An open letter addressing the issues and state of affairs within cultural journals: we solicit opinions, critiques and submissions.

The Novel of Quebec

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The Language of Difference: Writing in QUEBECois)

Yale French Studies, 65 (1983)

Sociologies de la littérature

Etudes françaises, 19, 3 (hiver 1984-5)

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The study of Canadian and Quebec literatures is perennially accused of being parochial. While comparative studies of either of them in connection with other literatures have been few, most of the novel-gazing has been the consequence of a lack of international critical interest in them. Things have been changing of late on all sides of the relevant borders.

The title of a special issue of Mosaic edited by Robert Krocetsch in 1981 bore aloft the title ‘Beyond Nationalism’, echoing the standard raised in a 1977 issue of Studies in Canadian Literature, ‘Métis Canadian’ in the fight for literature qua literature that would have behind a preoccupation with Canadian specificity. Notable in both cases was the introduction of structuralist and post-structuralist approaches to literature. And it is the impact of this newest of critical strategies that has also prompted the opening up of Quebec’s literary frontiers. This happens from within, in the issue of the Université de Montréal periodical, Études françaises, devoted to literary sociology, for here we find a number of contributions in translation from Anglo-Canadians, even an article on the literary sociology of English-Canadian literature which, given the stated mandate of the periodical, constitutes a border violation of the first order. So too does the presence of Frederic Jamieson represented by an article on mass culture which focuses on American culture. It appears also in the Yale French Studies’ Quebec issues wearing a different hat, as French scholar, in a study of Aquin’s revolution which he perceives as staged within the confines of a room within a room. In this guise, Jamieson exhibits the other opening of the borders which has occurred in recent years as a result of the very active promotion of Canadian and Quebec culture abroad by the Ministry of External Affairs and the Quebec delegations. The Association of Canadian Studies in the United States is a flourishing affair. Equally active is the North East Council of Quebec Studies whose members have contributed both to the 1975 issue and to L’Esprit créateur.

Both issues are devoted to introducing Quebec literature to American readers, though the fact that both the Yale and the Advocates has been completed, and reveals the fact that the books published by Laidlaw and the critical discourse makes it possible to see Quebec for the first time and consequently making its literature subject to the appropriation of criticism. The maypole around which the narrative strands of all three reviews weave themselves is the question of ideology and literature. Most brightly coloured of the streamers are those of feminism and of deconstruction—two modes of difference. Strangely, though, given this optic, there is an unfortunate lack of attention to the present occasion, that is to the ironic situation of publication within an American periodical.

Indeed, the whole issue of American imperialism is left to the side in articles which address the difference that Quebec writing inscribes in itself with respect to that of France. Occasionally, there is some discussion, especially in the many essays on Hubert Aquin who emerges as the most important Quebec writer from these collections, of the power relationships with the American Canadian culture. But of the United States, nothing. No essays on the American-ness of Quebec literature, on her lost son, Kerouac. These, however, as the teachers of Quebec literature in the United States will tell you, are the reasons that students flock to their courses, to reclaim their own Franco-American heritage. This strain is deeply buried here, visible only in the geographical locations from which these Quebec issues have emerged, namely from the Cajun stronghold of Louisiana, and from the Quebec Corporation, home of the factories that made les États into a 19th-century El Dorado for poor ‘habitants’. At this juncture, I should like to reshape the paradox enunciated by two of the contributors to The Language of Difference, and turn it back on the irony of the present instance of emunciation. In her study of the language of Quebec writing, Lisa Gauvin concludes:

In turn, Joseph Melançon concludes his study of ‘The Writing of Difference’ with a contradiction and to inscribe it in the form of writing used. The absurdity of it all is that this writing still reveals beneath the surface that it has been borrowed. Perhaps one day a literary work which accepts this absurdity and the consistency of decision will thus come into existence.

But what are we to make of the absurdity of this difference erased in translation into English? These questions are not addressed within the essays in the way Gauvin has pointed her finger at both European studies, like the Yale the first version of the essay. The study of the American reception of Quebec literature has been completed, and reveals the fact that the books published by Laidlaw and the critical discourse makes it possible to see Quebec for the first time and consequently making its literature subject to the appropriation of criticism. The maypole around which the narrative strands of all three reviews weave themselves is the question of ideology and literature. Most brightly coloured of the streamers are those of feminism and of deconstruction—two modes of difference. Strangely, though, given this optic, there is an unfortunate lack of attention to the present occasion, that is to the ironic situation of publication within an American periodical.

