writing samples: an article, poetry and book reviews. Future use of our “space” on the Internet will include an indexed archive of out-of-print issues, as well as links to information about our editors, beginning with our founding editor, George Woodcock. To check out this resource: when you are at the home page, click “*About Canadian Literature*,” then scroll down the page to “History of the Journal” and click George Woodcock's name (highlighted). All feedback is welcomed and encouraged.

In this new world of infinite recall we are creating, where all can be stored, and nothing can be forgotten, regardless of how profound or banal it might be, originality will be an additive and transformative process. The focus will be on collaboration and the development of deep interconnected

relationships, but not just relationships with our contemporaries. For instance, *CL* will be able to remain connected to its roots by keeping alive the words of its earliest contributors. The passion, surprise and insight of George Woodcock can be a challenge to future contributors of *CL* when they “recall” his words and are able literally to link their own words to his. By maintaining an archive of, and links to, resources that continue to inform Woodcock’s contributions to *CL*, it will be possible to build on his knowledge in new ways, to carry it forward with each new issue of *CL*. s.c.

¹ to subscribe to CANLIT-L, send the command SUBSCRIBE CANLIT-L to MAILSERV@NLC-BNC.CA

² to subscribe to ASLE, send the command SUBSCRIBE to ASLE@unr.edu.

