

prochain Épisode; or, Charting Canonical Time

One Friday morning in April 1994, I was listening to Peter Gzowski discuss Canada's national bilingualism policy with his weekly political panel on *Morningside*. The question was whether or not official bilingualism should be scrapped because of the high cost to the Canadian taxpayer. One of the anglophone panelists argued against any cuts, stating that "bilingualism helps us understand Quebec." Chantal Hébert, the sole francophone panelist and writer for the Montréal newspaper *La Presse*, responded immediately: "Does that mean that Jacques Parizeau and other bilingual Quebecers understand English Canada?"

The key word here is "understand." It calls to mind the double meaning of the word in French (*comprendre*) as it was used on signs promoting Canadian national unity during the referendum campaign of 1992: "Mon Canada comprend le Québec." Yet Hébert's response was justified. Indeed, it is widely believed that the institution of official bilingualism was intended in the first place to diffuse nationalist aspirations in Québec, not really to encourage an "understanding" of Québec's aspirations, either within or without the federation. These concerns are equally relevant in Québec in 1996, where, almost one year after another sovereignty referendum, renewed controversy over the notorious sign law has revived the debate about bilingualism and linguistic rights in the realm of commercial advertising.¹ In truth, these issues have for some time been filtering through many levels of political and cultural discourse in Canada, not the least of which is literature, where literary translation, federally subsidized since 1972 through the Canada Council Translation Grants Programme, was somehow assumed to foster congenial relations between the two linguistic groups.²

Yet if the continued need for literary translation is a "stark admission that the two solitudes exist" (Mezei 3), its implicit goal has also been some version of a bridging of the two cultures. Anthologies of English- and French-Canadian

- 1 I refer specifically to the debate aroused by English rights activist Howard Galganov's protest of the absence of English signs in Montréal shops in the summer of 1996.
- 2 For the import of this programme see Martin.

literature,³ literary histories that chart the parallel history of both, courses that teach the two in tandem — what is the message? Mon Canada comprend le Québec? Transposed in the literary domain as "La littérature canadienne comprend celle du Québec"?

Certainly these sentiments had been internalized by many English-Canadian critics writing on Canadian literatures in the 1960s and 70s. In a paper delivered at the 1995 Learned Societies conference at the Université du Québec à Montréal, Frank Davey spoke of Québec as having constituted a site of "libidinal excess" for anglophone Canadians, forming a sort of cultural frontier. English Canadians' "ocular fascination" with Québec, their determination to learn about the Québécois or French-Canadian "other" through a reading of selected literary texts in translation, was evident in many early anthologies and literary histories of the two literatures,⁴ but never more so than in that period of ferocious post-centennial fervour in the late 1960s and early 70s.⁵ Such is the case with the two comparatist Canadian critics around whom I wish to focus this discussion — Ronald Sutherland and Jeannette Urbas⁶ — whose periodizations of the French-Canadian/Québécois novel chart an evolving, cohesive, and assuredly "knowable" Québec. Yet, one that is also, to echo the famous joke of Yvon Deschamps, set firmly "within a strong and united Canada" (Newman 3).

Not surprisingly, critical positions regarding the politics of translation have been closely linked to conceptions of Canadian federalism. According to Larry Shouldice, it had long been common among English Canadians "to view translation as a means of fostering national unity" (75). In particular, as Kathy Mezei notes, translation activity gained momentum around the time of the Quiet Revolution "when Quebec independence seemed a possibility" (3). The long-held,

though perhaps unstated, goal of translation (and perhaps of comparative Canadian literature generally) has been communication between cultures, informed, as E.D. Blodgett states in "The Canadian Literatures as a Literary Problem," by a tendency towards universalization. Likewise, the motivation behind much ethnographic description, while based upon a principle of comparative sameness, involves a "synthesizing of interpretations [that] pretends to do much to help readers 'understand' strangers" (Czernis 23). One could argue that every position in favour of translation expresses a desire for national unity at some level, if only at the level of communication. D.G. Jones, for example, values translation as an escape from cultural solipsism, seeing it as a move towards communication and communion with the other (Blodgett 1983, 18): communication leads to understanding which leads to good will and (it is hoped) to national/cultural association of some kind.

Larry Shouldice, in "On the Politics of Literary Translation in Canada," has highlighted communication or "intelligence gathering" as the driving force behind literary translation in Canada (75), particularly during the 1960s and 70s when political debates on the "French/English question" were taking place on cultural grounds (79). During this period, the translator was believed to function as cultural mediator, providing crucial information to "Canadians eager to know what Quebec 'wanted'" (Homel 83). This motivation for translation parallels Sherry Simon's identification of the ethnographic, documentary approach to literary translation, a limited position if not combined with other, more language-oriented, concerns. Shouldice is correct in pointing out that the lines between cultural curiosity, unity, and power can become blurred. As Blodgett and numerous Québécois critics have pointed out, translation "cannot be merely taken, as most historians of literature are inclined to do, as a means of access to other cultures; it cannot be considered a reliable reflection" (1993, 10). "The will not to translate Canadian texts," writes Blodgett, "is an ideological act of importance" (1982, 30).⁷

