

LITERARY HISTORY OF CANADA

Canadian Literature in English

SECOND EDITION VOLUME FOUR

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LITERARY HISTORY OF CANADA

VOLUME IV

Canadian Literature in English

**This volume is dedicated to
Carl F. Klinck**

Preface

The *Literary History of Canada* project began in 1957, under the direction of Carl Klinck and a group of distinguished colleagues. The first edition of the work appeared in 1965; a second edition, subdivided into three volumes, appeared in 1976, extending coverage to 1972. When Professor Klinck and his Board retired in 1977, I undertook to direct the preparation of Volume IV, a volume intended to focus on anglophone Canadian literature published in the years between 1972 and 1984. It will be the last supplement to the Second Edition.

Helpfully, Carl Klinck and his Editorial Board agreed to continue as an Advisory Board for this volume, and Dr Malcolm Ross joined them in this role. It is with regret, however, that I record the death in 1979 of Dr Roy Daniells, one of the original Board members, whose constructive contributions to the *Literary History*, both editorial and critical, were of lasting value.

I appreciate the continuing support which Carl Klinck and the Advisory Board have given me; I am also deeply indebted to the members of the current Editorial Board, whose hard work, scholarly advice, and unfailing enthusiasm have so markedly shaped this volume. Without their active involvement in the project, it would not have been possible.

Special thanks go to my wife, Peggy, who discussed the project with me, and who saw it take shape over an entire decade. For her love and encouragement I am especially grateful. I wish also to thank Beverly Westbrook for her secretarial assistance; Elizabeth Devakos for checking references; Carol McIver for further library research assistance and for patiently proofreading the text and preparing the index; Jean Wilson for editorial advice; and Nancy Palmer for typing the final version of the manuscript. Gerry Hallowell, of the University of Toronto Press, provided invaluable editorial guidance and support throughout the project.

The Canadian Federation for the Humanities, the Social Sciences Federation of Canada, and various Learned Societies generously answered requests for information, as did Tannis MacBeth Williams, Neil Guppy, and Cole Harris.

Support from the Strategic Grants and the Research Programmes Divisions of the SSHRCC greatly facilitated the work and enabled it to be completed close to schedule. The University of British Columbia provided continuing encouragement, and the University of Toronto Press at several critical moments tangibly enabled the project to proceed. I am grateful to all these agencies and institutions, and to the particular people in them who have been involved with the *Literary History* over the past ten years.

I wish finally to thank the contributors to this volume for their scholarly care, and for taking the time and effort to share with others their sustained interest in literature and ideas.

W.H.N.

Introduction

This volume extends the second edition of Carl F. Klinck's *Literary History of Canada* to survey the years from 1972 to 1984. At the same time it redefines the field it surveys, partly by redefining the manner of surveying it. Literary history, like many other fields of enquiry, has been undergoing changes in presumptions and methodology, many of which will be apparent in the chapters that follow. Implicit in Volumes I–III were several attitudes about literature and authorship: among them, a belief in the progress of art in Canada, an acceptance of prevailing belletristic definitions of what was 'literary' (conventional genres, history, philosophy), and a reliance on the notion of individual genius. To a lot of people these ideas have not lost their appeal. A recurrent notion in this volume, however, is indeterminacy. While the 1970s generated an extraordinary amount of data, many scholars who were eager to gather it were also resistant to it, recognizing that all sets of questions and answers carry limitations. Among other things, such limitations derive from social biases (such as culture, region, gender, race, age), from the design of an enquiry itself (selectivity or omissions in the data collected), from the subjectivity of interpretation, and from the privileging of certain information by seeking it – rather than pursuing some other topic – in the first place. Such limited data, ably orchestrated, can nonetheless convince and persuade. Fascinated by the power of selection and arrangement, many writers turned their attention to the workings of artifice itself. They questioned the ability of art to 'represent' the empirical world and challenged empirical limitations of reality. But that there existed connections between artifice and the empirical world was not in doubt: the problem was fixedness, whether of expectation or estimation, which it was the aim of artifice to alter and undermine. Against this background, literary history shifted its attention from 'factual' discovery to the processes of interpretation, from received standards of categorization and judgment to an acknowledgment of the biases inherent in perception and cultural context, from the genius of individual person to the trends and patterns that characterize a given selection of books, from the

implications of sequential progress to those of disjunction and uncertainty. In the remarks that follow, this introduction focuses on a number of issues that relate to these distinctions: issues involving the structure of Volume iv, the social and political character of the years it surveys and the contexts in which it was itself composed, and the intellectual ramifications of the literary data assembled here.

