

Between Literatures: Canada and Australia

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ALL "NEW" LITERATURES in English, or in any colonizing language, are caught between the drive to create something distinctively new in the place where they are being produced and the necessity to use an old and alien language to do so, one that has developed in another place and in other circumstances. The dilemma confronts both the invader and the invaded. For the invaded groups the problem is greatly intensified by the fact that their "new" literatures have to use one of the most potent threats to their culture, the language of the invader, in the process of attempting to construct something new of their own. The paradox of these new literatures is that they work towards cultural self-definition and self-defence by utilizing the weapon which has been turned upon them in the past (Arthur). This is so, for example, for the Aborigines in Australia, the Indians and the Inuit in North America and Canada, Black Africans, Indians in India and, in a different way, it is true also for new immigrants. An important question raised by the paradox is this: can this utilization of the language of oppression be read as an act of subversion, a turning of the tables upon the dominant culture, or is it a final capitulation?

A different form of the problem and the paradox applies to the colonizers themselves. While theirs is the language of power and control in the new land, it loses much of its force in the process of transplantation. One way or another many of its cultural reference frames are lost or altered so that the language is emptied of much of its meaning. The language loses authority by the process of wielding authority in an alien context. It is because of this depletion to which all transplanted discourses are

subject that it takes so long for a new literature to find its feet and become comfortable in the language which is both its own and not its own. The language has to be remade to fit the new conditions — politically, geographically, psychologically — or, to put it the other way around, the language is inevitably remade in the process of constructing the place and its history. It is often forgotten that white Canadians and Australians were linguistically dispossessed by the fact of their migration and placed into situations where self-definition, whether personal or national, was very difficult to achieve. In spite of the fact that they brought the language with them, the language that carried political authority with it, colonizing Australians and Canadians were linguistic refugees.

The linguistic difficulties of the colonized groups are obvious. Less obvious is the position of the colonizers who bring the dominant language with them and continue to use it. Their problems have been understood largely as those of coming to grips with a new environment and finding a language for their new perceptions (Harrison). While there is no doubt that this has been one of the major challenges for the literatures of Australia and Canada, it has not been the only one. Both literatures have reflected the more insidious threats posed by deeper kinds of disorientation which can be described in terms of confusion about such things as paternity, genealogy and authority. All these problems spring from the fact of linguistic displacement and all have been encouraged by anxious and defensive literary criticisms which are equally unsure of themselves (and usually more so) in relation to the parent culture.

The unsureness is not surprising. The languages have had to adapt to new social codes and conditions, to new frameworks for personal relations, for work, for food, climate, colour, geography. Involved in the adjustment to all this is a sense of diminished power for the dominant language and this in itself alters it radically, making its authoritative discourses gather irony and parody. Examples which make the ironies obvious are rituals and discourses associated with parliament, law courts, the church and, especially in Australia, festivals such as Christmas. The language is not quite at home but sufficiently so to mask the parody. To

use Robert Kroetsch's terms in his keynote address at the Badlands Conference, the resiting enforces perpetual quotation. But is this such a bad fate? We know that all literature is riddled with the anxiety of influence anyway. Is it any worse to have a double or triple dose of it? If anything, in Australia and Canada this state of affairs should provide ideal conditions for postmodernism and for comedy (postmodernism is essentially comic), and many writers are taking advantage of these conditions. But there has also been great resistance which can be explained in terms of a lingering desire for the kinds of clarity of understanding and vision that are associated with national self-definition or myth-making.

Over the period of their white histories both countries have perceived their literatures in terms of organic metaphors of growth, as young, adolescent, maturing or coming of age. These metaphors have reinforced anxieties by implying deficiency — full adulthood will eventually follow, allowing the new literature the status and authority of the “parent” literature. Until then, the metaphor suggests, the in-between state of becoming and growing is to be tolerated as an unavoidable stage of development towards a more “whole” and more confident state with a stronger sense of identity.

Looming large in the search for signs of maturity has been the question of Australianness or Canadianness in the literature and this has been either deplored or applauded according to the definition of literary maturity chosen. Either way the terms of the discussion remain locked within a Freudian Oedipal structure. The Freudian model has been consistently applied not only to Canada and Australia but to other new literatures which function between the inescapable fact of their linguistic parentage and their desire to develop a separate identity. I want to argue that this model is a disabling one even when it is used in a spirit of rejection and to propose a different model, one which might release the literatures from their Oedipal iron collar. It is based on the model of the schizophrenic process and of schizoanalysis as developed by Deleuze and Guattari in their book *Anti-Oedipus*. While the term schizophrenia comes readily to mind in the context of post-colonial literature it has been used perjoratively with

all its customary connotations of dysfunction and incapacity. In my use of it I want to dissociate it from its clinical origins, using its structure positively as Deleuze and Guattari do in taking it as a model for a form of antifascist political activity and analysis. Used in the context of literary and literary-critical pursuits the term can be detached from its negative clinical associations while at the same time allowing the recognition that in displaced literature, as in the individual life, the experience of dispersal and incoherence can involve pain and loss and that to give up the search for wholeness, in a story, a novel or in a national literature, is to give up security, stability and a sense of direction.