Surely among many English-Canadian critics writing on French-Canadian literature, the assumption that the literary products of Québec could provide a window on the political aspirations of those ever-frustrating and self-contradicting Québécois encroached, in the 1970s, into the realm of literary-realist virulence. The approach could best be described as a sort of self-referential "cultural anthropology," one that was in the first place preoccupied with discovering and defining its subject of study ("Canada" or "Québec") and

3 This paper is largely a historical study, and my use of the terms "English" and "French Canadian" is meant to echo the discourse of the critics I am considering here. To speak of "English Canadian" and "French Canadian" as culturally homogeneous groups is, of course, a conflating and essentializing error. I am intending these designations in general linguistic terms only, fully aware of the multicultural, multinational, and indeed multilingual diversity by which each of these is constituted.

4 See, for example, Watson and Pierce, Stevenson, Pierce, Becker, Robins, Nelson, Weaver, Toye, McGeehan and Penner.

5 There are numerous examples. See, for instance, Bissell, Green and Sylvestre, Smith, Richler, Glasco, Lucas, Atwood, Weaver and Toye, Moss (1974, 1977), Stevens, Foley, Daymond and Monkman, Owen and Wolfe.

6 Confusion resulting from Jeannette Urbas's name may make it necessary to clarify why I have included her among English-Canadian literary critics writing on Québec. Urbas places herself in this subject position in the introduction to her book, a study geared towards the teaching of French Canadian literature to "the English-speaking student": "Through the literature we, as English Canadians, can achieve not only a better understanding of French-Canadian culture but a clearer comprehension of ourselves, if not by analogy, then by contrast" (viii).

7 For additional material concerning the politics of literary translation in Canada, consult Mezei's *Bibliography of Criticism on English and French Literary Translations in Canada*. This survey is of interest not only for those concerned with literary translation in Canada, but also as "a history of attitudes towards bilingualism ... [and] the other solitude" (5) and see also Martin.

in which individual works were interpreted as "witnesses to or instances of general cultural patterns of [that] collectivity" (Surette 45, 55). This assumption became so entrenched that the mimetic potential of selected French-Canadian novels came to be heralded as their prime value, and a coherent body of texts was seen to "translate" or decode Québec for English Canada — making it palatable, unambiguous, comprehensible.

Canadian critics tended to read the Québec novel as a "clear, objective portrayal of reality," even when they were likely to condemn similar approaches to English-Canadian writing: "Indigenous novels may be fiction," writes Jo-Anne Elder, "but imported novels are generally read as a kind of pseudononfiction" (70). Perhaps expectedly therefore, many literary histories of Québec written in English have been normative in thrust, constructing a canon of French-Canadian novels in which individual texts become reified into a direct reflection of Québec cultural and social reality at a given period in the nation/province's history.

Numerous critics have articulated the nationalist impulses governing the promotion by the literary institution of specific "canonical" texts in Canada,⁸ particularly in terms of the fixing of place — the nation, the region — as a site of discursive and ideological conflict. Tim Heath has argued that there has been a privileging of time over space in critical discussions of Canadian literatures, a statement that is true of definitions of Canada (and, perhaps, Québec) as an identifiable (and geographically bounded) national construct — from Confederation (or some other constitutive temporal event) onwards — though less generally so of specific discussions of literary production in Canada.⁹

A useful exploration of this distinction occurs in Dermot McCarthy's contribution to the collection *Canadian Canons*, where he demonstrates how the growth of Canadian literature over the last two centuries has been forcibly synchronized to accord with notions of the spiritual and political evolution of Canada. Looking at early Canadian literary histories and anthologies, McCarthy convincingly illustrates how critical conceptions of national identity influenced the canons these early texts propagated. Notably, he outlines how canonical authors have been privileged not only according to what and where they were writing, but also in terms of *when* they were doing so.

This has surely been true of much English-Canadian literary criticism in the

past. A.J.M. Smith's famous native vs. cosmopolitan approach to Canadian literature was itself based, like much contemporary postcolonial discourse, on an "evolutionary model," as was the very institution of English studies, and latterly Canadian Literature, in Canada. "By arranging Canadian culture into 'three stages — the colonial, the national, and the cosmopolitan'" (Bennett 204), Smith defended his own version of Canadian progress and maturation. Northrop Frye, as Linda Hutcheon has argued in "Eruptions of Postmodernity," did much the same thing. Such moves involve a double process of rewriting — in the first place, a teleological urge hearkens back towards its defining eschatology, a destiny that is presumed to have been always there from the beginning. These revisions involve a fulfillment of a perceived history. Secondly, such rewritings can invoke a new periodization, a wiping of the slate and construction of new origins.

