“For an Ethic of Discomfort: Studying Canadian Literature(s) from Afar”

Abstract
This essay discusses recent changes in Canadian literary studies after the controversies that surrounded “Canada 150,” the sesquicentennial anniversary of the Confederation’s independence celebrated in 2017. Taking Michel Foucault’s “ethic of discomfort” as its cornerstone, it reflects on the disciplinary affiliations of Canadian studies in French universities in comparison to the place they occupy in Canada. The resurgence of Indigenous cultures has led to a re-examination of the field, its shifting borders, and the position of Indigenous Literatures with respect to “CanLit,” an institution shaped by various forces of legitimation among which school syllabi, university curricula, literary journals, publishing rationales, literary awards and radio programs. The essay will finally move on to interrogate some of the options available in France for scholars researching CanLit and the Indigenous Literatures in Canada, two imbricated categories that require researchers to situate themselves as regards the object of their investigation.

Résumé
Les festivités organisées au Canada pour célébrer le cent-cinquantième anniversaire de l’indépendance en 2017 se sont déroulées dans un climat d’intense agitation politique et intellectuelle. Parmi les débats, de nombreuses discussions ont porté sur la place qu’occupe la littérature dans les études canadianistes, leurs enjeux, leurs missions et leurs limites. Célébrer l’anniversaire de l’obtention du statut de « Dominion de la Couronne » fut, comme pour le Centenaire, l’occasion de réévaluer les contours de « CanLit », ce canon littéraire dont la construction a visé, tout au long du XXe siècle, à fédérer les imaginaires disparates d’anciennes colonies devenu pays d’immigration en mal d’unité nationale. La résurgence des littératures autochtones est aujourd’hui l’un des facteurs devant être pris en compte quand on veut préciser les contours mouvants des études canadiennes. Ce qui est vrai au Canada l’est aussi dans une certaine mesure en France, dans les départements où s’enseigne la littérature canadienne anglophone. L’article prendra appui sur « l’éthique de l’inconfort » qu’invoque Michel Foucault pour sonder l’enjeu des positionnements auxquels les spécialistes de littérature anglo-canadienne sont aujourd’hui invités s’ils veulent entendre, depuis l’Europe, ce que les littératures autochtones du Canada ont à leur dire.

Bio
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> What happened? Not so long ago we were radicals. We thought of ourselves as critical intellectuals, advocates for the value of indigenous cultures, defenders of our people. Now, all of a sudden, we’re handmaidens of empire.
>
> James Clifford. *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century*, 2.

The nationwide celebrations of "Canada 150," the sesquicentennial anniversary of the Confederation's independence, took place in 2017 in a political climate fraught by the reception of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on the legacy of the Residential School System. The report's 94 calls for action emphasized the role of education and the teaching of Indigenous[1] history, knowledge and methodologies to confront the long-term effects of cultural genocide, foster intercultural relations and advance reconciliation. Indigenous scholars and writers met these recommendations with caution, warning that the process "if not carefully theorized, [could be] mobilized by official discourses in order to reinscribe Indigenous expression within the norms of the settler state" (Hanson 2017: 70; see also Wyile 2019). In 2019, the UBC-based periodical *Canadian Literature* opened their own special *60th Anniversary* issue[2] with a forum looking back on the debates that had been raging in academic circles ever since the interrogations surrounding the publication of the TRC's *Calls to Action* started to intersect with other political front lines, in Canada and abroad. Speaking in the name of fellow scholars in literary and cultural studies, Karina Vernon sums up:

> We find ourselves now in our own moment of struggle, catalyzed by a variety of social revolts against imperialism, state-sanctioned racism, and misogyny, such as #BlackLivesMatter, the TRC Calls to Action, Wet'suwet'en resistance against the construction of a Coastal GasLink pipeline on its traditional territory, and the #MeToo movement to name a few salient "*dispersed and discontinuous offensives*" unfolding in our time. In this context, scholars, writers, artists, and students, many in precarious social and institutional positions, have been undertaking the brave public work of confronting the structures of power which have sedimented in a range of Canadian cultural institutions. (Vernon 2019: 13, emphasis added)

In that initial moment of contextualization,[3] even before she sets about to define Canadian literature (in the singular) "as a critical discourse" with a political edge (2019: 15), Vernon describes today's academic activism with words harking back to the intellectual upheavals of the 1970s. Her nod to Michel Foucault's philosophical guerilla warfare[4] is a reminder of the formative influence French theory has been exerting on literary scholarship in Canada ever since Frank Davey urged Canadian scholars to *Surviv[e] the Paraphrase* (1983). Davey's title is a tongue-in-cheek travesty of *Survival*, the influential study guide Margaret Atwood

[1] Terms relating to Indigenous Peoples will be capitalized in agreement with Younging's editorial manual (2018: 77-81).

[2] George Woodcock founded *Canadian Literature: A Quarterly of Criticism and Review* in 1959 at the University of British Columbia. It remains one of the most influential literary journals in Canada to this day. The biographical note about Woodcock's extraordinary life is well worth a perusal on the periodical's website.

[3] Vernon's "now" is alluding to the imbricated controversies known as the "CanLit dumpster fire" that scorched through Canadian English (or cultural) studies departments and creative writing programmes between 2015 and 2018. For contrasted and complementary responses to the events, see UBC Accountable 2018; Atwood 2018, McGregor, Rak and Wunker 2018.