1

Observing publication trends during the 1970s, the Editorial Board determined that Volume iv of the *Literary History of Canada* could not follow exactly the pattern laid down by its predecessors. There were other genres to attend to, different priorities of subject, the immediacy of the literary experience, and the shifting character of the social framework. Referring more to the social sciences than had previously been possible, Volume iv emphasizes how people were writing and reading traditional literary genres from within several separate kinds of framework, and also recognizes that for a large number of readers the term 'literature' now extends to a variety of less traditional forms of communication. For their part, the chapter writers – all of whom have felt constrained by the restricted amount of space available – have variously addressed changes in methodologies, devised systems of classification, and exercised judgment both by direct statement and through their criteria of selection; they have emphasized books rather than authors, verbal and intellectual structures rather than individuals. Hence this volume becomes a book about patterns of discourse. It charts some of the patterns themselves; it also asks how they elucidate a number of social changes in Canada over twelve years, and how they reveal tensions between prevailing cultural attitudes and various minority views about power and marginality, society and language.

Inevitably, the pressures of size and circumstance have resulted in omissions. The choice of areas to be covered has been influenced by the previous volumes and further determined by practicalities; everyone regrets that it has not been possible to be comprehensive. As an extension of Volumes i–iii, this book focuses on anglophone writing, though it does glance from time to time at the plurality of francophone culture in Canada. In doing so, it acknowledges the increasing connections between anglophone and francophone literatures. But the editors have had to omit any extended account of writing in French or the burgeoning literatures in indigenous and 'unofficial' languages. A longer book would have pursued these intercultural parallels and differences in more detail, and also considered such subjects as scholarship in other languages, writings on non-Canadian history (a general field in which over 100 books and monographs were published during these years),

and connections between literature and science. Hindsight suggests that more room perhaps should have been found for Canadian linguistics and the philosophy of language study, and for examining connections between literature and art history; these subjects are acknowledged here primarily within the chapters on life-writing, anthropology, and criticism. There are, however, compensations. Departing from the practice of Volumes I–III has meant corresponding extensions of coverage in other directions.

For example, a chapter on translation looks both at historical accomplishments and at the politics and practice of the art. A separate chapter on the short story reflects a growing recognition of the importance of this genre. A chapter on writing for non-traditional media (radio, television, film) reveals not only the distinctive demands of each of these forms but also the degree to which changes in technology have invited writers to reach markedly different audiences. And chapters on the literature of anthropology, political science, and psychology address the intellectual strategies of other forms of communication, stress the disciplinary differences of these avenues of enquiry, and further emphasize the complexity of the social and intellectual framework within which writers write. Each of these new chapters, moreover, surveys the changes in genre or discipline that lie behind practice in the 1970s and 1980s, therefore overlaps with Volumes I–III in some measure and provides a different set of contexts within which to read some of the works those earlier volumes mention. Bruce Trigger, for example, traces the linear developments in anthropology that link present-day practice with nineteenth-century academics, critics, and scientists such as Daniel Wilson and John William Dawson; he also demonstrates the lateral branching that has made contemporary writing in anthropology a voice of historical reassessment – and sometimes (on issues like education and land claims) of social activism.

