Introduction

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In 1917 Canadian literature made its first appearance in *The Cambridge History of English Literature* as a modest twenty-page chapter entitled "English-Canadian Literature" by Toronto academic Pelham Edgar, along with a series of other chapters on literatures of the Empire like "Anglo-Irish Literature," "Anglo-Indian Literature," "The Literature of Australia and New Zealand," and "South African Poetry." Almost exactly ninety years later, this substantial *Cambridge History of Canadian Literature*, co-edited by two women scholars, with its thirty-one chapters written by a distinguished company of Canadian and international contributors, offers convincing evidence for the establishment of Canadian literature as an important scholarly field and for its current standing. Between then and now there have been numerous literary histories, encyclopedias, and anthologies in English and French, produced in a continual process of inventory-taking on the state of the nation and its literature.[1]

Interestingly, these have been concentrated in particular periods of national crisis or celebration, notably in the post-war 1920s, in the decade of cultural nationalism centered on the Centennial of the Canadian Confederation in 1967, and most recently since the mid-1990s with its radical reassessments of the nation and its literary heritage. This *Cambridge History of Canadian Literature* is situated in the context of newly defined discourses of nationhood, national culture, and literary production which are both specific to Canada and related to larger theoretical questions which have widened the parameters of nation, history, and literature.[2]

1 For a chronological list of literary histories of Canada up to 1996, see E. D. Blodgett, *Five-Part Invention: A History of Literary History in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), pp. 20–2.

2 It is symptomatic of this development that a number of other literary histories have appeared almost concurrently with this volume, including Michel Biron, François Dumont, Élisabeth Nardout-Lafarge, *Histoire de la littérature québécoise* (Montreal: Boréal, 2007), and Reingard M. Nischik, ed., *History of Literature in Canada: English-Canadian and*

Indeed, to write the history of any national literature in the era of globalization is problematical, where tensions persist between "national" and "global, diasporic, transnational," where national identities have become pluralized, and where the contemporary emphasis on diversity stimulates – and indeed necessitates – the revisionist reading of that literature from its beginnings so that we may understand the relation between the present and the past in different and more inclusive ways.[3] One striking feature of Canada's literary history is that it has always been a fractured discourse, notoriously difficult to define along chronological or national lines. Even the concept of literary history needs to be re-examined in a New World context where the first encounters between Europeans and Indigenous peoples highlight the differences between written records and other semiotic systems not covered by writing. The problem of multiple beginnings and conflicting allegiances continues with Canada's fraught bilingual and bicultural traditions which are written into the history of its European colonization and which continue to feature in its postcolonial politics. Since the 1970s the country's official multiculturalism has in many ways bypassed traditional English and French dichotomies, and most recently developments in response to globalization have raised social and cultural issues which are crucially different from both biculturalism and multiculturalism.

This *History* acknowledges the conceptual challenges posed by changing meanings of "Canadian" as an identity category and by periodic reformulations of Canada as an imagined community: such instabilities and shifts are represented within our narrative. What this volume offers is a nuanced reassessment of contemporary literary production in English and French, together with a reconfiguring of the literature and national myths of earlier periods, drawing attention to ethnic, cultural and regional diversities that were sometimes submerged in previous paradigms. The visual images in this volume are an important component of the narrative. Strategically placed in specific chapters, they function to underline arguments about different

French-Canadian (Rochester: Camden House, 2008), a revised translation of Konrad Gross, Wolfgang Klooss, Reingard M. Nischik, eds., *Kanadische Literaturgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2005).

3 The *Cambridge History of Canadian Literature* is one of several volumes already published or in preparation by Cambridge University Press that re-examine the literatures of the former Commonwealth and other previously colonial cultures. Some of these volumes focus on national literatures (the volumes in preparation on Australian and Indian literature, for example), while others transcend national boundaries (the two-volume *Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature* published in 2004 and the forthcoming *Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*).

forms of graphic representation, from an early eighteenth-century drawing annotated in French of a tattooed Indigenous warrior to contemporary cartoons and comic books.