Because the Freudian model is based on negative notions of lack and absence as states to be overcome, when applied to the literatures of Canada and Australia it casts both into apologetic and abject attitudes for being less than they might be or for not being something else. Hence the cultural cringe and the cultural strut and all the familiar symptoms of ontological anxiety. English-speaking Canada and Australia have in common a number of well-known characteristics that have led to this kind of insecurity. Both exist between the cultures of Britain and the United States, with Canada lying physically between these two countries which have threatened its fragile identity throughout its colonial history. Australia has been similarly under pressure from Britain and the United States with the added complication of Southeast Asia's increasing influence. To both countries there has also been European migration on a vast scale from a wide variety of places and finally, in Canada, there is French Canada which forbids any national definition in unitary terms. It is also worth saying that with ever-increasing media interpenetration and ease of travel, questions of national identity are further strained and problematized. All this is well known and it is not surprising that it has led to a preoccupation with the big national questions "Who are we?" and "What is here?" as well as eliciting reactions against such questions in both countries.

What is now needed is not a criticism of either position but an explanatory model that may begin to allow a fresh view of identity in the literatures, one that may provide an escape from the constraints of the nationalist-internationalist binary framework.

The model will also allow a different way of understanding the related matter of realism in the fiction of new literatures and the special paradoxes inherent in the post-colonial quest for representation.

Quests presuppose goals and desire. In Freudian analysis a coherent totality-unity is the goal that is posited in terms of absence, as that which subjects of desire *lack*. “Consequently,” Deleuze and Guattari argue, “everywhere we encounter the analytic process that consists in extrapolating a transcendent and common something . . . for the sole purpose of introducing *lack* into desire” (72). In this context the transcendent common something is national identity or Europeanism or internationalism according to who is speaking and the historical context. Further, they say, “when we relate desire to Oedipus, we are condemned to ignore the *productive* nature of desire: we condemn desire to vague dreams . . . we relate it to independent existences — the father, the mother, the begetters,” and “the errors concerning desire are called lack, law and signifier. It is one and the same error, an idealism . . .” (107; 111).

In all three “errors” — lack, law and signifier — there is implicit a vision of ultimate wholeness which, though it may never be reached, can be pursued or escaped from whether in the field of nationalism or of literary representation or of personal self-definition. It is this concept of wholeness that is rejected by the schizoanalytic model in order to open the way for a new concept of desire based on what Deleuze and Guattari call the desiring-machine. In their conjoining of the term machine with desire Deleuze and Guattari introduce the idea of interruption into the functioning of desire which is more usually thought of in terms of a continuous directed flow. “A machine,” they explain, “may be defined as a *system of interruptions* or breaks (*coupures*)” (36). The redefined concept of desire has implications for writing and reading. It suggests that these activities be carried out in response to the demands of the moment rather than with an eye towards a larger goal, that encompassing structures with their built-in paths, chronologies and territories be resisted in favour of more random and fragmented units of operation which may or may not yield larger patterns. To adopt a schizoanalytic approach is

to abandon the desire for a single goal. It is to accept instead the *via negativa* of Deleuze and Guattari's model where

Everything functions at the same time, but amid hiatuses and ruptures, breakdowns and failures, stallings and short circuits, distances and fragmentations within a sum that never succeeds in bringing its various points together. . . . Maurice Blanchot has found a way to pose the problem . . . how to think about fragments whose sole relationship is sheer difference — fragments that are related to one another only in that each of them is different — without having recourse to any sort of original totality (not even one that has been lost), or to a subsequent totality that may not yet have come about. (42)

Deleuze and Guattari do not try to dispense with all connectedness. The fragments do come together but not predictably nor consistently. While a signifying chain does form it forms in unconventional ways:

It is a chain of escape and no longer a code. The signifying chain has become a chain of decoding and deterritorialization . . . under the order of the included disjunctions where *everything is possible*. (328)

Repeatedly Deleuze and Guattari refer to the need for a *scrambling* of the codes of desire and signification. As a result, “desiring production,” they say “is pure multiplicity, that is to say, an affirmation that is irreducible to any sort of unity” (42).

They use examples from postmodernist writers to illustrate ways in which the schizoid pole might be expressed. Here is their example from Njinsky:

I am God I was not God I am a clown of God; I am Apis. I am an Egyptian. I am a red Indian. I am a negro. I am a Chinaman. I am a Japanese. I am a foreigner, a stranger. I am a seabird. I am a landbird. I am a husband and wife in one. (77)

Following Njinsky's example, and in the context of the wider argument about post-colonial identity, many of us could similarly present ourselves in a schizoid way. In my case, using only verifiable historical data I could say:

I am Ukranian. I am Australian. I am Russian. I am West German. I am Polish. I am British. I am American. I am East German. I am a foreigner, a stranger. I am not a seabird etc.