A linear and progressivist impulse has to some extent always informed anglophone critics' constructions of French-Canadian literature — in particular, the canon of translated French-Canadian works in English Canada, or the Anglicized French-Canadian canon.¹⁰ Moreover, critics have imposed a relation of general historical likeness between Canada and Québec, projecting their conceptions of "Canadian" national and postcolonial legitimization and socio-historical maturation onto Québec. As Hutcheon, quoting Stephen Slemon, has pointed out, the "unknowable becomes known" ... by the recuperation of the other 'by reference to one's own systems of cultural recognition'" (150). Or, in Blodgett's words, such gestures "make the past, as well as the Other, capable of supreme appropriation in the eternity of the 'imperial self'" (1993, 9).

Indeed, it has been suggested that English Canada first awoke to the empowering discourse of postcolonialism via the Quiet Revolution in Québec — as Northrop Frye observed in the *Literary History of Canada*, the "decisive cultural event in English Canada" during the sixties and seventies was "the impact of French Canada and its new sense of identity" (qtd. in Hutcheon 152). According to Anne and Henry Paolucci, "what was new in 1967 was not the separatist appeal but the fact that the spell of the colonial past had been broken" — English-Canadian interest and sentiments were lured "in support of the process of decolonization" (61). Thus, Sutherland can argue that anglophone and francophone writers in Canada have "undergone the same thematic evolution" (1976, 34), while Urbas is able to justify her "translation" of French-Canadian literature by observing that "the English-Canadian reader finds there, in addition to [overlapping] artistic values, the revelation of a world so close to his own physically and yet so different" (viii).

In their literary histories of Canada, anglophone critics generally relied on a

8 See, for example, Davey (1988, 1993, 1994), Lecker (1991, 1995), MacLulich, Metcalif, Stuewe.

9 According to Blodgett, Frye's posing of the question, "'Where is here?'" instead "perpetuated the imagining of Canada as a spatial proposition whose space is an explanatory referent" (1993, 8). See also Leon Surette's "Here Is Us" for an examination of the "topocentric" basis of much Canadian literary criticism. The revision of literary history Blodgett proposes could be well applied to Québec — a history that would transpose Québec (and/or Canada) "from what is perceived as its geographical and historical place into a nation of discontinuous origins..." (8).

10 For further discussion of the "English/ed" French-Canadian canon and critics' various approaches to it, see Sugars (1993, 1996).

nineteenth-century conception of evolutionary nationalism in which national cultures were assumed to "develop through an organic process beginning with infancy and moving towards maturity" (Fee 21). This was an attractive prospect for colonials — Canadians generally or Québécois — aspiring for self-definition and independence. Grounding their studies of French-Canadian literature in this assumption, English-Canadian critics responded to the evolutionary demand by constructing what were nothing less than canonical time-spans or periods to categorize the literary texts they considered, moving from any given "original" moment to its expected "prochain épisode," and so on along a diachronic line. These periods were in turn bound by a chronological and hierarchical ordering, offering a vision of continuation and advancement that overlooked any sense of overlap or conflict and was "impervious to the movements of unrationalized time" (qtd. in Hutcheon 157).¹¹ In these studies, the history of Québec and/or Canada is based in a notion of temporal succession and growing national unification (both within Québec and, by paradoxical extension, of Canada generally), producing a canon of French-Canadian literature — set within a larger English-Canadian context — that was seen to reflect or even chart an idealized historical and political "progress" of Québec. Such is the case with Sutherland's and Urbas's English-language studies of Canadian literatures, where canonical time-spans are used to map the secular progress of Québec. The canon of novels so invoked thus comes to chart, diachronically, the social and historical maturation of Québec, establishing Québec as a monolithic construct that transcends the literary texts by which it is seemingly reproduced.

Individual texts, then, are considered to be coherent and referential, not situated in anything like a polysemous social and cultural context. In Northrop Frye's terms, such a chronological ordering "supplies the magic word 'tradition,' which means that when we see the miscellaneous pile strung out along a chronological line, some coherence is given it by sheer sequence" (16). In this case, a progressive, evolutionary sequence is imposed so that each text — from *Maria Chapdelaine* to *Thirty Acres* to *The Tin Flute*¹² — becomes a metonymy of a designated "period" in this evolution; in each text the values and mores of that period are assumed to be encoded. In other words, a shared place and time are reductively seen to imply "a shared past, and a shared ideology" (Blodgett 1982, 25).

