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Atwood, Moisan, and Beyond:

The Question of Diversity in Comparative Canadian Literature

by

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Abstract

The following consideration of methodologies in comparative Canadian literary criticism is influenced by Margaret Atwood's *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, and Clément Moisan's *Poésie des frontières: étude comparée des poésies canadienne et québécoise*. An analysis of the advances and pitfalls in Atwood's and Moisan's works of thematic criticism sheds light on what stands to be gained from a broader ground for comparison, one that relinquishes the need to capture all Canadian literary expressions under the net of a single study organized around language and culture. Translation emerges as both a model for such change, and a tool that facilitates a more fluid treatment of differences within recent studies. Contemporary comparisons by E.D. Blodgett, Sylvia Söderlind, Peter Dickinson, and Lianne Moyes seek to forge ahead despite the difficulties inherent to the discipline. Their methodologies demonstrate a desire to find new ways of reading Canadian literatures together, while recognizing Canada's ever-expanding linguistic and cultural literary diversity.

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The Question of Diversity in Comparative Canadian Literature

In 1979 Clément Moisan published his comparative study of Canadian and Québécois poetry, *Poésie des frontières: étude comparée des poésies canadienne et québécoise*. In the opening chapter Moisan credits another Canadian literary figure with having largely influenced his project: "On ne saurait trop insister sur la parution en 1972 de *Survival* de Margaret Atwood. Ce guide thématique de la littérature canadienne (dont un chapitre est consacré à la littérature québécoise) fourmille de notations heureuses sur les mentalités collectives et les attitudes particulières des Canadiens" (22). This reference to Atwood's *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, and its influence on Moisan's work, is the catalyst for the following consideration of methodologies in comparative Canadian literary criticism that cross language and cultural differences.

Envisioning an inclusive and exhaustive image of Canada through an all-encompassing study of its literatures was a challenge that held the attention of many early comparatists. Deep cultural and linguistic diversity, existing then much as it does now, complicates this pursuit for a singular, all-encapsulating reflection of a Canadian literary identity. Most of these scholars organized their studies along the categories of English versus French language literatures. What was missed was a wide variety of identities, values, self-understandings, and life experiences expressed by Canadian writers, but which were not sufficiently recognized or interrogated by a methodology governed by the English and French categorical divide. The innovation in Atwood's and Moisan's works is that, while

their studies do address literatures written in English and French, language is not the comparative focal point. Both tried to carry out the task of comparative Canadian literature in a relatively new way, though their approaches were not without serious complications. An analysis of the advances and pitfalls in Atwood's and Moisan's works of thematic criticism sheds light on what stands to be gained from a broader ground for comparison, one that relinquishes the need to capture all Canadian literary expressions under the net of a single study organized around language and culture.

In part one of this study I will explore *Survival* and *Poésie des frontières* as two examples of comparative texts that speak to Canadian literatures while negotiating the very different cultural and linguistic groups existing in Canada. Early critical response to *Survival* fell largely against Atwood's use of thematics, although her work also included a number of techniques that succeeded at encouraging debate around the study of Canadian literatures. These methods include controversy, the manifesto genre, thematic criticism itself, and ambivalent language. Moisan demonstrates in *Poésie des frontières* to what extent French Canada was particularly apt to respond to the message of *Survival*.

Both Atwood and Moisan aim to speak across the borders of language and culture to encourage a broader discussion of common traits within Canadian literatures. As will be further explored, translation played an important role in both works. Atwood's and Moisan's projects are not without complications, issuing mainly from the desire to capture in their analyses a complete picture of

Canadian literatures. This is played out in both critics' representations of the 'other' and in their particular uses of thematic criticism.

In part two I approach aspects of indeterminacy within the discipline of comparative Canadian literary criticism with an eye to how new developments in comparative methodologies may better accommodate an increasingly diverse body of Canadian literatures. Translation emerges as both a model for such change, and a tool that facilitates a more fluid consideration of differences within recent comparisons. I will elaborate upon translation's reputation within literary studies as a controversial mode that has been both revered and reviled. There are comparatists working today who are looking for ways to forge ahead despite the difficulties inherent to the discipline, such as E.D. Blodgett, Sylvia Söderlind, Peter Dickinson, and Lianne Moyes. Their comparative methodologies demonstrate a desire to find new ways of reading Canadian literatures together. All recognize the value of addressing Canada's ever-expanding linguistic and cultural literary diversity. While Blodgett's comparisons are unable to look beyond previous categorizations, other scholars have embraced new possibilities that are less dependent upon language and cultural groupings.

