

# Reading On Forty Years of Canadian Literature

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# Reading On: Forty Years of Canadian Literature

CYNTHIA SUGARS

*For Roger Ploude, Barrie Davies, and Mike Taylor, co-founders of SCL/ÉLC;  
and Herb Wyile, co-editor extraordinaire*

I NEVER IMAGINED THAT I WOULD FIND myself writing the introduction to this special anniversary issue of *Studies in Canadian Literature/Études en littérature canadienne* without Herb Wyile. From the beginning, this issue was a joint effort: joint inspiration, joint labour, joint enthusiasm. I know how much Herb was looking forward to seeing this issue in print, and it was so close. It feels wrong to be writing this piece without him. I can only say that my thinking about this issue, as about so many things, is informed by his integrity, his enthusiasms, his hard work, his fairness, and his unmatched humour.

Herb and I began co-editing *SCL/ÉLC* in the summer of 2013, though we had been conferring regularly on the prospect over the preceding year, and we were looking ahead to the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary with great anticipation. Sometime in early 2014, our prophetic design editor Ian LeTourneau called our attention to an anonymous poem that had been discovered by a student assistant in the *SCL/ÉLC* archives: “The Ballad of SCL.” After some digging, we discovered that the poem had been written in 1975 by two of the founders of *SCL/ÉLC*, Roger Ploude and Barrie Davies, professors at the University of New Brunswick who had travelled from Fredericton to Ottawa in 1975 to request funding for what was then a mere fancy: a new bilingual journal dedicated to Canadian literature. In the midst of their elation (and inebriation) upon learning that they had received start-up Canada Council funding for the journal, the two men scribbled an impromptu poetic self-parody in a hotel bar in Ottawa.

Right off the bat, Herb and I wanted to include the poem in the upcoming 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue of *SCL/ÉLC*, still at that point a few years in the future. Noting the founding date of the journal in 1975, and the publication of its first issue in 1976, we commented on how

much had changed in the map of Canadian literary studies since then. It was thus we decided to celebrate the journal's anniversary with an issue dedicated to the past forty years of Canadian literature (1976-2016). In 2015, we co-organized two special sessions on this topic at the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences, held at the University of Ottawa that year. These sessions were co-sponsored by ACQL/ALCQ and CACLALS. Some of the papers from those special sessions — contributions by Frank Davey, Robert Zacharias, and Anne Sophie Voyer — appear here in substantially expanded form. At that Congress, Herb and I also co-organized a festive anniversary celebration — complete with bubbly and cake — to commemorate the anniversary of the journal. ACQL/ALCQ asked if they could join us in the celebration as they, too, were marking their 40<sup>th</sup>.<sup>1</sup> I remember that Herb seemed vaguely embarrassed about the display of it all. Ever modest, he was wary about public show and commercialism. But once the party got started, and the room was overflowing with colleagues, students, and general enthusiasts, he came into his element. Herb was irrepressibly social, and he loved to talk. The celebration had begun! We launched the festivities with memoirs presented by John Ball (a brief history of *SCL/ÉLC*), Kathy Mezei (a personal memoir of attending the first ACQL/ALCQ sessions), and Sandra Djwa (who could not attend the Congress, but whose memoir/history was read aloud by Sara Jamieson, then president of ACQL/ALCQ). These memoirs, Herb and I agreed, would make the perfect closing contribution to the anniversary issue. Thus was the anniversary toasted in Ottawa, and Herb was there in the midst of it all, ebullient as ever, enjoying with me the warmth and energy of our CanLit colleagues, and eager to channel that energy into what we hoped would become a spectacular issue. And here you have it: a superb collection if Herb and I do say so ourselves.

In writing to me after the memorial service for Herb in Wolfville on 9 July 2016, David Creelman commented that Herb's unexpected death got him thinking about "how time passes so unevenly." That phrase has haunted me these past months. But only today do I think that it works rather evocatively in approaching a collection that looks back upon the last forty years. There are milestones and setbacks. Things that seem important at one moment become a mere footnote the next. The battles fought (over the top Canadian novels, over Canadian hirings in universities, over the Canadian curriculum, over literary prizes, over

broader inclusivity) become the foundations of things not even anticipated. Rather like life, isn't it? Perhaps a forty-year anniversary should be approached with a degree of humility, maybe even awe. Who can say whether what we do now will have the outcomes we expect.

Time passes so unevenly. Herb might have said so about his own academic career, when he worked for ten years as a sessional instructor, losing hope of ever finding a permanent teaching position (which of course he did find at Acadia University in 2001, but only after a far too long apprenticeship). In many ways, Herb's scholarly career provides a good snapshot of the past forty years, and notwithstanding his penchant for (often excessive) humility, I think he would concur. In 1986, Herb wrote his Master's thesis at McGill University on regionalism in the work of David Adams Richards, followed in 1992 by his PhD dissertation at the University of New Brunswick, a study of regionalism in Canadian literature entitled *Regionalism, Writing and Representation*. In conversation with Linda Warley a few years later while teaching as a sessional instructor at the University of Alberta, Herb admitted glumly that he feared that his focus on regionalism "was not going to get him anywhere" in the competitive job market (Filewod). And yet, looking back to his dissertation, one can see the germ of what would become Herb's future ground-breaking work on neoliberalism and Atlantic-Canadian writing.