The focus, however, remains on the immediate rather than the distant past, a perspective which affected the composition and organization of the volume as a whole. Indeed, because of the immediacy of comment, the very notion of ‘whole’ came into question. The following chapters therefore constitute a plural series of readings, not a single, monolithic version of literary accomplishment during the years 1972–84. The chapter writers, though in contact with each other throughout the preparation of this volume, designed their chapters separately. They devised organizational structures appropriate to their own particular topic *as they saw it*; they made their own informed decisions about what to include, stress, and omit; they expressed their own judgments. For the most part they stressed ‘serious’ and ‘academic’ rather than ‘popular’ literature (though this distinction was in dispute). Not all of their judgments, furthermore, coincide – a degree of indeterminacy is a characteristic of any ‘contemporary history.’ Hence the arrangement of these chapters (which, like the initial selection of subjects, fell to the editors) may consequently seem

arbitrary. Yet there is a pattern. As this is a book of reference, not all readers will read it from cover to cover – but the sequence of chapters constructs a kind of ‘narrative’ of the years under review, which in turn suggests some of the editorial principles that governed the selection of subjects in the first place. The main intention was to record how a group of commentators perceived the literature of their own time. Inevitably, the flexibility of ‘perception’ became an issue to contend with, as did the shifting character of ‘context.’ One answer to indeterminacy was to use statistics; another was to emphasize the notion of interconnection.

This volume begins with the familiar – though the surveys of conventional genres (poetry, fiction, drama) are not altogether conventional in themselves. These chapters give way to chapters on critically less familiar forms (radio and film, for example, and translation) and to discussions of the several ways that critical methodology, imposing shape upon meaning and meaning upon shape, is itself a form of ‘translation’ – or performance. (‘Theatre’ is a recurrent metaphor.) The continuity thus begun by the obvious link between stage drama and drama in other media is then extended in the survey of drama written for children. Subsequently, the discussion of other forms of children’s literature leads into the commentary on folklore, which in turn leads into the discussions of anthropological, political, and historical literature. These chapters provide contexts against which to read accomplishments in conventional genres; they also open up the definition of literature itself, as the chapter on ‘life-writing’ makes clear. Positioned between discussions of history and psychology – and referring to diaries, letters, and journals, as well as to biographies and autobiographies – the chapter on life-writing mediates between ‘fact’ and ‘fiction.’ It draws on both history and psychology; it sheds light on both. All three chapters share an interest in the verifiability of fact, the fictionality of form, the indeterminacy of motive, the limitations of perception, and the selective interpretation of details. These interconnections construct a kind of paradigm of how to read this book. But they do not impose a single ‘meaning’ upon it. The running dialogue throughout the book – between ‘text’ and ‘context’ – argues for plural possibilities of interpretation. Yet the presumptions and expectations of interpretation are themselves, of course, constructed against a reader’s or a writer’s experience of a series of historical *events*. And these (being constructed) read as ‘fictions’: versions of reality, shaped in words, ‘stories’ shaped by the priorities and preoccupations of a place and time. Because this volume surveys a literature-in-progress, there can be no fixed ‘conclusions.’ The final chapter is therefore not designed as a formal closure to the book ‘as a whole’ nor as a capsule guide to an ‘entire period.’ Instead, it provides yet another angle of vision on the fluid subject of this book – ‘writing’ – another glimpse of what ‘literary

communication' meant during the 1970s and 1980s and of how it 'actually' took place.

2

During the early 1970s the Vietnam War continued to affect Canada, in that the nation was commercially if not politically involved in military action; at the same time Canada was perceived as a safe haven by Americans opposed to the war. In 1975, the war drew to a close, but other upheavals took its place as a focus of international political attention. Television cameras made North Americans daily witnesses to them: famine in Mali and Ethiopia, protest against South African apartheid, social unrest in Poland and the Middle East, civil war in Central America, the emergence of a fundamentalist Shi'ite government in Iran. Canadian radio and television interviewers – on programs such as *As It Happens* and *The Journal* – provided direct news links with the participants. Recurrently the media asserted a Canadian perspective on the world; just as often, world events – from peace movements to political violence to the technology of space exploration and satellite communication – touched daily Canadian lives. Everyone, moreover, was living under the shadow of nuclear threat.