[4] "Dispersed and discontinuous offensives" is a quotation from *"Society must be Defended": Lectures at the College de France, 1975-1976*. 5.

published in 1972 in which she identified the concerns and motifs that defined Canadian literature in contradistinction to the English and USAmerican traditions. The hint leaves little doubt as to the target of Davey's essay, namely the thematic criticism inspired by Northrop Frye's *The Bush Garden* (1971) that was then holding sway over studies of English-Canadian literature. *Surviving the Paraphrase* thus heralded the sharp cultural turn that followed the Centennial decade, an intense period of reflection when the nation both celebrated and reassessed the first hundred years of the independence it was granted in 1867. The 1970s thus inaugurated the phase when literary criticism vacated the scene and critique made its entrance.

Foucault's thought played a prominent role in this mutation, which is the reason why his writings retain an aura somewhat different from that of his customary companions on the reading lists of graduate courses in North-American universities (see Cusset 2003). His *Archeology of Knowledge* had a strong impact on the Canadian avant-garde of the 1980s, particularly on Robert Kroetsch whose essays extensively relied on Foucault' epistemological model to confront "the coerced unity of traditional history" that erased postcolonial discontinuities (Kroetsch 1980: 585; see also Calder and Wardhaugh 2005: 8, Fee 2015: 27-36; Thieme 2016: 6). The examination of the discursive formations undergirding English-Canadian literature that began with Robert Kroetsch's reading of Foucault has not ceased, far from it. But whereas the critics of previous decades could be under the impression that they formed a unanimous, progressive front that "largely identif[ied] problems as external to their work" (Cho 2019: 26), today's debates have exposed divides that cut across the humanities, forcing literary scholars to acknowledge the embedding of the institutions that employ them and fund their research within the very structures of power they intend to undermine. Lili Cho ponders this Foucauldian imbrication in "Inhabiting Discomfort," her own contribution to the *Canadian Literature 60th Anniversary* forum:

> We have to be deeply uncomfortable with the fact that the field has been founded on legacies of settler colonialism that continue to permeate every facet of our work, that we haven't mourned the role of the field in the colonial project (and not just in terms of obvious places such as Duncan Campbell Scott, but also in the less obvious ones such as the unfinished work of hearing Lee Maracle's call […] for understanding how diasporic subjects can, however unwittingly, serve as settlers). (Cho 2019: 27)[5]

The present essay takes its cue from the malaise Cho succinctly evokes, a condition which does not only affect the descendants of settlers and diasporic subject once they have renounced the innocence of the newcomer. Indeed, a similar unease is also perceptible among scholars who teach and research English-Canadian literature in European universities, but do

[5] Duncan Campbell Scott was deputy superintendent of the Department of Indian Affairs (1913-1932) and a member of Canada's Confederation Poets. His name remains associated with the aggressive assimilationist policies implemented in the 1920s and -30s to "get rid of the Indian problem," as he phrased it (qtd in McGregor, Rak and Wunker 2018: 79).

not see the contradictions in which their material is hamstrung diminish with the distance separating them from the Canadian cultural arena. Gillian Roberts' testimony about her own experience as a British academic external to, yet involved in the field is quite evocative of the implications this position entails:

> Teaching Canadian literature and culture at all in my institution is, in some sense, to promote Canada. So even if I teach from a position of critique of the settler-colonial project that is Canada, and even if Global Affairs Canada no longer funds my doing so, I don't think I can escape […] this sense of promotion. […] I am also mindful of the contradiction of writing about and teaching resistant work under the umbrella of Canadian literature when that work actively refuses Canada itself. (2019: 22-23)

For scholars involved in Canadian studies from afar, is there a way these inner contradictions could also be enabling ones? If discomfort causes unease, what repositioning or critical adjustments does it encourage in the ways the Canadian literatures are studied in various academic traditions and institutions? Is a plural form federative enough to accommodate the full linguistic and cultural diversity of the category of "Canadian literature," the deceptive singular term frequently used as a synecdoche for an "English-Canadian" literature which has become increasingly diverse, multilingual and transnational over the last decade (Martin 2013: xvii)? Finally, should literature by Canada's First Nations be included into the disputed academic institution and disciplinary field known as "CanLit" (Coupal 2020, Justice 2018)? Or should it be left out and preferably approached as Indigenous Literatures *in* Canada, in abidance with the third principle in Younging's *Elements of Indigenous Style*:

> Indigenous Literatures are their own canon and not a subgroup of CanLit. Contemporary Indigenous authors' works are an extension of Traditional Knowledge systems, Indigenous histories, histories of colonization, and contemporary realities. Indigenous Literatures frame these experiences for Indigenous readers and provide non-Indigenous readers with context for these realities. (2018: 15; see also "Possessives that offend" 91)

These questions are unlikely to receive definitive answers in the limited scope of an essay, particularly at a time when the resurgence of Indigenous cultures, the calls for reconciliation and social justice are prompting vigorous discussions across Canada's civil society and universities. What follows is an outsider's contribution to the collective reflection on these matters. It takes as its cornerstone the "ethic of discomfort" Michel Foucault once advocated to counter the immobility threatening within any established code of conduct, or institution. The next section will present the academic institutions through which the Canadian literatures written in English have been made available to students and scholars in French universities in comparison to the place they occupy in the English departments of Canadian universities. This overview of the shaping of Canadian literary studies into a discipline will lead me to consider the changes the resurgence of Indigenous cultures are presently introducing within the field. I will take as an example the ethical dimension of the

land acknowledgement that has now become a preliminary ritual allowing Canadian writers and scholars to situate themselves, at home and abroad, with respect to the land they inhabit and its Indigenous populations. The essay will finally move on to interrogate some of the options available in France for scholars writing about Canadian and Indigenous literatures, two overlapping fields in which acknowledging discomfort makes it possible to simultaneously claim and question the place one occupies as an outsider.