Barbara Godard, in her excellent article "Critical Discourse in/on Québec," identifies "a sort of general sociologizing discourse practiced forever by

journalists, writers, professors, who tend to consider each important work that appears as a moment, successful or not, in a literary evolution inseparable from national and political evolution" (274). The problem with the ensuing literary historical narrative is always the same: it is "overdetermined as explanation" (Blodgett 1993, 2). However, Clément Moisan has spoken of the different tendencies of French and English literary histories. French-Canadian literary history, he argues, tends to periodize in eras and movements; English literary history organizes around genre (688). Moisan's distinction corresponds to Godard's between the "sociology of the work" — "literature as an expression or reflection of the social conscience" — and the "sociology of literature" — "literary conventions and the ways they function" (1990, 282). An initial glance provisionally bears out the validity of Moisan's observations, if one compares, for instance, Moisan's or Sirois's chronological accounts of French-Canadian literature with Carl Klinck's *Literary History of Canada*. What is interesting, though, is that when English-Canadians write literary histories of Québec, they appropriate the historical preference of their subject, and periodize — yet in most cases they periodize according to theme, thus combining both tendencies. According to Jo-Anne Elder, this is "typical of the pedagogy of imported literature, in which literary history is divided into sections combining time, place, and theme" (65). The result, in most cases, is an artificial homogeneity proposed for each time period, both socio-historically and aesthetically.

Ronald Sutherland and Jeannette Urbas construct such temporo-thematic breaks in accord with the movements of a ritualized time, uniting an impulse to periodize with an urge for thematic analysis. As Urbas elaborates on her study, *From Thirty Acres to Modern Times: The Story of French-Canadian Literature* (1976), "The approach is essentially chronological, but the progression in time is related to basic themes in each period" (vii). These theme-period divisions, however, chart a clear teleology and evolution, in which the interpretation of individual texts is wholly guided by the specific label to which they have been matched. Furthermore, once this maturation process has been set in motion, an argument must be made for the "radical" nature of each literary work. The result reads like a list of steadily increasing high points in Québec's literary-cultural history, each text more of an abrupt ideological disruption than the last.

Urbas's first theme/period, "The Myth of the Land," is exemplified by *Maria Chapdelaine*, whose protagonist is herself subsumed within this heading — she is not a "human protagonist," Urbas writes, but linked directly with "Nature" (10). The ensuing analysis centres around Maria's (though it is also the critic's) debilitating "reverence for the past" (16), disregarding the possibility that Maria's marital prospects might instead suggest some ambivalence on her part concerning the value of this past. The next section, the "Undermining of the Myth," is typified by *Thirty Acres*, which is seen to mark "the beginning and the end of an era" (19), bridging the gap between "rural values" and literary realism. *Thirty*

11 John Dickinson and Brian Young note a parallel tendency among historians of Québec, whose traditional periodizations of Québec history misleadingly rely on momentous political events rather than on more subtle social and economic influences.

12 Since anglophone critics and anthologists have generally considered the translated versions of these works, I will refer to them, where appropriate, by their translated titles.

Acres is seen at once to mark a moment of acute disruption, and at the same time to chart a gradual transition from one grand theme to the next. At first we learn that it has dealt "a fatal blow to long-standing myths and illusions: after Ringuelet it was impossible to write in the old vein" (19). The book is thereafter applauded for its role in challenging old assumptions: the character of Euchariste Moisan is said to stand out "in sharp contrast to the rosy glow that previously surrounded the virtuous, serene inhabitant of the country" (19). However, with a few others that merit passing mention, the novel is also seen to function as something of an intermediary: "The process which Ringuelet brought into focus had been at work for some time now" (35), Urbas admits later. The cover illustration reflects this gradation: an aerial map depicting a large area of quilted farmland that merges with the outskirts of a small city and airport.

Truly daring works characterize the next category, "Urban Social Problems." The definitive novels here, *The Town Below* and *The Tin Flute*, are seen to mark a sudden intervention. With *The Town Below*, Urbas writes, "the city made its first and decisive appearance in the French-Canadian novel" (35) (although Moisan does move to the city towards the end of *Thirty Acres*); it "had the effect of a bombshell in conservative literary circles" (35). However, once again, the disruption must be tempered before one can proceed to the next category. We are subsequently told that these texts are not so radical after all: "the two novels do not deal with the city as a whole, but with a single unit of it, a district which in many ways still reflects the village life from which the inhabitants are not so far removed in time and in ways of thinking" (45). These contradictions enable Urbas to move ever upward, to applaud each stage in the evolution while also acknowledging its obsolescence.

Closing in on more "modern" concerns, her narrative builds to specific considerations of the individual within society and various forms of social and psychic alienation, charted by André Langevin, Anne Hébert, and Marie-Claire Blais, and finally to "Modern Times" and the Quiet Revolution, represented by such writers as Jacques Godbout and Hubert Aquin. By the conclusion of Urbas's study, therefore, national identity and personal subjectivity have been conflated.

Loretta Czernis's analysis of the 1977 Task Force on Canadian Unity identifies a similar allegorizing tendency in its construction of an *a priori* "mytho-history" for Québec: "One concept that is highlighted is Québec's change in cultural theme, from one of *survival* (survival) to one of *épanouissement* (blossoming into self-fulfillment)" (37). In the terms constructed by the report, the shift was from "a logic of necessity" — defence, survival within the Canadian federation, and national unity — to a "blossoming, which is a carnivalesque logic of fertility" (38). The pattern, based upon a metaphor of maturation, parallels earlier (anti)colonial versions of Canadian culture, notably by Smith and Frye, in which Canada's colonial condition was seen to have been the source of its cultural immaturity.