The Nation and the Necessity of Difference for the Comparative Project

Since both Atwood and Moisan engage the concept of nation, it is useful to explore this term before turning to their particular works. Ernest Renan, in his speech "Qu'est-ce que la nation?" refers to the nation as "une idée, claire en apparence, mais qui prête aux plus dangereux malentendus" (9). There is a

peculiar duality at work in Canadian identity politics, one that seeks to recognize cultural plurality while consolidating a single pan-Canadian national identity. For its importance within the project of comparative Canadian literature, the nation is thus a term that carries multiple meanings. Canada has a stratified history of immigration, leading many people living within its borders to claim recognition of their own cultural distinctions. Further, numerous cultural groups in Canada make claims to their status as particular *nations* and identify on a civic level more strongly with their particular community than with Canada as a whole. Taking "the many as one" (Bhabha, "DissemiNation" 142) insufficiently addresses groups that are "disrupted by an internal dispersal" (Sugars 1). This, however, is what the multiculturalism policy, first introduced in 1971, suggests in attempting to unite diverse Canadian identities under a single image of Canada.

One may question whether the notion of the nation helps or hinders the process of comparing Canadian literatures. To conflate the nation with the state, for instance, can lead to structuring comparisons along pan-Canadian nationalist lines. English-French bilingualism, granted under British colonial rule, eclipses other cultures and creates a subaltern position for French Canada. The multicultural policy further complicates matters by fostering the expression of a multiplicity of cultural identities while upholding British colonial dominance.

The place of the nation within literary analysis has been a major consideration in comparative Canadian literary criticism, although the position of comparatists on this topic has shifted over the years. In the introduction to his recent work, *Five-Part Invention: A History of Literary History in Canada*, E.D.

Blodgett defines comparative Canadian literature as having "a didactic purpose that is aimed at constructing an idea of a nation [. . .]. It requires clarity of origin and precise delimitation [. . .]. Difference and meaning come into being through procedures of exclusion and the providing of direction" (10). Given this fundamental role of differentiation in forming comparative units, the project itself complicates the existence of a single understanding of Canadian identity. Whereas certain comparative studies approach literatures of contrasting countries, languages, and cultures, comparative Canadian literature takes as its focus the internal literary variances of an individual country. Sylvia Söderlind, in her article "Ghost-National Arguments," outlines the changing treatment of the nation in comparative texts from the 1950s to the present. The period from the 1950s to 1970s was marked by a strong preoccupation with Canadian nationalism that was carried through in literary studies. Frank Davey's book *Post-National Arguments: The Politics of the Anglophone-Canadian Novel*, published in 1993, suggests a shrinking importance in national issues in accordance with a simultaneous shift to both regionalism and globalization. Jonathan Kertzer countered this trend with *Worrying the Nation: Imagining a National Literature in English Canada*, published in 1998. Dealing only with English Canada, Kertzer insists that a pervasive concern with national identity continues to linger in Canadian literature. While Söderlind acknowledges the merit of these two studies, she insists that any consideration of literatures written in Canada, whether anglophone or francophone, must give credit to the relational nature of the Canadian identity. For her, "there is something fundamentally missing when–in an age when the concept

of the nation is more than ever at issue–one writes a history in which 'nation' is the structuring principle without mentioning the role Quebec has played in English-Canadian thinking about nation" (674). By considering both recent and past comparative analyses, Söderlind argues that an isolated consideration of any one national literature in Canada inevitably leaves other cultural groups in the dark. This line of inquiry influences my present study of Atwood's and Moisan's treatment of Canadian literatures, with hopes of fostering new directions in comparative Canadian literary criticism.