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discourse of power inform us, audacity, and daring are required through singularity of perspective, while all that it excludes on its way to the unique view of the world has the possibility of multiple perspectives, since this encompasses both the view of power and the excluded view.

What I have just defined is Bakhtin's concept of the monologic and the dialogic. And Bakhtin in *The eminence grise* (1985) and *The carnivalization of Quebec literature* (1989) has brought to light behind these three collections, explicitly brought into play in André Bellessais contributions, "Carnivalisation and roman québécois mise au point sur l'usage d'un concept de Bakhtine", in *Etudes françaises* and "Carnivalisation et roman québécois", in *L'Esprit créateur*, and in *Etudes québécoises*. The *Carnivalisation* and *roman québécois* are like "the novels of the novel" in *L'Esprit créateur*, and in *Etudes québécoises*. The Carnivalisation Hero in the Quebec Novel. For what Bakhtin has done through his concepts of the ideologeme and the carnivaleseque is to introduce a vocabulary to handle the problem of the interaction of the text, the author, and the society", an epistemological problem that Lucie Brind'Amour, guest editor of *L'Esprit créateur*, raises as the contribution of the general articles on Quebec literature in that special issue. However, Bakhtin's identification of specific literary devices for encoding ideological positions also replies to many of the criticisms raised by Marcel Fournier in his introduction to *Etudes françaises*, "Littérature et sociologie au Québec", regarding the methods of literary sociology practised by earlier sociologists like Lucien Goldberg. The deep structures sought by the latter that would link literary artifact and society have had to be transposed into the relevant codes: his system founders on the question of homology, of identity, of identity perceived. A typology of codes is necessary to extend Bakhtin's work to Quebec fiction, something Bellessais does in his article where he explores the conflicts of codes through close textual analysis which leads him to study the dissociation of the knowledge to speak, the duty to speak, the power to speak, and the desire to speak in Quebec fiction.

But as well as developing Bakhtin's theories. Bellessais like many of the other contributors to these issues, draws heavily on work in semiotics. As Bakhtin and Sar- konov comments in his editor's preface to "The Language of Difference", despite his own orientation to the problem evident in the title and the contributions of Melancon and C. Crevisio already discussed, traces of Derrida and Foucault are less frequently in- scribed in the texts than are those of Bakhtin and Barthes. And here the hegemony of Yale give way to that of Toronto. The former hosted an international conference on Bakhtin in the fall of 1985, and organized, in spring of 1985, in Toronto. In turn, is home of the Toronto Semiotic Circle and the International Summer School in Semiotics. Representatives of both are included in these issues;

Pierre Gobeil on the literary quality of Michel Tremblay's dramatic and prose, Renée Leduc-Park on repetitions in Ducharme, Oiseau Des- sette on his own writing—all in *Y*—and Agnes Whiffen on the character of the heroine in post-1960 fiction in *L'Esprit créateur*, all hail from Quebec. The Toronto group is probably best represented by Janet Paterson on Anne Beaubien's discussion of the unreal, Paul Perron on language and writing in Bessette's fiction, and Had- dukekwe on the novel. Bessette is a key figure here. As Sarbonak explains it, a semester of a course this year would seem to be the originating moment of the special Quebec issue. Its trace is to be found in the contribution of Jadwiga Selwo- niak, Gerard Bessette and His Dreams of "Generating" an essay for his course and one of the two American contributions to the issue. There is of course irony here for Bessette to become a major Quebec novelist when, as an intellectual, he has long been ex- ile from Quebec in order better to foster a critical attitude to its discourse. Is this also Sarbonak's aim as a Canadian exile in the US, to establish his perspective through an emphasis on norm and dis- tance?