Already in the late 1980s and early '90s, Herb was undertaking a shrewd metacritical analysis of discourses of regional identity. The terms *region* and *regionalism*, he argued, were problematic markers in Canadian literary criticism, signifying differently depending on the discursive assumptions by which they were framed. As he put it in his thesis on Richards, "The regional capacity for self-identification has always been an impulse under siege, particularly in as neurotic a field as Canadian literature, and regionalism has frequently been intended and/or taken in its pejorative sense, meaning parochial or backwards" (10). Specifically, Herb noted the ways regionalism had become "a useful tool for marginalizing writers from the Atlantic provinces" and other areas (*Regionalism* 2). What followed in Herb's multiple publications on the topic was an extended analysis of the ways the terminology (and ideology) of regionalism had been used to classify and evaluate English-Canadian writing and culture. In Herb's analysis, the invocation of "regional" identities often contained implicit negative assumptions about political and economic relationships, a topic that would come to the fore in his co-

edited collection with Christian Riegel, *A Sense of Place: Re-Evaluating Regionalism in Canadian and American Writing* (1997/1998).<sup>2</sup> In this work, the editors were interested in the ways “current global trends [were] investing the term [regionalism] with new significance” (ix), an assertion that would come into focus in subsequent years as critics turned to the referent of the local in global contexts. As Herb put it in a 1998 article for *Essays on Canadian Writing*, “With the cohesion of many Western nation-states being gradually undermined by economic globalization and the growing influence of transnational corporate culture on the one hand and the growing anticentric pressures and a decline in nationalist sentiment on the other, regionalism is starting to receive more sustained scrutiny” (“Regionalism” 139). Herb’s methodological critique and his incisive analysis of the various permutations of regionalism as a discursive construct would become central, not only to his contextualization of Canadian postcolonial writing, but more significantly to his award-winning study of Atlantic-Canadian authors’ resistance to the impact of neoliberalism in Atlantic Canada, *Anne of Tim Hortons* (2011). Unbeknownst to him in the late 1980s, his work on regionalism and the power structures inscribed within it had been prescient.

Well before *Anne of Tim Hortons*, Herb’s interest in regionalism and Atlantic Canada was evident in his decision to co-organize two major Thomas Raddall conferences on Atlantic-Canadian literature at Acadia University: “Surf’s Up: The Rising Tide of Atlantic-Canadian Literature” (2004; published as a special issue of *SCL/ÉLC* in 2008)<sup>3</sup> and “Atlantic-Canadian Literature in a Shifting World” (2013). The first of these gatherings, “Surf’s Up,” was a formative moment in the history of Canadian literary studies, consolidating in a concrete way the burgeoning field of Atlantic-Canadian writing. It began the project that Herb would undertake more completely in *Anne of Tim Hortons*: to challenge the way the writings of Atlantic Canada had previously been studied and understood. The conference, which I was fortunate to participate in, brought together national and international scholars brimming with the energy and determination to bring to this field a new profile. Indeed, the momentum of this gathering was comparable to that described by Sandra Djwa here in her account of the spirited resolve that led to the founding of a society for Canadian literature (what would become ACQL/ALCQ). Many of the major critics currently working in the field of Atlantic-Canadian literature (Jennifer Andrews, Wanda Campbell, Paul Chafe,

David Creelman, Gwendolyn Davies, Danielle Fuller, Thomas Hodd, Ross Leckie, Jeanette Lynes, Alexander MacLeod, Tony Tremblay) were present at the “Surf’s Up” conference in 2004.

In the interim (towards the end of the 1990s), Herb’s focus had moved from the region-nation dichotomy of his earlier work to a broader assessment of the ways literary works could launch a critique of the exclusionary nation-building project in English Canada. In *Speculative Fictions: Contemporary Canadian Novelists and the Writing of History* (2002), Herb examined the proliferation of postmodern and postcolonial historical fiction in post-1970 Canadian writing, a project that was supplemented a few years later by his outstanding collection of interviews with Canadian historical novelists, *Speaking in the Past Tense: Canadian Novelists on Writing Historical Fiction* (2007). Interested in the interconnections between cultural works and social formations, Herb assessed the interrogation of dominant national narratives and historiographic conventions in Canadian novels that tackled history “from below.” He noted how “the unitary, authoritative, realistic voice of the historical novel in Canada has been fractured, mongrelized, and in many cases subverted through a discursive interplay that challenges the authority of official history and brushes the form of history against the grain” (*Speculative* 139). Not only did this work continue in the vein of Linda Hutcheon’s seminal study from 1988, *The Canadian Postmodern*, but in it Herb assessed what he felt to be an increasingly conservative trend in Canadian postcolonial fiction moving into the twenty-first century. This scepticism about the growing conservatism of Canadian society and culture inspired his post-2002 critical work, including articles on Jeff Derksen and Lisa Moore, and culminated in *Anne of Tim Hortons*, a book whose analysis of the ways Atlantic-Canadian authors resist the totalizing forces of neoliberal agendas and economics may very well reorient the study, not only of Atlantic-Canadian writing, but of Canadian literature more broadly. And so Canadian literature comes full circle — back to local communities, local politics, local initiatives. The “region,” but in a new guise.