Domestically, there occurred another series of social and political changes, from the threat of Quebec secession to the passing of the Constitution Act, which affected the way authors and others perceived their culture. Native rights groups protested land use policies and threats to cultural survival. Ethnic minorities (for example, the Japanese Canadians) asked for recognition, and for resolution to the wrongs they suffered during the 1940s – writers, critics, and historians such as Joy Kogawa, Roy Miki, Ken Adachi, and Roy Kiyooka were part of a protest against social discrimination and the implicit biases of linguistic norms. The politics and economics of gender differences were also at issue: the Women's Movement campaigned for equal rights and equal pay. Regional disparities focused still other social resentments. The boom-and-bust of the oil economy, for instance, briefly moved economic and political power to Alberta, though the forces of centralization were to prove the stronger over the decade as a whole. There were also signs of urban unrest not unlike that which occurred during the 1910s and 1930s. By 1980 the chief domestic problems were unemployment and recession, which in turn fuelled social unrest and latent racism. The high public tolerance, however, for levels of unemployment and inflation that fifteen years earlier would have been deemed insupportable, was but one sign of the growing neo-conservatism of the 1970s and of the apparent end of Keynesian expansionism.

Changes in immigration policy during the 1970s affected the ethnic character of Canada, especially in urban communities. To the waves of immigrants

and refugees who had come to Canada during the 1950s and 1960s – from Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and elsewhere – were added an increased number of immigrants of South Asian, East Asian, Caribbean, and southern European origin. The 1985 *Canada Year Book* reported that people from Asia accounted for 2.5 per cent of all immigrants during the period 1945–54, and for 32 per cent of all immigrants since 1970; three-quarters of all Asian-born immigrants, moreover, arrived after 1970; and during the period 1978–81, 43 per cent of immigrants came from Asia, 29.7 per cent from Europe, and between 5 and 10 per cent from each of the following areas: the United States, the Caribbean, and Latin America. The new ethnic mix, the patterns of settlement, the numbers in any particular group and their cultural cohesiveness all affected literature and language. Writers such as Marco Micone, Mary di Michele, Neil Bissoondath, and Rienzi Crusz wrote of the difficulties of living with two cultures. Leon Rooke emigrated from the United States, Jeni Couzyn from South Africa, Marilú Mallet from Chile; they brought with them different kinds of literary training and different perspectives on political reality. Second-language education, moreover, became an issue of even greater magnitude than it had been a decade earlier, compounding existing tensions over the relative precedence of English and French.

To some degree these developments could all be seen as the social ramifications of the 1960s. The generation that was young and active then (it was a larger generation than others, constantly skewing demographic norms) had placed an empirical faith in the coming of the 'Age of Aquarius'; by the late 1970s this idealism simply ran up against the conservatism of suburbia, late parenthood, and middle age. A belief in unflagging progress waned; many rebellions lost their impetus. Natural food fads replaced the drug culture; 'security' replaced 'freedom' as an effective desire. In response to a competitiveness born of numbers, many of those who in the 1960s had 'opted out' were now 'opting in' again. Like the smaller and more conservative generation that followed them, they found they had to compete for jobs and security, and often looked for power by attaching themselves to the social norms that seemed the strongest. These norms were not necessarily Canadian. Economic and cultural nationalism both waned by the 1980s, when American business models and Friedmanite economic principles became for many a political ideology, a program for life. While some writers resisted these trends – among them, several of the writers who had emigrated to Canada from the United States during the Vietnam years and who had become champions of Canada's cultural difference, its need to preserve its distance from American systems – there were others who read North America in another way. To many immigrants from Eastern Europe, for example – among them the novelist Josef Škvorecký – such declarations about distance seemed naive. Of

greater importance to them was the larger polarity between East and West, a binary system in which the idea of 'America' (or 'West') was to be embraced, not held apart. Hence the word 'America' came to mean at least two different things. Two systems of rhetoric came into conflict. Two definitions of cultural opportunity came to be seen as antithetical, as mutually exclusive political choices rather than overlapping ones. The distinction fed a climate of confrontation.

While Canadians quarrelled about the idea of America and the value of American alliances, the United States continued directly to affect Canadian economics and attitudes. Many Canadians embarked on American careers – from opening business franchises in the United States to scriptwriting for Hollywood films – and the American economic and political influence in Canada increased as the recession hardened. Some Canadians remained suspicious of American technology, politics, and ownership. George Grant's attacks on what he castigated as the 'liberalism' of technological progress, and Charles Taylor's enthusiasm for a 'Red Tory' tradition, attracted adherents: yet it became Conservative party policy in the 1980s to espouse closer economic ties with the United States. It was as though the 1890s rivalry between George Parkin and Goldwin Smith were being reactivated. In 1887, Sara Jeannette Duncan wrote of the prevalence of American magazines in Canada and opined that if American matters were thus becoming familiar then American methods would shortly follow. The 1980s suggested something of a reversal, partly traceable to the influence of American media: that if American methods were already so familiar, then Canadians would soon start to accept American attitudes as their own.