Concentrating on close readings of the texts in question and identifying the literary codes, none of these contributions leads for the specular and tackles the issue of transcoding, an essential element in the establishment of equivalences between social and literary texts. Hope of such an undertak- ing is raised in *Etudes françaises* by Luc Racine's "Symbolic and analogy; 'l'enfant comme figure des origines', which in invoking figuration, especially symbol and analogy, promises to shed some light on the problematic relationship of author, text and society. This is later dashed by Racine's statement of intent to the effect that within his semiotic project, he will be descriptive. A much more probing study of these issues is that of Manon Brunet who, in "Pour une esthétique de la production de la réception", in *Etudes françaises*, introduces reader-response theory to fundamental epistemological problems in existing definitions of what reality is. Formalists and structuralists have understood the literary work as a concrete totality in its symbolic function. To reconcile the two, to bring together di- chotomic and synthetic approaches, to conceive of the work dialectically, is her aim. Rejecting the effects of both Goldmann with his structural homology and Pern- anon with his theory of literary evolution, Brunet finds a model in Hans Robert Jauet's reader-response theory. In this, the literary work is made concrete in the mo- ment of the actualization of a dia- logue in the interpretation of signi- fication. By adding to Jauet's anal- ysis one of literary practices, she hopes to arrive at a history of the production of reception. To do this, one must explore the virtual signification of the work, that is "the horizon of literary expectation," and also the effect produced by the work, "the horizon of social expectation," that is the history of the different questions posed by readers at different historical mo- ments and especially by those superreaders or agents of legitimation of symbolic goods found in the literary institutions. Through comparative analysis of the meaning offered by different groups of readers she hopes to escape the possible intuitive or subjective im- plications of this hermeneutic. This is a relatively complex and flexible approach which takes ac- count of the way individual read- ers are positioned by social forma- tions and, by shifting the grounds of the relationship between the social and the aesthetic to the activity of the historically-based reader, avoids many of the pitfalls of other sociologies of literature. Brunet's is the most forward-looking of the contributions on literary sociology, attempting to adapt the newest mode of literary theory to yet other uses, while most of the contributions are historical evalua- tions.

In trying to make a seamless whole of three different collecti- ons of essays, I have been doing some complicated feather-stitch- ing to put this crazy quilt together. The order I have been constructing has its basis in the nearly simulta- neous publication of these three periodicals and of their different implied readers. *L'Esprit créateur* includes texts from a wide geogra- phical range, including French cri- tics of Quebec literature, and more contributions by American writers than the other two periodicals. Consequently, there are more studies of specific works, fewer general studies, those latter presuming both a more know- ledgeable audience, but more spec- ifically, a more widely-read critic. The introductory nature of this collection is implied by the first essay on "Nationalité et na- tionalisme", in Quebec literature by Gilles Dorion which gives the venerable, though very necessary, periodization of Quebec litera- ture into the national novel, the nationalist novel, identity crisis, quiet revolution, autonomy re- conquered. This is introductory as an introductory lecture on Quebec literature for undergraduates, not
intended for experts. The same is true of Madeleine Durucq-Poirier's 'Les romançes québécoises et la condition féminine contemporaine', which gives a brief historical approach within an outlined image of women analysis, identifying a persisting image of alienated woman and a new group of feminist novelists. Happily this study is balanced by Karen Gould's analysis of Madeleine Gagnon which gives substance to this feminist writing. Here it surfaces in the archeaic language of the maternal body, dream-like syntax and visceral imagery. While not as extensive as an earlier essay by Gould on contemporary Quebec feminist writing that appeared in Signs, 'Unearthing the Female Text', it would do well in the collection 'The Language of Difference', where it answers the assertions made by Gauvin and Melançon that it is in contemporary feminism that writing that difference has been inscribed, not backed, however, by any concrete evidence within that volume. The close textual analyses of individual works in L'Esprit créateur—one on Hébert, three on Aupin, one on Ducharme—beg the question of the relationship of the aesthetic and the social by focussing on the former with generally satisfying results. However, Maurice Cognot's supposed 'lecture idéologique' of Yves Beauchemin's Le Marais is disappointing—merely a plot analysis of the novel, lacking in critical sophistication on the question addressed. The unevenness in the contributions, as well as the use of both English and French in this volume, betray an ambiguous implied reader.