Herb’s career-long critique of the impulse toward homogeneity and neoliberal economics in post-1980 (if not post-war) Canadian culture informed much of his work. And here we have it. If one could sum up what has been the greatest impulse in the study of Canadian literature these past forty years, I would say it is this: a suspicion of singularities.

Indeed, this scepticism about pronouncement, terminology, prescription, institution may be the clearest single thread to characterize the last forty years of literary criticism in Canada. And this thread was already evident in the 1970s, when the impulse to start up a new Canadian literary journal, or a new society for the study of Canadian literature, was conceived as an act of resistance to what was perceived as a normalizing and exclusionary colonial culture. One has only to read the interview with Daphne Marlatt included in this issue to get a sense of the invigorating iconoclasm of the period.

\* \* \*

In 1975, this spirit of optimism and contestation propelled two English professors at the University of New Brunswick, Roger Ploude and Barrie Davies, to start up a new critical journal dedicated to the study of Canadian literature. *SCL/ÉLC* was conceived by Ploude and Davies; the two were joined a few weeks later by Mike Taylor, who eventually became managing editor. The founders were eager to establish a bilingual Canadian literature journal that was based in eastern Canada, something that would complement and rival the work being done by *Canadian Literature* on the west coast. At the time, UNB was one of the few universities offering a PhD program in Canadian literature, largely as a result of the tireless work of Desmond Pacey in the late 1960s, so the establishment of a Canadian literature journal based at UNB was no coincidence. In correspondence with me, Ploude provided some important insight into the early days of the journal. Initially, the editors were worried about acquiring a critical mass of essays for the early issues, particularly since neither Ploude nor Taylor had extended contacts in Canadian literary circles. According to Ploude, Robert Gibbs, who is listed as one of the editors on the first issue, “help[ed] to track down some early submissions since, like Barrie, he had contacts in the field. Taylor and I were in different fields (Shakespeare and 19thC British, respectively) and had no contacts with critics of Can Lit.” Pacey, then a renowned Canadian literary critic and all-round advocate for Canadian literature, having just completed his appointment as VP Academic, was not involved in the production or founding of the journal, though he offered “strong support . . . from his post in senior administration” (Ploude).

First published in 1976,<sup>4</sup> *SCL/ÉLC* was from the beginning immersed in the vigorous critical debates of the day — debates about formalism versus thematics; anti-colonial nationalism; feminist consciousness; environmentalism; Indigenous activism. If one looks at only the first two issues of the journal from 1976, one finds coverage of a wide range of authors and topics, from discussions of Duncan Campbell Scott, Robert Kroetsch, Margaret Atwood, Sara Jeannette Duncan, Malcolm Lowry, Mazo de la Roche, Alden Nowlan, and Thomas D'Arcy McGee, to articles about *The Canadian Forum*, imperialism, class division, feminism, and language politics. From a perspective forty years later, one can see that contributors focussed largely on White authors, echoing Marlatt's observation that the "readership" of the time showed "much less racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity than we have now." Nevertheless, contributors felt that they were participating in an anti-colonial endeavour by celebrating what was then a marginalized discourse. Indeed, it took more than a bit ofchutzpah to advocate so strenuously for a field of study that was widely considered to be second rate. It is not surprising, then, that many of the writers who contributed to these early issues would go on to become some of the major Canadian literary critics of the subsequent decades: Glenn Clever, Sandra Djwa, Stan Dragland, Carole Gerson, Sherrill Grace, D.G. Jones, Robert Lecker, Lorraine McMullen, W.H. New, Warren Stevenson, Clara Thomas, and Elizabeth Waterston. Clearly the journal was filling a need for a scholarly forum in which these contributors, new and established, were eager to participate. It is worth noting, as John Ball does in his memoir included here, that the journal's first special issue in 1977, entitled "Minus Canadian" (2.2) and leading off with Barry Cameron and Michael Dixon's famous essay "Mandatory Subversive Manifesto," launched a hard-hitting and caustic attack on thematic criticism, an approach that had dominated the field of Canadian literature for some time.