Whether the media have such control over public judgment remained a disputed question. When sociologists and psychologists investigated the impact of American television on Canadian communities newly exposed to it, their results were not altogether clear. Programming appeared indeed to have a measurable impact on individual attitudes, but the difference between CBC programming and American programming (at least between 1973 and 1975) was of less measurable consequence than was the physical habit of watching television instead of doing other things. *The Impact of Television* (1986), edited by Tannis MacBeth Williams and involving research by herself, Raymond Corteen, Meredith Kimball, and others, argues further that television interferes with the acquisition of reading skills, perpetuates sex-role stereotypes, and increases aggressive behaviour more readily *in cases where the community itself provides no countervailing models*. If parents and the community obviously read and value reading, for example, then it seems children will learn the skill whether they watch television or not; if the community daily acts out alternatives to sex-role stereotyping, then the models on tele-

vision may be only marginally significant. But the research also suggests that Canadian communities are most ambivalent not on these two issues but when it comes to projecting a message about the acceptability of violence.

Across the country, a recurrent public outcry against television violence and the availability of pornographic magazines and films suggests that many people believed that a connection did exist between media violence and violent behaviour. A widespread tolerance for violence in televised sport, however, and for the more insidious attitudinal violence implicit in racist and sexist stereotyping, does not argue a consistency of attitude. Even some of the protests against violence took violent forms, whether through direct action against booksellers and film rental companies, or in books and films themselves. To the degree that it became publicly acceptable to print obscenities, or to discuss or graphically represent patterns of behaviour formerly deemed 'deviant,' then social and aesthetic norms were both changing. The tolerance of the market governed the availability of products. Yet the primary intent of many aesthetic rebellions was less to titillate than to shock. Films like Anne Claire Poirier's *Mourir à tue-tête* (1979) and the National Film Board Studio D production *Not a Love Story* (1981), for example, used visually horrific images of empirical reality in order to condemn the violence of rape. And the escalation of linguistic and behavioural violence in books was often designed (often unsuccessfully) as a measure of reform. A problem for civil libertarians dealing with 'obscenity' – whether of language, attitude, visual representation, or behaviour – lay in the difficulty of defining the terms: the moral absolutism of many proponents of censorship (who made no distinction between a Margaret Laurence novel and a 'snuff film') was as offensive to them as pornography or media violence was. In a related issue, however, a series of celebrated trials in 1985 argued that the propaganda of race hatred should not be justified by appeals to freedom of speech. One result of these controversies was that books and films worked not merely as the agents of entertainment, information, and reform, but also as the ground on which defences of civil freedoms took place. It might be argued that such issues transcend societies. By the subjects they raise, however, and in their particular manner of dealing with them, the arts and the media both reflect and affect the priorities that a given society attaches to social problems and solutions.

To turn to creative writing is to see that political and social events not only affected literary settings and subjects, but also helped modify literary form. In the 1960s, Canadian settings were the norm in Canadian books; the arts were a means of ratifying the social reality. Regional settings carried a similar political function during the 1970s. But as the 1970s advanced, a Canadian

setting no longer seemed quite such a self-conscious choice. Canadian writing began to range through space and time as much as it had done in the 1890s and 1900s, and apparently more confidently, with an eye less for referential truth than for the textual effect of artifice and allusion. Canadian historians and political scientists, more extensively than their predecessors, wrote about the world beyond Canada, including studies of Bourbon France, Russian foreign policy in the Balkans, twentieth-century pacifism, the labour movement in Peru, Nazi Germany, and the spontaneous generation controversy in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century science. Canadian novelists, poets, and dramatists wrote of Kepler, Giordano Bruno, eighteenth-century explorers, and Lizzie Borden; they set their works in fourteenth-century Spain, twentieth-century Germany, Chile after the death of Allende, Sri Lanka, Trinidad, and the astral planes of the imagination. Such topics were not unrelated to Canada or to personal experience, but less and less was it seen to be the role of art to validate the culture. Artists repeatedly took it on themselves to probe the limits of power by probing the limits of language. With changes in literary intent came changes in literary form. (Even economists took up the literary strategies of modelling and game theory.) As Canadian writers were influenced by their co-writers from around the world – V.S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie, Milan Kundera and Umberto Eco, John Gardner and Alice Walker, Nadine Gordimer and Gabriel García Márquez – they shifted further from empirical realism and turned to the postmodern and the surreal. To generalize, these were years of literary protest and literary play, sometimes in the same work.