Foucault's "Ethic of Discomfort"

The title for this paper stems from the translation Paul Rabinow proposed for "Pour une morale de l'inconfort," a book review Michel Foucault devoted to Jean Daniel's *L'Ere des ruptures,* and originally published in *Le Nouvel Observateur* in 1979. At that time Jean Daniel was the editor-in-chief of the famous weekly, alongside Claude Perdriel with whom he had co-founded the left-wing news magazine in 1964. "Pour une morale de l'inconfort" used *L'Ere des ruptures* as a springboard to reflect upon the disorientation of the French Left after the ideological tenets of the counterrevolution started to yield under the pressure of the historical transformations of the 1970s. In the aftermath of the Vietnam War, the disillusion of the colonial independences compounded with rampant conflicts and violence in the Middle East forced many Left-wing supporters to question their political allegiances when groping for a tenable position. Paul Rabinow's comments on Foucault's review contain elements of contextualization well worth an extensive quotation:

> Who one is, Foucault wrote, emerges acutely out of the problems with which one struggles. In the review, he phrased his approach in a manner so as to distance it from Sartre and his version of the committed intellectual: "Experience with […] rather than engagement in […]" Privileging experience over engagement makes it increasingly difficult to remain "absolutely in accord with oneself," for identities are defined by trajectories, not by position taking. Such an attitude is an uncomfortable one insofar as one risks being mistaken and is vulnerable to the perfect hindsight of those who adopt firm positions (especially after events have passed) or who speak assuredly of universals as though the singular were secondary. To that extent, one could say, adopting a distinction Foucault developed in his work […], that this attitude is rooted in an ethics and not a morality, a practice rather than a vantage point, an active experience rather than a passive waiting. (Foucault 1994: xix)

The adhesion defining the Sartrian engagement serves as a foil to distinguish the praxis, the non-totalizing experience with the singular that orients Foucault's political thought. The dialectical interaction in Aristotle's philosophy between *ēthos* (character, attitude, dwelling-place) and *ethos* (use, habit or custom) prepared for an evolution in the modern conception of ethics from one grounded on the respect of usage (and rules) to one resting upon decisions engaging the subject's responsibility (Cassin 2004: 695-696). Ethics is thus both dependent upon and threatened by stability. This paradoxical pull is embedded in the etymology of the

stable to which cattle return once their animal instincts have been reined in, an apt image for the regularity of customs, the habits that guide but also limit individual choices (Pelluchon 2018: 212). The contrast justifies why Rabinow chose to translate the original *morale* as "ethic" rather than the word-for-word "morality." Whereas the latter requires the kind of observance that will occasionally encourage self-righteousness, an ethic calls for responsible choices that imply an exposure to risk revelatory of one's vulnerability. That is why Rabinow insists that Foucault viewed ethics as a practice quite distinct from position stating. If an ethic of discomfort is to be understood as a "trajectory," the philosopher and his disciples must become reconciled with uncertainty. Unsettling as this acceptance may be, it should not be regarded as a weakness but as an antidote against the dogmatism and complacency Foucault chastised in the figure of the public intellectual Jean-Paul Sartre popularized (Foucault 1994: 322; Brass 2014: 94-96). Foucault drives this point home in the review's concluding paragraph which expands on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's resolve to "never consent to be completely at ease with what seems evident to oneself" (qtd in Foucault 1979: 83). Praising discomfort as an ethical goad in his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, Merleau-Ponty asserted the value of stoic doubt embodied in Epictetus' ungainly gait, preparing for the memorable admission that philosophy limps, but in its limping also lies its virtue (Merleau-Ponty 1989: 59; 61). If philosophy is a way of seeing the world askance, the discomfort that results induces an alertness to the contradictions and paradoxes through which philosophy problematizes its concerns. Foucault rephrases this condition as "une éthique de l'évidence sans sommeil" (1979: 83), an ethic of restless watchfulness, implying that philosophical inquiry rarely sits placidly within the walls of an institution, no matter how venerable, wherever knowledge and power mutually sustain each other. This interdependence should become clear enough in the next section that reviews the transformations through which the Canadian literatures have gained academic recognition, and become a legitimate field of teaching and scholarship in Canada and overseas.

Institutions, at Home and Abroad

In 2012, Stephen Harper's conservative government terminated the "Understanding Canada" program which had been funding research in Canadian studies overseas since 2008. The four-year program itself could be viewed as a receding comet tail, an indication of the waning of Canada's "cultural policy as diplomacy" (Kamboureli 2017: 17) that was launched after the Massey Commission (1951) recommended the development of a robust cultural industry so as

to foster enough national sentiment in Canada to resist the ideological seduction of communism during the Cold War. Even after the peril diminished with the disintegration of the Eastern bloc, successive Canadian governments went on investing into the cultural sector to instil collective values into an increasingly diverse population. Government support to Canadian arts and culture only began to lose its priority with the rise of globalization many associated with the demise of the nation-state (Davey 1993). Another consequence of the emergence of multipolarism was the undermining of area studies in most Western universities and the birth of Cultural Studies at the intersection of various disciplines (Jay 2010). Irresistible as this global evolution may seem in retrospect, it has had little impact on English studies in France where a "highly regimented education system" (Martin 2013: 53) resting on national teaching certifications has maintained barriers between the periods and geographical areas that determine faculty hiring, research affiliations and government funding.