In persisting with these dualities (cultural naiveté and secular maturity), Urbas expresses a contemporary, post-Quiet Revolution, and centralist bias in her summation of Québec literary history: "French Canadian literature has come a long way" (157). The "historical" narrative has thus been set up to prove a pre-established conclusion: the "story," she writes, "has been one of gradual emancipation" (157). Yet such narratives of maturation and unification are really modes of legitimization, in which the critic seeks "the intelligible in the play of temporalities ... deliberately construct[ing] ... sequence and progress" (Goddard 1990, 271). From survival to *épanouissement* ... progress to erasure. The work makes of itself a "self-fulfilling prophecy" (Imbert 703).

Similar periodized thematic schematics are expressed in Ronald Sutherland's 1971 and 1977 studies of Canadian literatures, *Second Image* and *The New Hero*. Throughout his work, Sutherland is interested in the "social realities" depicted in works of Canadian literature. Like many Canadian critics, particularly from the 1970s and 80s, his concerns are paralytic; in his own words, Québec novels are "reflections of actuality" (1971, 132). Thus he outlines three periodized, hierarchical themes to chart the development of Canadian literature (both French and English — his goal is to reveal the basic similarities between the two literary traditions), a tertiary structure that carries with it an apparent, though unelaborated, "Marxist allure" of progressive transformation (Blodgett 1982, 21): 1) The Land and Divine Order; 2) The Breakup of the Old Order; 3) The Search for the Vital Truth (Sutherland 1971, 3). These categories are tagged by the same literary texts listed by Urbas, beginning with the *roman du terroir* (*Maria Chapdelaine* and *Thirty Acres*) to urban novels (*The Tin Flute*, *The Town Below*, *Dust Over the City*) to the last, "enlightened" category (*Prochain épisode* and *Knife on the Table*). Writing of the second group, Sutherland admits that he cannot "give dates to this transitional process," arguing instead that it is "a state of mind ... [that] has been going on slowly and unnoticed for centuries" (11). Like Urbas, he highlights this "transitional process" as a distinct period, using it to facilitate the charting of a progression already decided upon in advance. In Sutherland's terms, the reader's historical education should proceed as follows: the reader should see the

sense of mission and attachment to *notre maître le passé* dramatized in *Maria Chapdelaine*. Ringuelet's *Trente Arpents* depicts the breakup of the Québec rural order, and *Bonheur d'occasion* goes a step further, studying the displaced people in the slums of the big city. Bessette's *La Bagarre* illustrates changing attitudes toward the church, morality, education, and labour relations, while in a book like Hubert Aquin's *Prochain épisode* the reader experiences the frustration and desperation of many young people in contemporary Québec. (1977, xii)

In both Urbas's and Sutherland's studies, Québec literary history (and its history generally) is seen to begin with the *roman du terroir*, namely with *Maria*

Chapdelaine (1914). We might call it the first canonical Anglicized French-Canadian novel. Indeed, Urbas justifies her focus on *Maria Chapdelaine* by alluding to the popularity of the translation. Other Québec novels, she says, "are relatively unknown by comparison with *Maria Chapdelaine* which has been translated into more than twenty languages" (9). Heralded as the precursor of the genre, *Maria Chapdelaine*, written well after the British Conquest, well after the Québec Rebellion (both potential periodized points of origin), and not even written by a Québécois, is cited as one of the most influential texts in the development of French-Canadian literature — even though it was not published until 1914. Seldom are earlier *romans du terroir* discussed — Patrice Lacombe's *La Terre paternelle* (1846) or Antoine Gérin-Lajoie's *Jean Rivard le défricheur* (1874), for example. Contemporaneous *romans du terroir* also remain unacknowledged, novels such as Albert LaBerge's *La Scouine* (1918), published only four years later. Besides, *La Scouine* in many ways operates as a subversive, self-reflexive critique of the genre and the social values it propagated, even though the literary histories suggest that these assumptions reigned strong well into the 1930s, until the appearance of Félix-Antoine Savard's *Ménard, maître-d'œuvre* (1937) or *Thirty Acres* (1938). Nor does the *roman du terroir* mark the beginnings of a Québec literature, in which a whole tradition of journalism, explorers' narratives, poetry, and adventure, romance, and historical novels precedes *Maria Chapdelaine*. These writings were simply not considered "distinctive" enough to be included in literary histories devoted to providing clues to the specificity of Québec. As Jo-Anne Elder has noted, a whole corpus of writings in early Québec, particularly those influenced by the Europeans' contact with the aboriginal peoples of Canada (notably the *Jesuit Relations*) are "relegated to prehistory by the majority of Canadian literature courses" (65), not to mention by Canadian literary histories of French Canadian literature. Because *Maria Chapdelaine* is seen to have initiated the significant though gradually realized course of Québec literary nationalism — notably through its heroine, who ultimately makes the approved ideological choice in her *habitant* husband — it is awarded benchmark status in literary histories of French Canada.