Coincident with the embryonic days of the journal were a number of other significant Canadian scholarly initiatives, including the creation of ACQL/ALCQ in 1973/74 (see Djwa's memoir in this issue), the formation of ACUTE's scholarly journal, *English Studies in Canada*, in 1975,<sup>5</sup> and the founding of *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews* in 1977. These initiatives were an index of the times. The cultural nationalism of the period found expression in the emergence of Canadian



literature as a professional field of study, which in turn lent impetus to the arguments for starting up such new ventures as *SCL/ÉLC* and *ACQL/ALCQ*. Robin Mathews, as Misao Dean explores in her article in this issue, was central to this professionalization of the field, but so were many of the authors, editors, teachers, and publishers of the day.<sup>6</sup> In 1968, A.B. Hodgetts's exposé of the Canadian cultural malaise, *What Culture? What Heritage?* — which was echoed by many Canadian authors of the time, including Dennis Lee, Margaret Atwood, and Robert Kroetsch — sparked a nation-wide controversy for its analysis of the inadequacy of Canadian content in Canadian public schools. The book was followed by Mathews and James Steele's *The Struggle for Canadian Universities* in 1969, which in turn led to an investigation in 1972, launched by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada and headed by T.H.B. Symons, to report "on the state of teaching and research in various fields of study relating to Canada at Canadian universities" (qtd. in Cameron 21-22; see also Sugars 4). The establishment of *SCL/ÉLC* and *ACQL/ALCQ* were part of this impulse to produce the framework and infrastructure that would support the professionalization of Canadian literature as an independent field of study.

At the same time, and shortly before and after the founding of *SCL/ÉLC*, a number of pivotal cultural initiatives took place: the founding of The Writers' Union of Canada in 1973; the creation of many book publishers dedicated to publishing Canadian literature (e.g., Coach House Books, Anansi, Oberon, Talonbooks); the rise of Canadian poetry and fiction magazines (*Malahat Review*, *ellipse*, *Brick*, *Books in Canada*, *Prairie Fire*); and the founding of numerous regional theatres across the country. The authors who gained increasing public attention during this time, in large part by contesting the *status quo* that had come to dominate Canadian society and culture, included a strikingly diverse range of voices: Jeannette Armstrong, Margaret Atwood, Marie-Claire Blais, Nicole Brossard, Maria Campbell, Austin Clarke, Leonard Cohen, Marian Engel, Timothy Findley, Jacques Godbout, Robert Kroetsch, Margaret Laurence, John Newlove, Lee Maracle, Daphne Marlatt, Michael Ondaatje, Michel Tremblay, and Rudy Wiebe. In 1976 itself, the year of the first issue of *SCL/ÉLC*, the first PQ government was elected in Canada, with René Lévesque becoming the premier of Quebec, while that summer the Olympics were being held in Montreal. Four notable pioneering Canadian literary works were published that

year: Michael Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter*, Marian Engel's *Bear*, Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle*, and Theatre Passe Muraille's *The Farm Show*.<sup>7</sup> These alone tell us something about the innovative spirit and transgressive vitality of the period. The appearance of *SCL/ÉLC*, therefore, alongside the founding of ACQL/ALCQ, was a logical outcome of the zeitgeist of the preceding decade, when authors and teachers were insistent on the need to pay attention to local Canadian cultural work and local communities but were also suspicious of institutional mandates, state agendas, and nation-based metanarratives.

The resistance to singularities, then, has a long, if sometimes forgotten, history, much as Dean argues in her reassessment of the radical interventions of Mathews in the 1970s. But as we know, this impulse broadened over the forty-year timespan to include attention to the shifting relations between intra-national and transnational communities. Consider, for a moment, what had *not* yet happened in literary critical scholarship by 1976. Edward Said had not yet published his seminal work *Orientalism* (1978), nor had Linda Hutcheon written *The Canadian Postmodern* (1988), nor Terry Goldie *Fear and Temptation* (1989). These three important critical texts changed the direction of literary studies in Canada. The country had not yet experienced the two referenda, the Multiculturalism Act had not yet been ratified, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was not yet even on the horizon, and 9/11 was a quarter century away. Major Canadian literary works such as Timothy Findley's *The Wars* (1977), Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981), Beatrice Culleton Mosionier's *In Search of April Raintree* (1983), Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* (1987) and *The English Patient* (1992), Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), Tomson Highway's *The Rez Sisters* (1986/1988), Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic* (1988), Carol Shields's *The Stone Diaries* (1993), Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993), Anne Michaels's *Fugitive Pieces* (1996), Dionne Brand's *What We All Long For* (2005), Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road* (2005), and Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes* (2007) had not yet been published. It is difficult to imagine the field of Canadian literature without these ground-breaking, and often socially interventionist, works.