Of course, this *History* measures its differences against earlier literary histories, among which our major predecessor is Carl F. Klinck's monumental *A Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English*, first published as a single volume in 1965. A three-volume version appeared in 1976, followed by a fourth volume, edited by W. H. New in 1990. This pioneering work was the first multi-authored comprehensive history of Canadian literature in English, and in that Centennial period a parallel volume on Canadian literature in French was also planned. That did not eventuate, though Pierre de Grandpré's *Histoire de la littérature française du Québec* appeared 1967–9, and Klinck's volume was published in French translation in 1970.The publication of Grandpré's four-volume history of writing in French well before Klinck's multi-volume version is a reminder that Quebec has collected the evidence of its "patrimoine" much more systematically than the English Canadians, a phenomenon which persists into the present with the now seven-volume *Dictionnaire des œuvres littéraires du Québec*, which has no exact equivalent in English.

Klinck and Northrop Frye in his famous "Conclusion" to Klinck's *History* were very aware of the double nature of Canada's literary traditions: "Every statement made [about English-Canadian literature] … implies a parallel or contrast with French-Canadian literature."[4] They envisaged a consistently comparative study of both literatures, whereas our approach is designed to highlight major connections and differences between the two linguistic traditions. Anglophone and francophone materials are treated comparatively in appropriate locations throughout (for instance, in the chapter on nineteenth-century histories and historical novels), while on the other hand the distinctive history of francophone writing is recognized with a final section devoted exclusively to writing in French from across Canada. Two of these chapters, written by scholars from Quebec and Franco-Ontario, were translated into English for this volume.

Klinck saw the production of literary history as a cultural project of national significance designed to give Canadians "a studied knowledge of ourselves" (p.xi). His emphases were – inevitably for that period – Eurocentric and territorial, though his definition of literature was a very catholic one. He includes essays on folk tales and folk songs, travel books, autobiography and

4 Northrop Frye, "Conclusion," in *A Literary History of Canada*, ed. Carl F. Klinck (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), pp. 823–4.

children's books (incidentally these four are among only six essays written or co-authored, by women out of a total of forty) as well as essays on historical writings, philosophy, religion, and the natural sciences. Indeed his approach was remarkably pragmatic for its time, and his authors make passing reference to oral storytelling traditions of "[t]he Indians and Eskimos" (p. 163) and to the new post-1940s phenomenon of novels where "the backgrounds … are Continental" (p. 709), the first recognition of the multiethnic dimension in Canadian literature. Such coverage implies an incipient recognition of the cultural pluralism which has become Canada's signature in following decades.

In 1971 Canada was the first country in the world to introduce an official multiculturalism policy, and subsequent changes in the social and ideological contexts within which images of Canadianness were reconstructed may be charted through creative writing, the media, new literary histories and revisions of those histories which were published in quick succession. The academic industry surrounding Canadian literature grew rapidly during the 1980s at home and abroad, encouraged by government sponsorship of Canadian Studies internationally as a branch of foreign policy, and for the first time ever, two Canadian literary histories were published in London: W. J. Keith's *Canadian Literature in English* (1985) and W. H. New's *A History of Canadian Literature* (1989). Both have been republished in Canada since 2000, with supplementary chapters.