By creating canonical time periods typified by homogeneous themes and genres which in turn are linked to selected literary works, critics established specific modes of creativity for each period, in the process constructing a literary-historical tautology. Patrick Imbert labels these periodized thematic "canonical circuits" in which criticism tries "to place the past in the perspective of a present" (698), creating a picture of "a community in unanimous agreement" at any given time (697-98). The result is not only "the reduction of works to a 'major' recurrent theme" (Elder 67) — at least of those works that are chosen to be discussed at all — but a reduction of history to that theme as well. Yet as Blodgett has argued, "the negotiations that constitute the diachronic basis of Canadian history ... do not precisely coincide with those of literature" (1993, 3-

4): "such large, and therefore amorphous, themes" cannot be used "as a means of relating a text to a national, historical situation" (1982, 21). Likewise, in any sequential arrangement, particularly where an evolution or development is understood, a reader or critic may "resituate a text to make it appear an origin of a subsequent series, implying a break within the series" (1993, 5). In such a genealogy, writes Barbara Godard, "the critic will be led not to the founding moment of something, but rather to the accidents of the journey, to heterogeneity that disturbs and disperses any origin" (1987, 45). The sequence of origins, then, can be seen to form a diachrony of their own, much like the canonical periods and texts of the literary histories, a diachrony that masks the diversity and context of its silenced, unacknowledged components.

Of course, one's charting of the literary history of Québec is keyed also to how one defines "Québécois" — whether, for instance, one uses it to refer to a geographical region or an historical period, and if the latter, how one chooses to periodize the origins of the French-Canadian/Québécois nation, particularly if every origin is simply, as Blodgett states, "a moment of intervention" (1993, 5).¹³ Where does one begin? With French settlement of North America, with the British Conquest, the Québec Rebellion, Confederation — possibly even with the Quiet Revolution? As many critics have pointed out, the very term "Québécois" is defined more by historical period than by region (Elder 69; see also Vachon 194; Melançon). "Such is the fate of a historical narrative about a contemporary phenomenon," writes Barbara Godard, "fixing the period. ... defines the contours of an event, determines its possible structure and significance by confirming a beginning, then carves out a plot which assigns to incidents their position as complicating middle or irrelevant digression and so establishes hierarchies" (1987, 25). One sees this in Sutherland's and Urbas's ordering of their texts and periods, for both construct the endgoal or at least the final episode to be the cultural self-realization of Québec, symbolized historically by the Quiet Revolution (and election of the Parti Québécois in 1976) and textually in the literary canon by *Prochain épisode* and *Knife on the Table*. In this way, any selection of a beginning or endpoint is necessarily teleological, imposing a synchronous cause-and-effect circularity on the entire diachronic sequence, "turning what is into what must be" (Godard 1987, 25).

Admittedly, both Sutherland and Urbas are motivated by an underlying and outmoded realist, mimetic conception of literary functioning. Moreover, as Robert Lecker has pointed out regarding Canadian literary histories in general,

¹³ This is true as well in definitions of Canada generally, especially in discussions of a postcolonial Canada. As Donna Bennett admits, even in terms "of political history the independence of Canada as a colony is particularly difficult to date. Officially Canada ceased to be a British colony in 1867, but its complete independence has only been achieved since that time and by increments" (167).

"they remain preoccupied with an immediate, rather than a historical, sense of value" (141). Reading literary texts in the present (post-1970s) context of national political crisis, these historians sought to construct a cultural Québec that was not only comprehensible, but also self-realized and autonomous — a construction that would allow Québec to remain both a contented part of the dominion and a culturally independent nation, whose literature could be securely embraced as Québécois and Canadian at one and the same time.

And in effect, the historical narrativization merely served as an appropriative placing of a marginalized Québec, much like national bilingualism itself. Just as Sutherland's goal in establishing a "mainstream" of Canadian literature — English and French — is informed by a hearkening towards (bicultural) national unity, so is his canonical periodization of texts. To Sutherland, one of the justifications of comparative Canadian literature is that it holds, for every Canadian, the "para-literary promise of an increase in understanding — of each group by members of the other group ... and of the common mystique shared by all" (1971 "Introduction"). The canonical construction is thus informed by a steadfast determination to "understand" Québec through a reading/translation of its literature. Against their surer judgement, critics insist upon Québec literature as an effect of the "real," reaching for "some reality back into which [they] can translate [the] fiction" (Blodgett 1984-85, 63). This approach is extended to their conception of the entire corpus of translated French-Canadian literature, which as a whole is seen to encapsulate all of Québec history.