In the intervening forty years since 1976, assessments of Canadian literature moved from a nation-based and often bicultural focus, to an expanded exploration, informed by the postmodern and postcolonial initiatives of the 1970s and '80s, of a wide range of divergent voices and

communities — from a focus on transnational connections, to diasporic communities, to settler-Indigenous relations, to global connections. Postcolonial interests, in particular, morphed into an emergent awareness of what Diana Brydon and Marta Dvořák term the “shifting relations between national and global imaginaries” (2). By the twenty-first century, authors and critics were turning their attention to the fluid collectivities that negotiated variously interconnected “glocal” locations. This body of work has demonstrated a growing focus on diasporic communities, global interconnections and circulation, and histories of transnational displacement, memory, and trauma. Alongside this emphasis on the global histories and memories that constitute the lived reality of individual lives in Canadian and international settings has come a marked critique of neoliberal ideologies and transnational capitalism. In an especially powerful focus in recent years, the settler-based desire for white national homogeneity has been called into question by Indigenous voices, especially in post-residential school Indigenous writing following the closing of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2015. So — Canadian literature traversed a lot of ground in four decades!

This range of interests is evident in the articles gathered in this collection, all of which attest, in different ways, to the changes and developments in Canadian literary studies over the course of the past forty years. It strikes me that what comes across in all of these essays is a refusal of complacency — a desire to situate Canadian literary studies historically but with eyes wide open: less congratulation than reflection. Importantly, this insistence has always been distinguished by a double movement: a determination to critique hegemonic positions and, at the same time, an attempt to imagine alternative forms of identity and community. In most of these essays there is what one might call a politics of scepticism that is constructive in impulse, which takes the form of an ongoing reassessment of our immediate historical, institutional moment. In these pages, this reassessment takes three broad forms: a reconsideration of forgotten Canadian literary predecessors; a reengagement with inherited terminology; and an assessment of the impact of specific literary movements of the past forty years.

A number of essays in this issue offer a reassessment of important Canadian precursors, from Robin Mathews to Barbara Godard. Misao Dean’s fascinating study of the legacy of Mathews and 1970s Canadian leftist nationalism is a case in point. Dean takes the opening of the

Robin Mathews Fonds at Library and Archives Canada as an opportunity to revisit his role in the struggle to make Canadian literature a legitimate area of study in English departments across the country. Inspired by the anti-colonial nationalisms of the 1960s and '70s, Mathews saw Canadian nationalism as anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist, and he argued that Canadian literature offered the materials for a collectivist counter-narrative to neoliberal capitalism. By placing Mathews at the centre of the narrative of Canadian literary studies as a discipline, Dean “shifts [the] focus from the discipline’s current project of unsettling the dominance of settler nationalism in Canadian literature, to seeing a particular form of that nationalism as a historical precursor to the larger de-colonization struggle in which we are now engaged.” As Dean puts it, Mathews, in retrospect, can be considered a model for political activism within the university, “whose successes are often dismissed as part of the ordinary, or even inevitable, evolution of the discipline, and whose failures are often misinterpreted by subsequent generations.” Her pronouncement is sobering to those of us who work in the field today: “To the extent that students read any Canadian literature at all at university, they read texts whose goal is to subvert something of which they are only vaguely aware.” Dean concludes that Mathews’s struggle to “Canadianize” English departments was a failure, in part because of his adherence to an Old Left view of the divisive nature of race, but nevertheless she believes that much can be learned from his efforts to secure the place of Canadian literature within the academy.

Aritha van Herk’s *Taking Stock: Reprise* revisits the 1978 Calgary Conference on the Canadian Novel as a significant moment in Canadian literary history that has particular import for the present day. The obsession with the tabulation of Canadian literature, often in inventories or lists that anoint significant works with canonical status, was distilled in Malcolm Ross’s attempt in Calgary to come up with a “top 10” list that would carry weight into the future of CanLit professionalization. Van Herk focuses on two speakers at that conference, Robert Kroetsch and Marian Engel, as examples of major writers who participated in this important literary gathering, yet whose works are gradually disappearing from contemporary cultural awareness. For van Herk, “forty years onwards, these two writers . . . epitomiz[e] the span and evolution of Canadian literature since then.” Engel’s *Bear* and Kroetsch’s *The Studhorse Man* are “templates,” van Herk explains,

embodying a sense of what Canadian literature aspired to in the 1970s. According to van Herk, the declining recognition of both authors over the past forty years reveals how the field of Canadian literature seems to be withdrawing not from its “bravura performance in the global literary world,” but from its own memory and recognition of its early pathfinders. Their works, she argues, speak to the paradox of Canadian literature as ironically unaware of its own invention, an argument that echoes Dean’s discussion of the ways contemporary students and scholars are often unacquainted with the history of the field as a field.