Because area studies remain the norm in French universities, Canadian literary studies have been occupying a distinctive position in the academic landscape where they first emerged as a result of Canada's post-war soft power strategy.[6] In 1970, Jean-Michel Lacroix initiated the collegial move that created the first pluridisciplinary centre for Canadian studies in Bordeaux, a preliminary step before the foundation of the French Association for Canadian Studies (AFEC) in La Sorbonne Nouvelle six years later. On the international level, the state-sponsored promotion of scholarly interests in Canadian culture led to the creation of the International Council for Canadian Studies (ICCS) in 1981. The fostering of Canadian studies beyond the national borders subsequently stimulated interest in Canadian contents from many disciplines within the Humanities, from Francophone literature to law and political sciences, which makes the AFEC a unique association gathering scholars from very diverse academic backgrounds. Today, Canadian contents feature on the curricula of a small number of "departments of anglophone studies" – the umbrella term used in France to cover the plurality of the English-speaking world – mainly in universities where the AFEC established one of its thirteen regional centres. As for Canadian *literary* studies, they also remain quite marginal in terms of teaching and researching, on account of their ambivalent place within the academic institution, since geography makes them part of North-American studies although they have been notoriously resisting the orbiting pull of USAmerican specialization. For some French scholars, developing research that straddles the 49th Parallel has stimulated energizing

[6] Regarding the belated development of Canadian studies in Europe, Kamboureli notes: "[W]hile the United States proceeded from a status of hegemonic self-confidence, Canada acted from a locus of self-awareness about its paradoxical position – paradoxical because Canada emerged from the Second World War as a major international player but one that lacked a strong cultural signature" (2017: 14).

comparatist approaches (see for instance the pioneer work of Danielle Pitavy and Bernadette Rigal-Cellard in the 1990s). For others, including myself, affiliating with postcolonial studies has been an opportunity to investigate the complex colonial legacy that continues to distinguish Canada from the USA and the sly forms of resistance the former opposes to the latter's political, economic and cultural clout. In this respect, the North-American context in which English-Canadian literature developed makes it quite unique among the various literatures in English born out of the colonial encounter in Britain's former empire.[7]

The kind of discomfort I had in mind when responding to the invitation to contribute to this special issue of *L'Atelier* acquires another dimension when shifting the perspective to Canada where Canadian literary studies hardly occupy the comfortable because undisputed place of a national literature ensconced within its home territory. Back in 1975, the Symons Report established that the literatures of Canada represented only 8% of the total offerings in Canadian universities (Martin 2013: 42, 131). The surveys Paul Martin successively led in 1997-1998 and 2007-2008 showed, in accordance with Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction, that the British tradition and Arnoldian excellence remained the pillars of literary programs in Canadian universities well into the twentieth-first century (2013: 51-58, 91; Kamboureli 2020: 13). Martin proffers several reasons that may account for the subtle forms of cultural conservatism that can still be observed in Canadian academic institutions. As a former colony that never waged a war of independence, Canada struggled to disengage itself from the Romantic nationalist philosophy holding that national literatures are written in one language only. The European model has proved difficult to reconcile with the multilingual, multicultural literatures produced in Canada, the consequence of its dual colonial history and an ongoing vigorous immigration policy. Whereas the study of francophone literature has traditionally been encouraged in the French departments of Quebecois universities to counter the pervasive influence of the English language,[8] the core of the syllabi in the English departments of Canadian universities has traditionally privileged British or American contents. In most Canadian universities, it is only after they have earned a BA in English that students can enrol in Masters featuring a sizeable offer in English-

[7] Another consequence of Britain's imperial expansion was the development of English studies overseas for the purpose of training the local clerks the colonial bureaucracy required, in the spirit of Macaulay's 1835 "Minute on Indian Education" (Martin 2013: 6-7). By way of contrast, the classical humanities – Greek and Latin – reigned quite unchallenged on the syllabi of British private schools and top universities at least until WWI.

[8] Martin is careful to nuance his argument as regards francophone literature from Québec, Manitoba or Acadia which fares comparatively better because it is compulsory to study francophone literature in the last two years of the French-Canadian high school prior to attending a French-speaking university. Undergraduates thus acquire a more robust knowledge of the field than what may be achieved in an optional course in (English-)Canadian literature for English-major students in the rest of the country.

Canadian literature.[9] Since the turn of the millennium, the inclusion of First Nations and diasporic texts has helped renovating academic curricula and diversifying the canon they validate (Martin 2013: 175). Putting the spotlight on contemporary writing, perhaps to the detriment of earlier, foundational texts, has been an effort on the part of instructors to connect with diversity in their classrooms, as a result of the demographic trends that presently affect a country where immigration is now responsible for most of its population growth (StatCan).