The issue of Études françaises on 'Sociologies de la littérature', is diversified in the range of its contributors and comparative in its format, as befits its analysis of the pluralist situation of sociological perspectives on literature. As a summary of the 'state of the art', it aims at a general—and mainly literary—audience. It includes specific textual studies like those of Jameson and Racine, as well as one on the city of Montreal in the novel of the seventies, 'La stratégie du désordre' by Jean-François Chassay, which treats the interest in fragmentation and the city as a new phenomenon of that decade, ignoring the earlier phases of accommodation to the city sketched out in work by Antoine Sirois and Barbara Thompson published in the sixties. The issue also includes a section on position pieces attempting to reconcile the traditional hostility of formalist and sociological perspectives on literature by outlining new inter-relationships between them. Among these are Belliveau's development of Bakhtin's concept of carnivaleisation, Brunet's extension of reader-response theory and Greg Marc Nelson's 'L'exigence d'une sociologie critique' in which a model of 'homologie multidimensionnelle' is developed to account for interdiscursivity in the interaction of cultural praxis with the literary institution. By introducing the definition of the social discourse as everything that is said, 'the narratable and the argumentable in a given society', Nelson aims to move beyond Lukacs and Goldmann's fetishism of the classics of a culture. These new perspectives are placed in context by three introductory essays, Raymond A. Morrow's historical overview of the critical theories of Frankfort school and John D. Jackson's review article on the sociology of literature in England and Marcel Four- nier's comparable overview of activity in Quebec. These latter two should be translated into English and published again as a dipthych, for the perspectives they offer on their fields of milieux are almost diametrically opposed. Jackson comments on the lack of interest by Anglo-Canadian sociologists in the sociology of culture and can cite only a collection edited by Paul Cappon, a series of articles by the Graysons—all shaped by the mirror metaphor, so strongly contested by formalist approaches—and his own work with the Concordia group on popular culture as a cultural practice contesting the social structure. Literary scholars following in the wake of Frye and Mandel have taken up categories such as the garrison mentality, the frontier, etc., drawn from the socio-historical context, and accepted as real facts. The question of why this particular option, why this debate, is never asked. And as literary critics have been fighting out for a decade, such descriptive criticism is reducive of the complexity of both literary and social structures.

Against this depressing picture of activity in English Canada is the extremely rich history of literary sociology in Quebec in the last 20 years. Fourrier's article refers back to a 1964 conference in Laval published by Jean-Charles Falchadeau and Fernand Dumont which, despite attacks on the simplicity and rigidity of its empirical approach, provided a wealth of documentation on the material factors of literary production in Quebec and stimulated interest in the discipline. It had an impact on literary critics as evidenced in de Grandpré's L'Histoire de la littérature française du Québec, which avoided the extremes of a structuralist reading of the work or a reductive sociological one by placing the work of art and the artist in context. Fourrier lists many examples of such analyses before the 1974 publication of 'Sociologie et idéologie' in the review Sociologie et sociétés announced another shift in direction, the development of greater sophistication in both theory and methodology, direction that has marked all recent essays in literary periodicals such as Voix et images and continued in the theoretical speculation, manifested in the current special issue, marking a 20th anniversary. Fourrier himself qualifies Belliveau's optimism about the relationships of sociology and sociology, changing his term complementarily to complicity. In his conclusion, Fourrier sketches a conclusion in the grounds for evaluating the divergent interest and sophistication in literary sociology in the two Canadas when he underlines the main conditions of Quebec literary production, heavily subsidized by the government, whether in the form of direct grants to artists or in the form of government authorized purchase of their works which have been placed on college curricula. The Quebec author knows that the act of writing in French is, as Robert Schneid, on 'Ethical Engagement'. His alternative is silence and exile. But then, all Canadian writers are subjected to by the government. Why is this engagement not universally recognized as a political act? Echoking from the past are these traditional different definitions of nationalism and statehood given by francophone and anglophone Canadans. For the former, the nation-state is perceived as the flowering of a specific culture. Anglo-Canadians, on the other hand, have viewed culture as an activity of the spirit divorced from the state which is conceived in terms of economic and political union of divergent cultures. Obviously, a much longer history could be written on this subject. But these two articles offer an excellent starting point for anyone interested in such speculation.