Anne Sophie Voyer and Lorraine York move from under-recognized predecessors to two seminal figures whose careers chart important developments in Canadian literary critical discourse. Voyer’s “Of Her Own Volition: Barbara Godard as a Case Study of the Translator’s Agency” offers an extended discussion of the innovative translation work of Barbara Godard, a leading critic, theorist, professor, and translator whose influence spans the past forty years of Canadian literary production. A leader in feminist translation, Godard helped bring translation to the forefront of theoretical discourse in Canada. For Voyer, Godard is the embodiment of the feminist translator. Refusing to practice self-effacement in her translation work, Godard flaunted her translative presence, leaving a creative “signature” for the attentive reader to follow in her texts. In doing so, she deliberately worked with the source, actively participating in the creation of meaning. Voyer’s essay explores how Godard’s translative method includes an appreciation of creativity and authorship as they pertain to translators. As a translator, Godard’s methods, discourses, and analyses had an immense impact not only on Canadian literary translations, but on the study of Canadian literature itself over the past four decades.

Lorraine York, in “‘A Sort of Refusal’: Alice Munro’s Reluctant Career,” uses Munro’s career and reception as a case study of “celebrity reluctance” in the Canadian imaginary. Reading York’s essay, I can’t help but come back to Herb’s analysis of the variously operating discourses of regionalism as they have been applied to Atlantic-Canadian writing. According to York, public renditions of Canadian “reluctance” operate in multiple ways by negotiating the literary marketplace, legitimizing model Canadian subjects, and offering an implicit critique of a neoliberal economic order. York examines how Munro’s reluctant consecration on the global stage, most clearly figured in her humble recep-

tion of the Nobel Prize for Literature, functions in both national and international registers. Canadian “reluctance,” she argues, operates as a way of negotiating Canadian culture’s position for a global audience while reflecting that global stardom back onto specifically Canadian debates about national culture, character, and prestige.

Another set of contributors to this issue examine specific terminology or tools that we have come to take for granted over the past forty years, and cast a critical eye on some complacencies that inform the field of Canadian literature today. Robert Zacharias’s and Winfried Siemerling’s essays work nicely in tandem to take on specific terminologies of space and time that have come to dominate current critical discourse about Canadian literature. In “The Transnational Return: Tracing the Spatial Politics of Can Lit,” Zacharias considers the spatial politics of the transnational turn in recent Canadian literary criticism, historicizing the growth of explicitly spatial critical frames — diaspora studies, globalization, critical regionalism, border studies — within the longer “topocentricism” of the field. In his view, much of this critical work has been informed by “the persistent critical fantasy of leaving the nation behind.” Taking the rise of hemispheric criticism as a case study, he suggests that the most common function of such work has been a transnational *return*, less a decisive move beyond the limits of the national frame than an extension of English-Canadian literary studies’ longstanding engagement with literary nationalism.

Siemerling’s “New Ecologies of the Real: Nonsimultaneity and Canadian Literature(s)” assesses the potentially homogenizing shift from the singular *Canadian literature* to *Canadian literatures*. The new emphasis on pluralization, he argues, “has sometimes homogenized writing practices that often rely on different forms of knowledge,” and indeed, on different conceptualizations of the “real.” A mere insistence on pluralization, in other words, can run the risk of masking differences that include specific forms of what Ernst Bloch refers to as “nonsimultaneity” (i.e., relations to time and space). Specifically, Siemerling explores the ways formal designations are contingent on social dimensions and cultural specificities by examining works by George Elliott Clarke, Marie-Célie Agnant, Sylvia Hamilton, Camille Turner, and Wayde Compton. These writers use distinct strategies of re-temporalization and re-spatialization, suggesting the ways different relations to time and space influence how texts intervene in the public sphere and exert civic agency.

A similar reassessment of terminology occurs in Simona Pruteanu's "Entre l'Amérique du Nord et l'Amérique du Sud: création d'un nouveau métarécit québécois dans trois romans d'Alain Beaulieu." Pruteanu conducts an incisive survey of the preoccupation with identity that has marked Québécois literature since the 1960s. Her article takes us through the various forms this focus on identity has taken: from a rejection of the French European canon, to an embrace of "*américanité*," to the transition to a concept of "*amérilatinité*" that emphasizes connections between Québécois and Latin American colonialist contexts. Her study moves from the period of the 1960s/70s when Québécois literature was dominated by nationalist activism, through the post-referendum 1980s when thematic approaches predominated, to the emphasis on *écriture migrante* in the 1990s, which newly interrogated notions of Québécois national identity and the conceptualization of a national literature. These current transcultural relations, Pruteanu argues, are reshaping the notion of a "*légitimité nationale*." Focusing on the writings of Alain Beaulieu, Pruteanu suggests that a modified conception of Québécois writing is emerging, a new "métarécit québécois" located beyond the emphasis on *l'américanité* (l'Amérique du Nord) and *l'amérilatinité* (l'Amérique du Sud).