These transformations have received sustained attention from literary scholars who have engaged in a thorough critique of how Canada has historically managed the heterogeneity of its populations so as to suppress dissent. For some Canada has clearly remained "a liberal democracy with a colonial heart" (Bannerji 2000: 75), despite the lip service paid to the federal policy of multiculturalism enshrined in the Canadian constitution since 1982.[10] Like Bannerji, Barbara Godard eloquently warned against a celebration of diversity that, in effect, "[was] a way of containing it" (2000: 229), an argument that has remained central to the protests surrounding the highly-publicized commemorations of "Canada 150." This collective, critical endeavour has gained momentum with the restructuring of the departments of English encouraged by the rise of Cultural Studies and the impetus it gave to the critical examination of the role of literature plays in identity politics and the buttressing of the national project. Placing the onus on critiquing the operations of patriarchal discourse, institutionalized racism, models of white civility and the duplicities of redress has shifted the center of gravity of literary studies in Canada away from textual analysis towards reception and the shaping role of literary representation on reading constituencies (Coleman 2006). Another consequence of this reflexive approach has been the critical understanding of "CanLit" as a scholarly enterprise shaped by various forces of legitimation. School syllabi, university curricula, literary journals, publishing rationales, literary awards and radio programs such as "Canada Reads" operate in conjunction to legitimate a literary canon which has been receiving sustained scholarly attention because of the cementing role it has never ceased to play in the imaginary mosaic that constitutes Canada as a nation.[11]

[9] As of August 2021, none of the sixty Masters in literature on offer in Canadian universities was exclusively devoted to the study of the national literatures, https://www.mastersportal.com/search/master/literature/canada?page=3, accessed 10 August 2021. At the undergraduate level, the university of Victoria (BC) remains the exception with a joint BA in English- and French-Canadian Literature.

[10] For a detailed overview of the political history of multiculturalism in Canada as an alternative to the USAmerican model of assimilation, see Jedwab 2020.

[11] This recognition received a precocious formulation from Quebecois scholars who argued in favour of "the nationalisation of literature" (Roy 1907). It is ironical that the same idea should have been taken up by the English-speaking elite after WW2 to foster national sentiment through the funding of Canadian cultural

Uncomfortable Acknowledgements

The same collective effort has also yielded research showing that discomfort continues to permeate discussions of Canadian "topocentrism" – Leon Surette's felicitous term – no matter the angle chosen to address its persistence in critical discourse. A case in point is the compulsive return to the interrogation framed by Northrop Frye when he observed that "Canadian sensibility is less perplexed by the question 'Who am I?' than by some such riddle as 'Where is here?'."[12] Dislocation is indeed constitutive of the formation of settler-invader cultures and their ambivalent desire "to differentiate themselves from their imperial origins by establishing a literary idiom representative of the local even while craving recognition from the metropole under the rubric of its presumed universal literary values" (Kamboureli 2014: 1). For Kamboureli, its historical "elsewhereness" has been forcing CanLit into an untenable position (2014: 5), the result of its double inscription within a settler-invader culture that looks back to its colonial antecedents, retaining them as frames of reference even when claiming to subvert them, while failing to address in the present the persistent violence perpetrated against the Indigenous populations displaced by white settlement, but also against other minoritized groups standing in the way of nation-building. The repression of this foundational violence – and its return under various ghostly guises – has received close scrutiny in recent years (see Kertzer 1998; Turcotte & Sugars 2009; Coleman 2006) leading to a pervasive hauntology which, Kamboureli insists, can be dialectically surpassed. Acknowledging the many ways in which the Indigenous Peoples of Canada inhabit the present and their participation in the Canadian polity offers ways out of the nation's Oedipal search for autonomy. In her discussion of Indigenous relational models, Kamboureli initially argued that the notion of kinship could present an alternative to the violence attendant to the colonial family allegory and the Freudian models of Oedipal individuation implicit in Canada's "coming of age" (Kamboureli 2014: 16-19). The reframing of settler/First Nations relations in a period of intense debates about reconciliation found another platform of expression during the conference entitled "Mikinaakominis TransCanadas: Literature, Justice, Relation" which Smaro Kamboureli organized in collaboration with Larissa Lai at the

industries. The initial formulation will have several spin-offs, one being the "nationalisation of nature" that has been playing an essential role in English-Canadian literature from the nineteenth century onwards (Dean 2017).

[12] The tendency is rather confounding, even among scholars intent on going beyond Frye's famous pronouncement in his conclusion to a *Literary History of Canada* (1965) republished in *The Bush Garden* (1971). See, among others, Surette 1982. Godard's seminal essay, "Notes from the Cultural Field," starts, once again, with Frye's "celebrated koan" (2000: 211).

University of Toronto in May 2017 as a critical counterpoint to consensual, world-wide celebrations of "Canada 150." The choice of the Ojibwa word for "Turtle Island" to name the fourth and final instalment of the TransCanada conference series had the value of a strong ethical imperative demanding that the participants "expand the ongoing dialogue about the relationship of Canadian literatures to land, Indigenous resurgences, and Black, Muslim, Asian and other racialized subjectivities in the context of global human, non human, economic, social and ecological shifts."[13] This mandate invited the question of indigeneity and its articulation with the claims of other minoritized groups within the walls of a most venerable institution, an architectural symbol of the foundations of settler colonialism.