'The Language of Difference: Writing in QUEBEC(09)', is, as I have suggested, an inner monologue by francophone Canadians which, written down, may be overheard by a wider audience. This dialogue with the self is ultimately what makes an interesting antology, for the articles present something that has not hitherto been available to anglophones, critical articles which reveal what Quebec literary scholars think of their own literature. Much of what is published in English on Quebec literature is intended for the neo-phyte. Not this collection, which can be read equally profitably by the expert or the greenhorn in the field. It does attempt a range of coverage, by including essays by Lawrence Malilho on the essay, by Michel Tremblay on 'Global, or the Formula and History', by Valerie Raoul on the diary. While the focus is contemporary fiction, Lise Gauvin's essay ranges back to Octave Crémazie and Guy Laffle writes
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The blood letting begins

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about Ringuet’s classic novel, "Trente arpents". The theatre is represented in Pierre Gobin’s discussion of Tremblay which explores the difference in his work between fiction and drama, while Pierre Népveu looks at those between poetry and fiction in "A (History) that Refuses the Telling: Poetry and the Novel in Contemporary Quebecois Literature". Then there is the historical survey Ralph Sarason's offering an introduction. All together, the essays provide both range and depth that make this publication one with wide appeal.

But the impact it will have can be measured also in terms of the success with which it bridges internal and external approaches to the novels, synchronic formalist analyses with diachronic and/or social critiques. And the whole anthology does so effectively. Taken alone, Janet Patterson's study of Anne Hébert's discourse of the surreal is an excellent close analysis from a semiotic perspective of Hébert's range of techniques for problematizing the real. In the context provided by the opening three essays, this becomes not just a particular stylistic trait but one of the mutations of writing involving successive saturations which is a manifestation of contradictory forces brought into play in literary production itself. Like Mélancion, the reader of Hébert follows the trace of these contradictions in which "difference is written as an expressive device of the semantic," differ." Hébert's textual subversion may also be read as an early attempt at the deconstruction of other cultural models—the full assumption of derision and absurdity is currently the work of Quebec feminist writing. Given the emphasis here, in Sarason's introduction, and in Gauvin's general statements on language and difference, about the role of Quebec women writers in assuming the contradictions of writing against everyone else and for the splendours of the Mother Tongue, it is surprising not to find more analysis of women writers in this collection. We can read Mary Jean Green's "Structures of Liberation: Female Experience and Autobiographical Form in Quebec", but this is a study of the "classic" women writers, Roy, Guévremont, Claire Martin and Marie-Claire Blais. Like Patterson's essay, this one is suggestive, but stops too soon to illustrate Mélancion's continuation, ending as it does with prophecy by quoting the words of Nicole Brosard about these writers: 'How is it that women have played such an important part in our literature. (...)With what collective schizophrenia did their own phantasms connect? On what oppression did they throw light? To follow this up with a study of Brosard herself, of her practice of deriving and difference, would be a logical development. But the ultimate flaw in the argument constructed by the anthology is that it fails to take this step. The lucky possessor of L'hippocrate could turn to

Goold's essay on Gagnon's female text, though in celebration of arcaic language is not the same thing as Brosard's careful deconstruction of literary and social norms and her assumptions of the nonsense of paradox, writing always acting out the adventure of language itself, the game of reading-writing-reading. In Brosard's work, a feminist critique of patriarchal ideology is married to a deconstructionist analysis of discursive formations and a Barthesian heritage of semiotics. The integrated nature of French can pursue this question in the studies of Brosard and La Nouvelle barre du jour in "Feminist Subversion, Writing, Etcetera", edited by Suzanne Lamy and Irene Pagès. But the one who reads only English will be left with her hunger, through many of Brosard's creative works are available in translation.

So, while many intersections of approaches that emphasize the symbolic function of a work and those that emphasize its social functions have been mapped in these three collections, more work is needed to fill in the outlines. What can be perceived from them, however, is that the project of unifying Marx and Saussure, Marxism and structuralism, is fraught with all the difficulties of being alive and well and living in Quebec, a repetition with a difference that makes all the sense.