The contributions by Frank Davey, Alan Filewod, Samantha Cook, and Marie Carrière explore different movements in Canadian literature that emerged in this forty-year period. In "Poetry beyond Illocution," Davey looks back to the innovative visual and conceptual poetry movements that arose in the late 1950s and 1960s. Exerting a resistance to "bourgeois poetic discourse" associated with the conventional lyric, these poets experienced a struggle to have their work included in mainstream anthologies and school textbooks. Instead, the new non-discursive poetries found most of their audiences in art galleries, libraries, and music clubs, often in international settings. Davey argues that this marginalization resulted in a rich accumulation of visual and conceptual poetry, with its own major figures, that is little understood or studied nationally and is often better known and appreciated outside of Canada than within.

Alan Filewod's "'Supercharged Reality': Documentary and Theatrical Disciplinarity" provides a review of documentary performance in Canadian theatre over a forty-year span, exploring how it has continued as a gateway practice that simultaneously enables and refuses



theatre disciplinarity (the system of value that differentiates the professional from the amateur). Documentary, Filewod maintains, “remains an active and adaptive cultural strategy that enables transition between the two poles of theatre disciplinarity: ‘community’ and ‘profession.’” In the decades since a generation of actor-creators reinvented the theatre profession in Canada by creating texts out of research (following the template of Theatre Passe Muraille’s *The Farm Show* in 1972), documentary has become institutionalized as a theatrical strategy in which the apparent authority of the text is paired with high-affect performance to create a gloss of authenticity. Productions such as Annabel Soutar’s *Seeds* and Judith Thompson’s *Rare* are a case in point. Against these is another documentary mode that refuses the anti-theatrical aesthetic of professionalized theatre and retains tactical power because it can create an image of a rigorous and de-aestheticized fidelity to evidence. Gary Kirkham and Dwight Storrington’s verbatim documentary, *Rage Against Violence*, shows how this low-disciplinary mode is an effective and accessible cultural resource for community activists.

As Samantha Cook’s and Marie Carrière’s essays emphasize, issues of gender and feminist politics have been at the heart of these ongoing debates about the nation as a battleground for competing ideas of community and conflict. Cook and Carrière both consider changes in literary feminism and feminist documentary that have taken place in the forty-year timespan. Cook’s “Le *je* dans le *nous*: repenser la valeur documentaire de *Dans un gant de fer* à l’aube du 21<sup>e</sup> siècle” examines the pioneering role played by Claire Martin’s autobiography *Dans un gant de fer* (1965-66) in the transformation of Québécois society that was taking place in the 1960s. Examining the critical reception of Martin’s seminal work over the past forty years, Cook maps changing assessments of the work alongside changing roles for women in Quebec. Initially concerned with the so-called verisimilitude of the work, critics gradually undertook more probing examinations of Martin’s destabilization of masculine/feminine binaries. Cook notes how the work relates to two central issues of the 1960s/70s: the changing role for women and the reconstruction of the Catholic school system in Quebec. According to Cook, Martin’s autobiography played a formative role during these decades, namely with respect to the traditional separation of public and private.

Marie Carrière’s “Metafeminism and Post-9/11 Writing in Canada and Québec” offers an important discussion of the changing feminist



perspectives of Nicole Brossard and Margaret Atwood, two trailblazers of literary feminism in Canada. The forty-year span of these two writers' *oeuvre* highlights the major trajectories of Western feminism in Canadian and Québécois literatures, which, according to Carrière, have culminated in a form of "metafeminism" that both transgresses and looks back to familiar feminist positions that continue to shape women's writing in Canada. This self-reflexivity is itself a larger trait that has been a hallmark of Canadian literary criticism throughout these decades. Having had to fight hard for institutional legitimacy in its early days, the field of Canadian literature has been distinguished by a higher order "meta" level of analysis that turns its focus on its own terms of engagement. Examining the impact of 9/11 on the work of Brossard and Atwood, Carrière argues that the post-9/11 world newly situates the social and economic challenges that feminism has always confronted. In short, Carrière offers a call for readers to attend to the radical ethical shift in the work of both authors, a shift that widens the scope of feminist social and ethical concern in Canada today.

Running through all of these essays is a sensitivity to the double role that literature plays in these debates: it offers a valuable expression of broader cultural and political concerns, but it also enables important forms of civic agency. Literature's ability to conjure a powerful blend of public and private, social and imaginative experience enables it to register the anxieties and aspirations of the day in exceptionally nuanced ways, sometimes before they surface as coherent issues, but it also offers a basis for intervening as part of a larger activism. This double pursuit is paramount in the writings and career of Canadian writer and activist Daphne Marlatt. As part of our anniversary celebration, *SCL/ÉLC* is privileged to feature an interview with Marlatt, conducted in 2016 by Laura Moss and Gillian Jerome. Marlatt, as readers will know, is one of the major Canadian literary figures of the past four decades, whose experimental work has consistently challenged social and aesthetic conventions in favour of a pronounced feminist ethics and environmental awareness. Marlatt traces the eventful trajectory of her literary life, taking us through the "collaborative energy" of the 1970s, when Canadian writers felt that they "were creating a truly contemporary (as opposed to colonial-influenced) Canadian literary culture," to her feminist activism with *Tessera* and the Women and Words Conference in the 1980s, to her renewed "biocentric consciousness." Her conversation is a veritable

walk through the last forty years of critical thinking about Canadian literature.