The event, however, did not quite meet the intent. The second day of the conference began with the intervention of a Black studies scholar who opened the plenary session claiming that CanLit remained a bastion of whiteness, an elitist institution indifferent to Black voices and their literary expression. He then solemnly declared that he was "quitting CanLit," stood up and left the premises.[14] The interruption set the conference on an altogether different tack: it redirected the general attention to the movement #BlackLivesMatter, with a substantial part of the debates veering towards the social networks beyond the university walls. Palpable unease followed insofar as the claim "challenged those comfortably situated within the field to consider what their presence demonstrates about how race continues to overdetermine power and opportunity in Canadian cultural production" (van der Marel 2020: 52). Although the struggle against racial inequality would certainly have rallied support among the Indigenous people who were concurrently protesting all over the country against 150 years of colonialization, the rallying cry in favour of Black activism had the effect of a parasitic interference troubling the signal sent by conference. An event initially planned to honour Indigenous Peoples while encouraging critical reflection on what literature and scholarship may achieve in terms of social justice, met a discordance that revealed the slipperiness of acknowledgements, the visibility they give to some while obliterating the place of others in the country's fraught history of racial relations.

The dynamic of adhesion/exclusion underlying the acknowledgement process does not reach outwards only. The speech act bounces back on the speaker, asserting reflexively the position of the subject of the enunciation who "does" or performs the acknowledging. A

[13] Conference programme, http://smarokamboureli.ca/transcanada-institute-archive/conferences/transcanada2017/. The preceding conferences in the series, TransCanada One 2005, TransCanada Two 2007 and TransCanada Three 2009 were all convened under the same heading "Literature, Institutions, Citizenship."

[14] For detailed discussion of the episode, see Kamboureli 2020. A volume gathering a selection of the talks presented during the Mikinaakominis conference is about to be published after five years of editorial gestation.

similar deduction may be drawn from the Haudenosaunee smudging ceremony that opened the Mikinaakominis conference, translating into an embodied performance the words of the land acknowledgement printed on the first page of the conference programme:

> We wish to acknowledge that the land on which the University of Toronto stands has been a site of human activity for 15,000. This land is the territory of the Huron-Wendat and Petun First Nations, the Seneca, and most recently the Mississaugas of the Credit River. The Territory was the subject of the *Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant*, an agreement between the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and the Confederacy of the Anishnaabek and Allied nations to Peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes. Toronto is still home to many Indigenous Peoples from across Turtle Island, and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work in the community of this territory. (Conference programme 1)

Prominent Indigenous figures – Elders from the Thames First Nation as well as Aboriginal writers – members of the organizing team and guest speakers, formed a procession in the Great Hall of Hart House and fell in solemn step with the drum and song of the Wahahi:o Singers. The procession was a visual enactment of the *following* of Indigenous Protocols, namely the requirement to use Indigenous cultural material in an appropriate, respectful manner (Younging 2018: 35). The choreography turned Hart House into a space where the presence and precedence of Indigenous Peoples could be asserted, while welcoming outsiders and the rest of conference attendees into to the ritual, either as participants or as witnesses. While the opening ceremony harked back to the tradition of kinship and diplomacy for which the region of the Great Lakes has earned its renown as the "Dish With One Spoon,"[15] the procession also conferred a place on the conference hosts and their guests. It confirmed their status as recognized academics, the embodiments of the inclusiveness of Canadian universities[16] while sweetgrass smoke wafted up the oak panelling of Hart House to the beaming portraits of the wardens of Hart House, the chancellors and governors who have been at the helm of the University of Toronto since its creation – mostly men and all of them openly white.

In the exacerbated racial context of "Canada 150" the paintings exuded a sense of permanence that may have jarred on those who did not feel welcome at the symposium table, or comfortable with the reasons that justified their invitation in the first place. Their protest was a sobering demonstration of the risks of hospitality, its propensity to flip into hostility

[15] Eileen Antone, an Oneida of the Thames First Nation, spoke fervently of the pre-contact "Dish With One Spoon" during the plenary session of May 24, 2022. My response to her welcome took the shape of an essay listed in the works cited section.

[16] I am aware that this point is debatable and that some may view the public figures of Smaro Kamboureli and Larissa Lai as mere tokens of the willingness of Canadian academic institutions to open their doors to racialized people and other minoritized groups (see McGregor *et al* 2018: 20-21).

revealing the weak spots of collective bodies.[17] In a later piece ironically subtitled "Should I be Here?" (2020), Kamboureli painstakingly replaces the notion of "kinship" within an Indigenous context (5). She no longer uses the term in relation to the issue of reconciliation, but instead she argues in favour of "solidarities," a notion unencumbered by the mutual obligations cementing an Indigenous relational ontology. Expressing solidarity is indeed one-directional. The signification of the word is pliant enough to convey many kinds of support that do not require to be reciprocated to be valid. In that sense, expressions of solidarity in all avenues of public life, including academic teaching and research, is somewhat different from the ethical involvement at stake in land acknowledgements, a point that requires further elaboration.