'Play' took several forms: humour, parody, experimentation with sequence, structure, fantasy, voice, and visual arrangement. It is not an unusual response to social pressure. A sardonic wit frequently allows a writer to observe disparities between reason and behaviour, while providing a defence against despair. Surrealism is a verbal and visual reaction to perceived social chaos. Metaliterary texts are sometimes signs of a flight from social reality into the perceived enclosures of art. In these years language itself became a plane on which to act. But action in art need not imply flight; often writers attempted to deconstruct the social values that conventional language had somehow allowed to seem fixed. Hence the language of play frequently turned into a strategy of protest and reconstruction.

In her chapter on folklore, Edith Fowke refers to the surge of interest in craft and design; this interest, too, reflects an attempt to overturn conventional hierarchies of judgment. Just as conventional criticism, by classifying 'native art' as 'folk custom,' had distinguished it from an implied 'real art,' so had many judgments of 'women's art' been implicitly dismissive. One impact of the showing of Judy Chicago's 'The Dinner Party' in Canada during the early 1980s was to turn this judgment around. Viewers recognized that embroidery

(or quilting, or tapestry design) could achieve artistic excellence; it had, moreover, its own aesthetic and sociopolitical implications. In art and writing by women, a dialectic was under way. The language women used and the language used about women particularly came under scrutiny. At the 1983 'Women and Words' conference in Vancouver, women writers attacked the gender hierarchies of language, turned 'history' into 'herstory,' pierced received meanings of words in order to turn the 'subtext' of a literary work into a 'sub-version' of canonical (therefore ideological) judgments, and called for alternatives, options, and a substitute system of values. 'Quand je lis je m'invente' announced the title of Suzanne Lamy's 1984 book. Fantasy was a way of inventing a more acceptable present or of imagining a continuing future; protest was as often as not an attempt to disrupt a reader's passive acceptance of the current rhetoric of social conventions. The former rearranged the language of reality; the latter disputed the fixed reality of language. 'Postmodern' forms of art sometimes brought the two together.

Canadian writers in the 1970s were willing to accept the influence of various literary schools of protest and postmodern play – of feminist theory and South American 'magic realism,' to name two of the most obvious – for several reasons. One was their perceived social relevance; another was the availability of translations; a third relates to the speed of international communication that satellite technology made possible; a fourth has to do with cheaper air fares and the jumbo jet, both of which encouraged personal travel and personal contacts. The situation of Bharati Mukherjee provides an illustrative example. Bengali-born, of Brahmin background, married in the United States to Clark Blaise, resident in Montreal and Toronto until she returned to the United States, unhappy and articulate about Canadian racism, she represents in her own life a variety of cultural influences. During the 1970s she visited China on a tour with Alice Walker and other women writers; her 1985 work *Darkness* acknowledges the influence of Bernard Malamud; when V.S. Naipaul travelled to New York, she interviewed him for *Salmagundi*. Like Margaret Atwood and many others, moreover, she was writer-in-residence at several universities in the United States and Canada and was supported on reading tours by the Canada Council. The literary world, long mobile, now relied on the speed of movement as well. Institutions like Arts Councils and authors' associations encouraged contacts. Events like the PEN conferences, the Amnesty International conference (in which Margaret Atwood was significantly engaged), and Greg Gatenby's Harbourfront festival and program in Toronto brought writers from around the world together for readings and discussions. Inevitably, such contacts influenced the range of experience on which authors came to draw.

The institutions that affect Canadian writers directly include the Canada Council, the government, and the universities. When in the early 1970s