The usefulness of the schizoanalytic model for Canada and Australia is at least fourfold:

1. it frees desire (in writing) from nationalistic or internationalistic goals and replaces these with the concept of deterritorialized and goalless desire described in terms of the desiring-machine;
2. it allows the schizoid nature of each country's vision of itself to be redefined as a source of creative power rather than to be seen as a source of insecurity;
3. it provides a way of understanding experimental fiction in each country in relation to the schisms and contradictions in each country's vision of itself rather than in relation to their unifying myths;
4. it encourages a multiplicity of critical discourses by releasing *criticism* from the closure of the nationalist-internationalist binary opposition.

The long history of realist representation in the fiction of both countries can be explained as the history of the attempt to *cure* the fragmentations and in-betweenness that is inherent in all new literatures by working towards the construction of unifying myths of place and national character rather than accepting them as a rich resource for many kinds of creativity, realism amongst them. Nothing is forbidden in the Deleuze and Guattari programme but everything is disrupted and dislodged to allow new kinds of structures, all recognized as temporary, to form and reform. The same argument holds in the case of literary criticism which has had a parallel drive towards the discovery of unified meaning. Like literature, criticism has been impeded by the nationalistic-antinationalistic debate.

The schizoanalytic model, applied to Canada and Australia, is unauthoritarian and un-prescriptive. There is no exclusion and there is no specific goal, not even postmodernism. It permits questioning, overturning, destroying, in order to look from many angles at the myths and conventions of national identity and of genre that are in place and to show how *moveable* they are. Schizoanalysis seizes upon disjunction and disharmony, exacer-

bating them in order to make visible the multiplicity of positions from which the literatures are written, the unavoidable disjunctions that exist in the cultures and the languages — all cultures, all languages — resisting the long-ingrained impulse to close over and conceal that has been particularly strong in new literatures and so opening the way for new ways of understanding and writing, ways perhaps not yet known.

The “extra-Oedipal” lesson that can be learned from Deleuze and Guattari’s theory is that there can be a creative synthesis which can accommodate and generate disjunction. The schizophrenic, they say, “is and remains in disjunction; he does not abolish disjunction by identifying the contradictory elements by means of elaboration; instead he affirms through a continuous overflight spanning an indivisible distance. He is not simply bisexual or between the two or intersexual, he is transexual.” Australia and Canada can similarly be seen disjunctively as not only *between* literatures and cultures, not simply as international but, in Brian Edwards’s term, as *transnational*.

Other ideas, other theories, could provide models for literary multiplicity and for transnational mixing of literatures. Todorov’s concept of “heterological mentality” has been mentioned by Diana Brydon and the idea of the “harlequin cosmos,” offered in the same paper, usefully suggests the carnival spirit in which the literary future of our countries might be approached (Brydon). Two further theories come to mind. That of Bakhtinian carnival with its emphasis on reversals and dislodgements and the Russian formalist theory of *ostranennie*. More closely related to schizoanalysis than any of these is Bakhtin’s more complex and more widely encompassing theory of dialogism with its related concepts of *raznorechie* (heteroglossia) and *inojazychie* (other-languagedness). All of these can be used alongside the schizoanalytic model. But Deleuze and Guattari’s model goes further than any of them in identifying the patterns of post-colonial anxiety and offering creative ways of understanding and escaping them. More than any of them it helps to identify the malaise and suggests unformulaic courses of action. Most important, it redefines indeterminate and in-between states as sources of *power*.

The task of schizoanalysis is not so much to interpret (it does not seek *answers*) as to rearrange, distort, undo, scramble. Although this may read like a prescription for postmodernist writing, it is important *not* to see the process of schizoanalysis as prescribing or defining *anything*. It is above all a process whereby everything becomes mixed and confused “but it is here that the breakthrough not the breakdown occurs” (132).

So far I have not mentioned specific Canadian and Australian writers but there are many who work in the spirit of schizoanalysis. Their work takes many forms. Several very recent works, including two volumes of Canadian short stories, will serve as examples. One is the collection by Michael Rawdon, *Green Eyes, Dukes and Kings*, which is self-consciously international as well as transnational and which presents games with their unpredictability and danger both as a theme and a literary model. *Frogs and Other Stories* by Diane Schoemperlen offers a range of styles with her story “Histories” allowing interplay between past and present, memory and fantasy to become an open-ended structural principle reminiscent of the double narrative of Robert Kroetsch’s *Badlands*. I would also like to draw attention to two outstanding Australian women writers — Ania Walwicz in Melbourne whose unpunctuated, ungrammatical prose poems openly express her sense of alienness and incapacity in the language that she has had to adopt since she arrived from Poland, and Marion Campbell, a Perth writer whose recent novel *Lines of Flight* explores language and identity in a way that is relevant to the themes of this conference and particularly to questions of subjectivity. These words from her novel are as applicable to national identity as they are to the personal identity of which she writes:

I is not fixed equation with me. *I* unboxed, multiplying hydra-high on its own expansions . . . (86)

and

I thought it wouldn’t be this but wild vertigo, intoxication of timing on my own axis in freed space. In a long greedy scrutiny of space from that pinnacle, I would see that crazy queue of arbitrarily fixed selves, oh yes, from moments past recede, I would pluralize and scatter on horizons ebbing into horizons that composite persona which you, your eyes, your words, your space,

your time concertina into *personality*. The mock determinism in the definitions you and all the rest of them offer. (23)

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