From Land Acknowledgements to the Acknowledging of "Terristory"

Land acknowledgements have now become a norm, introducing all manners of public events in Canada and abroad. Even in foreign venues, it has become customary for Canadians speaking in public to utter a brief, formal statement acknowledging the anteriority of an Indigenous presence on the land they call home. The practice spread after the release of the *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* which, although it did not stipulate, or even recommend the need to acknowledge Aboriginal precedence, solemnly asked the Government of Canada to "[r]epudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous lands and peoples such as the Doctrine of Discovery and *terra nullius*" (2015: Call to action 45, §i). The many versions of the land acknowledgement now in currency could be viewed as a belated refutation (failing a legal repudiation) of the idea that Europeans were ever entitled to claim Indigenous territory in the name of their sovereigns and trading companies. The recent evolution of the land acknowledgement into a collective performance therefore has something both poignant and futile about it. The ritual expresses a genuine trust in the performativity of language, namely the power of words to honour and make amend under certain, adequate circumstances. Under no circumstances, however, has the acknowledging of traditional territory actually restored Indigenous sovereignty over unceded land, or redressed violated treated rights, as evinced by the ongoing court battles on

[17] Emile Benveniste, Michel Serres and Jacques Derrida have all pondered the ambivalence of the Latin etymon *hostis* and its cognates "hospitality" and "hostility." "There are some black spots in language," Serres points out. "The field of the host is one such dark puddle. In the logic of exchange, or really instead of it, it manages to hide who the receiver is and who the sender is, which one wants war and which one wants peace and offers asylum" (1982: 16).

First Nations land claims, or the actions taken to protect Indigenous traditional territories from the encroachment of the extractive economy.

Dismissing land acknowledgements as mere virtue-signalling or, more disturbingly, as a pernicious effect of the colonial mentality,[18] does not dispel the discomfort perceptible in audiences whenever the ritual turns into a mindless roll of tribal names, a perfunctory preliminary oblivious of the ethical values it seeks to assert:

> At bottom of the acknowledgment, unintentionally, are essential human questions of ethics and the ephemerality of all history and what it means to live on the earth. Whenever I hear the acknowledgment read out loud, it provokes strongly conflicted feelings in me. It reveals to me the sinking burden of my own ignorance – who are the Wendat? (Marche 2017: 4)

Although the punch line targets an indifference that voids the acknowledgement of its primary purpose, there is more to the question than a candid admission of ignorance. Asking "who are the Wendat?" implicitly returns the speaker to an encounter with otherness that is still playing itself out in the colonial interactions of the present, and exposes the fragility of the latecomers' position through the boomerang effect Homi Bhabha once famously identified:

> The colonialist demand for narrative carries, within it, its threatening reversal: *Tell us why we are here.* It is this echo that reveals that the other side of narcissistic authority may be the paranoia of power; a desire for 'authorization' in the face of a process of cultural differentiation which makes it problematic to fix the native objects of colonial power as the moralized 'others' of truth. (Bhabha 1994: 99-100)

The attendees of the Mikinaakominis conference witnessed a similar reversal on the concluding plenary session, when Indigenous artists and scholars urged the audience to consider that First Nations do not need non-Indigenous people to learn more about them, emphasizing that centuries of anthropological, scientific, and artistic research have contributed to the disruption of Indigenous cultures, sometimes with the best intentions in mind.[19] Instead, they declared that the academic community would be far more supportive of Indigenous interests should non-Indigenous researchers confront their own ignorance about whiteness, and study the power structures that sustain the racialization and marginalisation of others.

This demand for self-examination has notable precedents in Canada's colonial history, among which the anecdote that inspired Edward Chamberlin with a title that has by now become a classic in Canadian studies:

[18] Relying on Coulthard's work on the politics of recognition, Margery Fee opposes "the transformative process of 'desubjectification'" to the dubious effects of land acknowledgements: "This desubjectification is important for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike. Offering to recognize Indigenous people (or expecting forgiveness and recognition from them) is simply to run around the same old colonizing discursive tracks" (2015: 221; see also Marche 2017: 4).

[19] Cf. Linda Smith's outcry: "The term 'research' is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, 'research' is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary" (cited in Battiste 2008: 497, see also Clifford 2013).

> It happened at a meeting between an Indian community in northwest British Columbia and some government officials. The officials claimed the land for the government. The natives were astonished by the claim. They couldn't understand what these relative newcomers were talking about. Finally one of the elders put what was bothering them in the form of a question. "If this is your land," he asked, "where are your stories?" He spoke in English, but then he moved into *Gitskan*, the *Tsimshian* language of his people – and told a story. (2003: 1)

The Elder's reaction to British claims spoke of cultural practices that fuse land and story into "a plural and ongoing set of relations," an idea which has endured as "a powerful source of Indigenous sovereignty" (Cariou 2020: 2) and sustains the remarkable resurgence of Indigenous cultures Canada is witnessing today. For Indigenous Peoples, Warren Cariou insists, "land and stories [are] aspects of the same thing – or not thing, but action, relation, energy, location," a mutual enfolding for which he proposes to use the portmanteau word "terristory" to counter assumptions that the land has no narrative agency.