The 1990s bore witness to symptoms of crisis as literary and cultural critics struggled to reconceptualize narratives of the nation. That revisionist emphasis has merely gained impetus in the twenty-first century. The traditional Anglo-French paradigm of Canadian literary heritage might now be considered as one of Canada's national myths, given the light thrown on the nation's origins by new critical perspectives and recent archival research. Far from being a double-stranded narrative of two "founding nations," Canadian literary history now begins to look more like a multi-plot novel with different beginnings and different narrative imperatives, as formerly marginalized voices and suppressed histories are assuming their proper place within a restructured and increasingly diversified literary tradition.[5]

This volume seeks to maintain a balance between the conventional chronological design and canonical genre treatment characteristic of traditional

5 We have looked more closely at these questions in a joint address, "Switching the Plot: From *Survival* to the *Cambridge History of Canadian Literature*," to the 2008 meeting of the International Council of Canadian Studies. A revised version of the lecture appears in the conference proceedings, *Canada Exposed / Le Canada à découvert*, ed. Pierre Anctil, André Loiselle, Christopher Rolfe (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 45–60.

literary histories, and a revisionist approach which interrogates and blurs those category divisions. Our aim is to demonstrate continuities and interconnections across decades and even centuries, with chapters on history and myth, nineteenth-century nature-writing and contemporary environmental writing and publishing history in Canada, while figures like Margaret Atwood and Michael Ondaatje cannot easily be accommodated under historical or generic headings, and chapters like "Canada and the Great War" illustrate the ways in which certain traumatic events resonate way beyond their particular historical moment.

We also include non-canonical genres, like comic books, as evidence of the continuing presence of popular culture and its resonance. In particular we recognize the significant new directions which Canadian literature has taken over the past twenty-five years or so. Over half the volume is devoted to literary production since the 1960s, paying detailed attention not only to major international literary figures but also signaling the emergence of new cultural and literary paradigms with the advent of Aboriginal and multicultural writing in the two major languages. Braided together, all these narratives bear witness to a multiplicity of traditions which contribute to the ever-increasing complexities within Canadian literature.

Writing as diverse as this also comes with typographical challenges. In general, we use the English version of names that have accents in French but none in English (for instance Québec / Quebec, Montréal / Montreal), except, of course, when they are part of a quotation in French or part of a publisher's name or a book title. This means that in our coverage of writing in French, it has sometimes been necessary to use the two versions side by side. "Native" and "Indigenous" are spelled with capital letters when they refer to "Aboriginal." On the advice of the authors contributing the chapters in this area and of other scholars, this volume uses these terms interchangeably, although arguments exist that favor one over the other. Because their printed versions are approximations of oral languages, the names of Aboriginal tribes can be spelled in a variety of ways. We have opted for consistent spelling, but we are aware of the compromise involved in this decision.

Most chapters have been provided with subheadings to assist the reader, but in a few cases they have been left out because they would have interrupted the argument.

PART ONE

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OLD AND NEW WORLD, LA NOUVELLE-FRANCE, THE CANADAS, DOMINION OF CANADA

1

Native societies and French colonization

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To explain why the Aztec empire crumbled before a small force of conquistadors, Tzvetan Todorov opined that the most important cause of its defeat was the absence of writing in Mexican culture. The Mexicans' drawings and pictographs recorded experience, not language, and so they lacked the mental structures fostered by phonetic, grammatically organized writing. Aztec leaders lacked the ability to perceive and respond to new situations which writing presumably creates.[1]

It is tempting to smile and dismiss such an evolutionist, Eurocentric, politically incorrect view of a non-European culture. But Todorov's bias, whether writing is understood as a transcription of language or a pervasive system of difference, is close to the heart (so to speak) of other literary scholarship.[2] The business of literary criticism has always been the analysis of written texts. Since the mid-twentieth century the structuralist and post-structuralist leveling of all representative forms to language, understood in terms of grammar and writing, has determined the focus and premises of other disciplines such as history and anthropology. The classic distinction between savagery and civilization is presented as a technical difference between orality and writing, and some leading anthropologists such as Clifford Geertz claim to "read" culture like a document. Nothing has really changed, however: the wolf is now the wolf in sheep's clothing; concepts of primitivism and savagery are still at the core of anthropological and ethnohistorical practice. Todorov's study of the Aztecs is an example of the risk that an oral / literate opposition entails: by its logic, he is led to assert that Aztec leaders were culturally, even mentally inferior to the Spanish invaders who