Sutherland's and Urbas's historical narratives, then, are informed by a strategic pedagogical aim. Urbas calls her text a "teaching tool," designed as "a response to a need experienced while teaching French-Canadian literature in translation" (vii). In Sutherland's view, one of the prime functions of a literary canon is the teaching of history; thus he takes his reader through a textualized re-enactment of the history of Québec. His identification of three periodized themes by which to understand French-Canadian literature — Land and Divine Order; Breakup of the Old Order; Search for Vital Truth — provides the temporal frame the literary texts might themselves be seen to lack. Sutherland states this goal overtly in his introduction to *The New Hero*: "If ... I were advising someone on what to read to know the history of Quebec, I would definitely include the novelists and poets as recorders and interpreters of reality. ... I would suggest works like *Maria Chapdelaine*, *Trente Arpents*, *Bonheur D'Occasion*, *La Bagarre*, and *Prochain épisode*. ... In these novels the reader would relive some of Quebec history, he would feel what certain generations of Québécois have felt" (xii). Sutherland's implicit aim is to promote intercultural understanding — and, by extension, national harmony. His seemingly wilful misreading of the conclusion to Godbout's *Knife on the Table* is prompted by this motive. He thus interprets the novel's ambiguous ending — "The knife will stay on the table" (128) — as the narrator's unwillingness to take up arms

against the English, represented here by his anglophone girlfriend (1971, 121-22). Sutherland's political goal is more apparent than Urbas's because he is intent on tracing a parallel evolution between English and French literary and ideological traditions. This enables him to propose that we do not have two solitudes in Canada, but rather *two* solitudes (1971, 23) — each separate but all too familiar, and therefore each capable of understanding/encompassing the other:

it becomes evident that French Canadians and English Canadians are much more alike than many spokesmen have ever dared to suspect. Aside from language, it is quite probable that there are at the moment [note that this was published in 1971, one year after the October crisis!] no fundamental cultural differences between the two major ethnic groups of Canada. Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* could almost be a sequel to Godbout's *Le Couteau sur la table*. (1971, 23)

Sequential temporal breaks are thus matched with specific French and English texts, a pairing that is in turn used as evidence that "there does exist a single, common national mystique, a common set of conditioning forces, the mysterious apparatus of a single sense of identity" (26).

From a literary critical perspective, both Sutherland and Urbas err in separating the study of literary origins from an aesthetics of reception, valuing "present meaning" over "past significance" (Weimann 9). As Robert Weimann has suggested, "it is an over-simplification to say that the social perspective ... can be associated [only] with the reading [or reception] of literature" (7). To stress only the aesthetics of reception, says Weimann, is to "abstract the work from the history of its creation" (13). "For the contemporary reader," Lecker argues, this means that "real literary history has been more than truncated. ... since literary historians ... tend to privilege the contemporary view as the authoritative one" (141).

All of which is exacerbated by both critics' unacknowledged focus on *translated* texts. Although Urbas does mention certain untranslated novels in passing, and Sutherland consistently quotes from French originals, both, gearing their studies to a potentially unilingual English reader, rely on French novels that exist in English translation to carry their constructed histories. Their studies are automatically restricted, therefore, not only by the number of texts that can be discussed, but also by their untheorized "English" bias. To write a literary history using translated materials is to divorce any given text from its original material context — its creation *and* reception — disallowing the possibility of a more complex polysystemic approach (see Blodgett 1986).

Their emphasis on novels introduces a further limitation. While Sutherland mentions both poets and novelists, he lists only the latter; likewise, Urbas claims to be telling the "story of French-Canadian literature" yet includes no treatment of poetry in her study. The restriction is understandable, for novels more easily lend themselves to mimetic interpretation (and hence "information gathering")

about the elusive other). These literary histories do not provide anglophone readers with anything like a history of French-Canadian or Québec writing; on the contrary, as Gary Boire suggests, the "emplotting" emphasis ... should alert us to its implied opposite: the 'subordination' of certain 'elements of the story' (8). In these cases, selected translated texts are transposed to act as token representations of perceived developmental periods in Québec's cultural history, proving that "what is commonly called literary history is actually a record of choices" (qtd. in Gerson 65).

These novels are then subjected to highly restricted mimetic and content-oriented analyses to yield up the "truth" of Québec society contemporaneous with the composition of the work in question. Patrick Imbert, for instance, has pointed out how for years the first Québec novel was taken to be Philippe-Aubert de Gaspé's *L'Influence d'un Livre* (incidentally, only recently translated into English in 1993), although François-Réal Angers's *Les Révolutions du crime: ou, Cambray et ses complices* was published earlier. This book was suppressed by the literary and educational establishment of the day, he suggests, because "Beginning with a founding text which admits that crime exists ... would be unbecoming to the ideology of its time as well as to the criticism practiced in more recent years" (700). Subsequently, the book has remained generally unknown and also untranslated. Moreover, as I have already noted, most English-language histories of Québec literature take *Maria Chapdelaine* as their starting point. Celebrated as a thematic benchmark, this work is used to pinpoint the origins of a fledgling but distinct French-Canadian cultural identity, a starting position that allows for a subsequently steady thematic climb upward in the canonical charts.