He contends on the contrary that "[Indigenous] understandings of story reverse the trajectory of signification that has been normalized in the West since Plato and Aristotle: instead of humans telling stories to mimetically represent the land, it is the land itself that communicates to humans through the stories" (2020: 1). The duality Cariou targets conflates several moments in Western thought, from the expressiveness Aristotelian mimesis searched to achieve in its representation of nature to the Cartesian division between thinking subject and inert object, *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, a later stage in the separation that prepared for modernity and the emergence of an impoverished sense of nature divorced from culture (Descola 2005: 12). The effort to explicate what makes "terristory" a specific dimension of Indigenous Knowledge may explain why Cariou does not mention a concurrent Western tradition, rooted in pre-modern myth, which has never ceased to inspire poets, from Ovid to the British Romantics and contemporary nature writers, in which the writer's task is primarily one of attention and humility. Relinquishing one's individuality to become attuned to the particulars of place and conversant with its *genius loci* has remained one of the great constants through which Western art, and particularly poetry, has pushed back against the forces of rationalism. What distinguishes Indigenous "terristory" from the land claims found in settler literature has perhaps less to do with the dichotomies of Western thought than with the difficulties newcomers have paying heed to what the land says when what the land says remains unintelligible to them or questions their presence (Fee 2015: 41; Lilburn 2007: 45).

Gregory Younging's *Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing by and About Indigenous Peoples* is an editorial manual that doubles up as a political manifesto, instructing readers how to conduct research in the field of Indigenous studies and present their results. In his introduction, Younging emphasizes that "[t]here's a growing awareness that you can't just

'take the stories'" and use them to suit your own needs, or agendas (2018, xiv). The choice of the verb "take" (preferably to "borrow" for instance) is far from accidental. It alludes to other forms of taking with no return or compensation, among which the assimilation policies that have caused Indigenous children to be forcibly taken away from their families in order to stop the transmission of Indigenous languages and cultures,[20] the enduring tradition of imposter literature (Younging 2018: 9-10) and, beyond, all the controversies surrounding cultural appropriation. For Younging, Battiste and many other Indigenous scholars who have taken stands against the forms of appropriation scholarly research encourages, stories are always more than words recorded on tape or arranged on the page. They express a vital connection between the land and Indigenous Peoples. In this sense, they are "world-making," thereby collapsing Western distinctions between fact and fiction, history and myth.

The assumption that stories being stories and fiction being fiction, they can be handled creatively, that is borrowed from, quoted, circulated, and interpreted, is no longer acceptable: "Non-Indigenous authors do not have the same artistic license [as their Indigenous analogues]. They need to enter into a relationship with the Indigenous Nation that is the source of the Traditional Knowledge and Oral Tradition they seek to use" (Younging 2018: 16). The protocols identified in *Elements of Indigenous Style* call into question the universalism of Western thought and a freedom of expression valued since the Enlightenment, namely the liberty to carry out the research of our choice, while relying on methods of our choice, leading to results that will be assessed by our peers through the blind vetting process that guarantees absolute fairness, or so we want to think. *Elements of Indigenous Style* demonstrates, however, academic freedom ought not to be confused with academic licence. Academic freedom comes with a sense of responsibility, less to our peers than to the Peoples whose cultural productions we purport to study.

I will conclude this essay on a personal note. Indigenous Literatures and the history of settler-Indigenous relations in Canada fascinate my students. Having discussed various aspects of the discomfort that permeates the field since "Canada 150," it should come as no surprise that I have grown increasingly uneasy with the authority I profess when supervising research in this domain. The methods, concepts, and critical positioning required to study Indigenous Literatures and handle the knowledge they impart have therefore become matters of concern for me, a rather unlikely development for one raised in the great post-structuralist

[20] The most notorious example being the "Sixties Scoop," *i.e.* "the large-scale removal or 'scooping' of Indigenous children from their homes, communities and families of birth through the 1960s, and their subsequent adoption into predominantly non-Indigenous, middle-class families across the United States and Canada" (Sinclair and Dainard 2020).

tradition of death of the author and devotion to discursive formations. In the classroom, I frequently end up feeling like a spoilsport whenever I ask students to question their curiosity as a necessary preliminary, and identify the expectations that inform the "white man's [vision of the] "Indian" (Berkhofer 1978). Extending these recommendations to myself, exercising reflection about my choices in terms of syllabus or research has led me to question the validity of my position as an outsider. Many non-Indigenous scholars have been wrestling with issues of positionality since Helen Hoy published *How Should I Read These? Native Women Writers in Canada* twenty years ago. But what options are there today for European scholars who, although they are "supportive of Indigenous Peoples' political and cultural aspirations," are wary of the war of position that would logically place them on the side of "an allied academic literature" (Younging 2018: 10). What place is allotted to those who remain outside this alliance? Has the cultural field become so entrenched that diplomacy has shed all of its nuances?

This is where I believe the acknowledgement of one's lack of expertise in the face of Indigenous "terristory" may indeed have value. I am no expert in the studying of Canada's Indigenous Literatures, and neither do I intend to be more than an *amateur*, in the literal sense of the word. But I am a qualified reader. It is as a reader that I am addressed when literature by Indigenous writers reaches me through the global networks of the publishing industry. Introducing Canada's Indigenous Literatures into our French syllabi, welcoming these texts into our classrooms, hosting Indigenous writers in our conferences implies greeting their foreignness with diplomacy. It implies expressing interest, a word that problematizes dualities and dissolves confrontational logics. Interest paradoxically designates the difference that lies *inter,* or between, individuals – the commonality that brings them together not in spite of their differences but *because* of them. I do not study Indigenous Literatures because of a dubious universality. I study Indigenous Literatures because of the interest these texts arouse in me and in my students, because they bring us to reckon with what we do not know or find hard to understand, including about ourselves. This does not quite sound like an acknowledgement, more like an admission, or a point to start from, no matter how uncomfortably.

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