1 Tzvetan Todorov, *La Conquête de l'Amérique: La question de l'autre* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), pp. 104–10.
2 See, for example, Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967) and Roland Barthes, *Le Grain de la voix* (Paris: Seuil, 1981), pp. 9–13.

destroyed their world. "Know what [the writer] thinks a savage is," Geertz remarks, "and you have the key to his work."[3]

We can weigh Todorov's claims by examining journals and memoirs produced during roughly two centuries of French colonization in North America. The French, both secular and religious, who documented early contact with Native societies from Acadia to the Great Plains include Cartier, Champlain, Lescarbot, Sagard, Lejeune, Radisson, La Salle, Lahonton, La Vérendrye, La Potherie and Charlevoix. All of these authors routinely used the term "Sauvages" to describe the people who welcomed and traded with them, who became their allies in war, but who resisted, at least in the short term, their efforts to change beliefs and subvert traditional ways of life. As their knowledge of Native societies extended to tribes living beyond the St Lawrence valley, the French in America modified their views of the "Sauvages"; they retained the term but used it ambivalently.

The first recorded contact between Europeans and Natives in what is now Canada took place on July 6, 1534. After touring the Gulf of St Lawrence, Cartier dropped anchor in the Baie des Chaleurs and sent out an exploratory longboat. The crew found more than they bargained for: up to fifty canoes and "ung grant nombre de gens quelx fessoint ung grant bruict et nous fessoint *plusieurs* signes," inviting them to trade for furs. The boat crew were outnumbered; they feared for their lives and quickly turned back to the ships. Seven canoes followed the boat, the paddlers "dansant et fasiant *plusieurs* signes de voulloir nostre amytié nous disant en leur langaige *napou tou daman asurtat*." The crew signed their refusal. When their signs were ignored, they opened fire.[4]

This encounter is interesting for the limited communication that was possible between the two parties. Notwithstanding the journalist's good ear for the language, or possibly a crew member's previous familiarity with it (the transcribed words are recognizably a Mi'kmaq invitation to friendship), interaction was limited to gestures before lapsing into open hostility.[5] The boat crew's refusal to trade is explained not only by unequal numbers but also by reference to an earlier description by European explorers to "gens effarables et sauvaiges." Seeing Montagnais or Beothuks west of Belle Isle had already

3 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 346.
4 Jacques Cartier, *Relations*, ed. Michel Bideaux (Montreal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1986), pp. 110–11, 333: "a crowd of people who shouted and gesticulated to us … dancing and indicating that they wanted our friendship … calling to us in their language, 'Friends, each of your counterparts in this nation asks for your good will.'" The translations in the following are my own.
5 Ibid., p. 331.

given the French an impression of Native marginality and impenetrability: "Ilz se voistent de peaulx de bestes … Ilz se paingnent de certaines couleurs tannees."[6] To the French these wild, daubed figures seemed scarcely human.

The text of Cartier's Mi'kmaq encounter is more accessible, most of us would say more reliable, than Native stories of "des hommes prodigieux & espouventables" crowded onto an "Isle mouvante."[7] To judge from the Mi'kmaq readiness to sell furs, there must have been earlier occasions for trade with European ships. While we can only guess at previous encounters, in Cartier's *Relations* the meeting between French and Natives snaps into focus. A specific date is given; the place has been identified; the details give an impression of exactness – *one* boat was launched from Cartier's ships and *seven* canoes pursued it, the paddlers shouting *napou tou daman asurtat*. Its detail and the day-by-day progress of the ships may even lull the reader into thinking that the account is a transcript of Cartier's own journal. But this confidence would be misplaced: Cartier's authorship is established only by inference, and there is no original text. Although a manuscript exists, it resembles a later version translated and published by an Italian compiler of voyages in 1556. Hakluyt in turn translated the Italian text for his *Principall Navigations* published in 1600. For 240 years, until the French manuscript was discovered, these translations were the only record of Cartier's first voyage. The textual uncertainty of Cartier's *Relations* is not exceptional: Champlain may not have written the earliest text attributed to him, and the *Voyages* of 1632 may have been compiled by a Jesuit ghostwriter.[8] A number of works claiming to be eyewitness accounts owe a great deal to earlier texts: Sagard's *Grand voyage du pays des Hurons* borrowed heavily from Champlain and Lescarbot, just as Charlevoix's *Journal d'un voyage … dans l'Amérique septentrionale* relied heavily on Lafitau's *Mœurs des sauvages amériquains*. Most of these writers claimed to report what they themselves had seen, at least what they had heard while in America. In fact earlier texts contributed as much to their accounts as their own experience.