The issue closes with three captivating personal memoirs by John Ball (about *SCL/ÉLC*), Sandra Djwa, and Kathy Mezei (both about *ACQL/ALCQ*). These memoirs pair up well with Marlatt's discussion of her experience of these past forty years, taking us from the heady days of CanLit fever in the 1970s through to the present. Ball takes us on a personal tour of his years as *SCL/ÉLC* editor, from 1995 to 2013, recalling how he was unexpectedly propelled into the position a few months after being hired at UNB in 1995. Djwa and Mezei likewise offer a humbling yet inspiring account of the early days of *ACQL/ALCQ*. Djwa recalls a time when Canadian literature was dismissed as a legitimate field of study, when research on Canadian literature was not considered acceptable for promotion and tenure, when there were few publication venues and sparse financial resources for work on Canadian subjects, and when conference sessions at ACUTE that could include Canadian topics were few and far between. All three writers tell stories of perseverance, energy, hard work, creativity, dedication, and imagination. As we celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *SCL/ÉLC*, it is difficult not to marvel at how much terrain has been traversed. Here we are, forty years later, looking back at an awe-inspiring four decades of activity.

Time passes unevenly, and inexorably, but I think now that is a positive thing, for it prevents one from becoming complacent — complacent about literary studies, about Canada, about the day-to-day business of living. This impulse is what spurs the contributors to this special issue, as it inspired Herb's work throughout his career. It is a sad coincidence that the very first issue of *Studies in Canadian Literature/Études en littérature canadienne*, published in the winter of 1976, was dedicated "In Memoriam" to Desmond Pacey, the renowned Canadian literary advocate and scholar who had died of cancer just a few months earlier. Here we are, forty years later, having just lost Herb Wyile under similar circumstances. This issue is dedicated to him. On behalf of both myself and Herb, I invite you to celebrate forty years of *SCL/ÉLC* and Canadian literature, and to read on!

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> ACQL/ALCQ, as a distinct organization, was established in 1973 and held its first conference sessions (jointly with other Learned societies) in 1974. It held its first independent conference as an association in 1975; hence, at the 2015 Congress, it was celebrating the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its first official conference. See the memoirs by Djwa and Mezei in this issue.

<sup>2</sup> This collection appeared first as a special issue of *Textual Studies in Canada* in 1997, and then as a book in 1998.

<sup>3</sup> A collection based on the “Surf’s Up” conference was to be published in a special issue of *Essays on Canadian Writing*. The issue was almost ready to go to press when *ECW* stopped publication. *Studies in Canadian Literature* took over the collection and published it as a special issue in 2008. See Ball’s memoir of *SCL/ÉLC* in this issue.

<sup>4</sup> In a letter of May 1975 from the editors of *SCL/ÉLC* to Sandra Djwa, who was a contributor to the inaugural issue, the editors explained the time-gap between the founding of the journal and the appearance of the first issue: “In our flyer advertising the journal we anticipated that the first issue would appear in the late Summer of 1975. That deadline cannot be met. We now expect the first issue to appear in the Winter of 1976.” My sincere thanks to Sandra Djwa, Roger Ploude, and Tony Tremblay for patiently responding to my many niggling questions about the journal’s origins.

<sup>5</sup> *English Studies in Canada*, like *SCL/ÉLC* and ACQL/ALCQ, emerged out of the anti-colonial ethos of the period. In 1973, an appointed ACUTE committee reported that “there was not a single Canadian journal of studies in English [and] that the market was flooded with a great many journals from outside the country, 76% of which were American at a time when Canada was worried about American cultural domination” (Garson 28). The first issue of the new journal was published in 1975.

Note that ACUTE (with only one “C”) was the original acronym for the Association for Canadian University Teachers of English. When the society changed its name to the Association for Canadian College and University Teachers of English in 1991, the acronym became ACCUTE. See the Dec. 1991 *ACCUTE Newsletter* for Shirley Neuman’s account of the name change. My thanks to Manina Jones for helping me track down this information.

<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, Mathews contributed an essay to the inaugural issue of *SCL/ÉLC* in 1976 (1.1), a study of Hugh MacLennan’s social critique of the colonial middle class in Canada.

<sup>7</sup> *The Farm Show* was a collective creation play by Paul Thompson and Theatre Passe Muraille, originally staged in Clinton, ON, in 1972. The first published edition of the play, assembled by Ted Johns, appeared in 1976 with Coach House Books.

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