In both cases, the narratives of progress are grounded in a notion of Québec as an iconographic construct that demands historical narrativization (Czernis x). The resulting text — the literary history of a personified Québec — extends from a version of socio-historical maturation to one of personal individuation (in Urbas's case, it even develops as such, progressing from general historical themes to specific considerations of the individual within society), entailing a correlation of the national with the individual. One could argue that these critical constructions take the form of a traditional *Bildungsroman*, constituting a moralistic allegory of psychological and social progress charting the exploits of an initially naive protagonist, Québec, through the painful but necessary processes of adolescence and concluding in well-adjusted maturity. As Benedict Anderson suggests, there is a centralizing "'national imagination'" at work in fictional texts of this kind that outline "the movement of a solitary hero through a sociological landscape of a fixity that fuses the world inside the [text] with the world outside" (30). Once again, from survival to *épanouissement*, though always from the perspective of a (presumably) already unified and blossoming "Canadian" culture.

Ultimately, such "centripetal view[s] of the national odyssey" demand a return to origins (Boire 4). Thus critics read backwards into the beginning, rewriting present chaos into a manageable past, where épanouissement is seen to have been always already germinating. In Jacques Derrida's terms, because this ideal finality "would have *already happened*, because the ideal would have presented itself in its form as ideal, this event would have already marked the end of a finite history" (66). It constructs a sort of "simultaneity-along-time" (Anderson 24), a mystical and revelatory prefiguring in which the future is configured as having fulfilled the past, or, from the perspective of the writing critic, the past is construed as "'the shadow of [i.e., cast backwards by] the future'" (qtd. in Anderson 23). In these terms any two events in the "sequence" are linked neither (quite) temporally, nor causally, since their relation occurs on a vertical plane that contains the internal horizontal one according to some Divine plan or necessity, a beckoning of a revealed self-presence or self-knowledge, a teleology towards a promised land of authenticated nationhood which contains within it its own origins.

Instead of literary histories, then, these studies take their readers on an omnitemporal, teleo-eschatological tour of historical revelation. The journey envisages "both a society and a literary text which is organically complete, harmonious, integrated" (Boire 11). Tagging individual texts to canonical time periods, critics establish an apparently progressive sequence that confuses temporality with causality, in the process colonizing the existing cultural history of Québec. An understanding of Québec's past is then presumed to pave the way to an empathizing and embracing (*comprendre*) of contemporary Québec. As Sutherland states in *The New Hero*, the endpoint of the textual journey through Québec's past is when "the reader experiences the frustration and desperation of many young people in contemporary Quebec" (xii). This comprehension, it is hoped, will foster congenial French-English relations in Canada, today and in the future.

Linda Leith, in quite another context, has observed that "since about 1980 ... English Canada outside Quebec has shown a less pressing need to understand Quebec than it showed during the 1960s and 1970s" (14). Leith's suggestion that the outcome of the 1980 sovereignty referendum in Québec negated any further need for "English Canada" to understand the political stirrings of the other (since the issue had been seemingly resolved) is not entirely convincing. The inflection of the debate may have changed, but the urge for cross-cultural reconnaissance persists. Today's flourishing debates about translation theory attest to this.

For Leith's post-referendum anglophone critics perhaps the real epistemic break was retroactively attributed to 1976 and the election of René Lévesque's Parti Québécois government in Québec. At least this was one way to imagine Québec's idealized "coming of age," viewed safely from the perspective of preserved national unity. Anxieties about national unity have surely informed the

reliance on periodized theme-time breaks in analyses of Québec's literary history, periods that were seen to echo those of Canada's development as a whole. Such narratives, and indeed most literary histories of Canada generally, have been motivated by at least a tacit awareness of the obstacles posed by cultural pluralism to any construction of a single Canadian national identity. Homi Bhabha has written of this willed enforcement of national harmony in analogous terms: "the political unity of the nation consists in a continual displacement of the anxiety of its irredeemably plural modern space. ... The difference of space returns as the Sameness of time, turning Territory into Tradition" (149).

Sutherland was on a mission to chart this "Sameness of time" in the interest of what he perceived to be an urgent need for a national Canadian consciousness (and canon) that would deflect the demands of its multi-ethnic and linguistic constituents. His necessary, albeit limited, affirmation of Québec was expressed as a narrative of evolution, in David Lloyd's terms, "a drastic reduction of the field of possibilities for the sake of a singular verisimilitude called 'progress' and 'development'" (10). Likewise, Urbas concludes her history with a vision of the contemporary Québec writer "freed from the old taboos and restrictions," standing "at a crossroads where all paths may legitimately beckon" (158). Her evolutionary model thus envisions "a passing through progressive stages of unfreedom to freedom and of blindness to enlightenment" (Bennett 195). The endgoal — or is it a dead end? — of this narrative sequence has from the outset been the unshackling of literary inspiration. Yet what new origin is possible once the blooming of a culture is rendered complete? These critics have effected a taming of literary history, imposing a predetermined conclusion that resounds with arch finality. They have, from the outset, replaced literary history with an ideal — an ideal that is necessarily "finite since it has happened, already ... and therefore history is over" (Derrida 66).

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