An exchange of signs during Cartier's meeting with Stadaconé villagers on the Gaspé coast plainly revealed French intentions in the New World. The

6 Ibid., p. 101: "frightful, savage people who are dressed in animal skins … They paint themselves with colors which make their skin look like tanned hide."

7 Paul Lejeune, *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites, 23 vols. (New York: Pageant, 1954), vol. V, pp. 118–20: "amazing, fearsome men" "[on] a moving island."

8 François-Marc Gagnon, "Le *Brief discours* est-il de Champlain?", in *Champlain: la naissance de l'Amérique française*, ed. Raymonde Litalien and Denis Vaugeois (Sillery: Septentrion, 2004), pp. 83–92.

ships traded with 200 men, women and children considered to be savages "car c'est la plus pouvre gence qu'il puisse estre au monde … Ilz sont tous nudz … Ils n'ont aultre logis que soubz leurs *dites* barques … Ilz mangent leur chair quasi crue … "[9] Seeing that their poor appearance posed no threat, Cartier chose this place to erect a thirty-foot cross on which he hung a shield painted with lilies and a plaque inscribed with the words "Vive le Roy de France." The French gathered around the cross and fell to their knees in adoration. Then they explained to the Stadaconé villagers what the cross represented: "leur fismes signe regardant et leur monstrant le ciel que par icelle estoit nostre redemption dequoy ilz firent *plusieurs* admyradtions" – remarkably succinct theology, all things considered, and the first of many lessons taught to the Native peoples of Canada.[10] The conjunction of religious, national, and royal emblems gave the French authority, in their view, to take possession of territory in the Americas. The Stadaconé chief Donnacona was not persuaded, however: "nous fit une grande harangue nous monstrant *ladite* croix et *faisant* le signe de la croix avec deux doydz et puis nous monstroit la terre tout alentour de nous."[11] Although the French could not understand a word of the chief's "harangue," his gestures communicated disapproval of the cross and appeared to insist that all the land belonged to him. As with the Mi'kmaq, the French response to Donnacona's signs was violent. Two young men, Taignoagny and Domagaya, were forced on board one of the ships, "dequoy furent bient estonnez,"[12] a phrase, indicating the Natives' reaction when Cartier abducts them, that allows us to see them just for a moment not as marginal objects of French observation and power, but as human beings who feel surprise and dismay.

Probably to ensure a passage home, the two captives told Cartier about a rich kingdom of the Saguenay as well as a great river flowing into the gulf where he had found them. French interest in the New World was limited to three objectives: to find a water route to Asia, to discover gold and copper mines, and to claim possession of the territory they traveled through. Given these aims, news of wealth farther west was a powerful attraction that the

9 Cartier, *Relations*, pp. 114–15: "These are the poorest people in the world … They are entirely naked … Their only shelter is under their canoes … They eat their meat almost raw … "

10 Ibid., p. 116: "To explain the cross we made signs, pointing to the sky as the source of our redemption, at which they expressed their awe and wonder."

11 Ibid., p. 116: "He made a long speech, pointing to the cross and making a sign of the cross with two fingers, and then he indicated the land all around us, as if he wished to say that all this land belonged to him."

12 "At which they were greatly surprised."