While Canadian literatures are, on the one hand, understood as being held together by shared commonalities, this alone does not override the immense variety within these texts. The challenge facing comparatists is to develop a methodological approach that can contribute to our understanding of Canadian literatures without overlooking their immense diversity. In order to define what is and what is not included in an analysis, Canadian comparatists like Atwood and Moisan have sometimes relied upon binary systems, despite the risk that these may conceal internal particularities. One such binary is the *two solitudes* analogy of English and French Canada. This bilingual positioning mirrors the country's constitution, but is not able to accommodate the significant number of literatures that thrive outside of these parameters. The oppositional units employed in the comparative process can change from project to project. The indeterminacy of binary identifications complicates the comparative process. For a poststructuralist theorist like Homi Bhabha,

> the encounters and negotiations of differential meanings and values within "colonial" textuality, its governmental discourses and cultural practices, have enacted, *avant la lettre*, many of the problematics of signification and judgment that have become current in contemporary theory–aporia, ambivalence, indeterminacy, the question of discursive closure, the threat to agency, the status of intentionality, the challenge to "totalizing" concepts, to name but a few. ("Postcolonial" 439)

One must not rule out the limitless other means by which Canada's literatures could be organized by selecting different criteria, such as geographical region, culture, class, gender, sexuality, thematic references, and the like. Thus, what emerges is a body of Canadian literatures that, like a multi-threaded tapestry, comes apart the more that it is handled. It is this shifting, ungraspable nature of Canadian literatures that has posed the majority of problems for comparatists attempting to contain the multitude expressions within a single study. Both Atwood and Moisan have employed methodologies that are necessarily limited in what they can address. The first step in addressing this malaise in the discipline may be to relinquish the perceived necessity for completeness and, rather, construct a composite understanding of Canadian literatures through a collaboration of efforts and perspectives.

Rather than attempt to address the challenges facing the discipline from a clean slate, the works of past comparatists, like Atwood and Moisan, can serve as a starting ground for a broadening of methodological approach. The shortfalls of

these two critics' works can serve as a testament that new directions need to move beyond where Atwood and Moisan took their analyses. However, the trajectory that is established by these two critics also serves as a testament to the value of pursuing this line of research. Both Atwood and Moisan held to their opinion that it is indeed a worthwhile endeavor to study Canadian literatures comparatively, across linguistic, cultural, and other differences. It is these differences that mark Canadian literatures as unique from many other world literatures. Rather than allowing Canada's diversity to stand in the way of comparative analyses, it is time for comparatists to explore new options that work with such a variety of voices. When the necessity to assess Canadian literatures on the basis of linguistic and cultural groups is ceded to the possibility of other approaches, growth may appear in the most unlikely of places.

PART ONE

Introduction

In this first part of my consideration of critical interaction across languages and cultures in comparative Canadian literature, I wish to explore the similarities between two critical works published by Atwood and Moisan. Both critics have stated their intentions to read Canadian literatures comparatively, across existing linguistic and cultural borders. To carry out my analysis, I will first discuss the methods used by Atwood to incite a response from her readers on the topic of Canadian literatures. Second, I will look at Moisan's comparison of Canadian poetry, as he demonstrates to what extent French Canada was particularly well positioned to respond to Atwood's call to action. Moisan's specific reference to the influence of Atwood's writing on his own work is not only exceptional for his having reached across Canada's language divide, but also in that Moisan chose to respond to Atwood over better-known anglophone scholars working in the same area. Third, I will explore the use of translation in both texts with an eye to how it helped broaden the comparative field in question. The projects undertaken by both Atwood and Moisan are ambitious and not without their complications. So, to conclude this section, I will discuss problems in both projects that stood in the way of the ultimate goals of the authors, namely, their attempts to deliver analyses that speak to the entire body of Canadian literatures, and the ultimate failure of their thematic approaches. These works are unique in speaking across linguistic and cultural boundaries, despite the obstacles that such a project carries with it.

Atwood's Comparative Analysis of Canadian Literatures

House of Anansi Press published *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* in 1972. Intended for the broadest audience possible, this handbook to Canadian literature had "the average reader" (6) in mind and sought to prove the existence of a literature distinct to Canada. Through this summary text, Atwood shed critical light on the broader implications of (not) studying the creative production of a country that was then, as it is now, fractured along many political and cultural lines. There are devices employed in *Survival* that are crucial to the response this book incited: the controversial nature of both Atwood's message and her position within the discipline, the use of a manifesto genre to format underlying political concerns, the vices and masked virtues of thematic criticism, and ambivalent language. The achievement of this short book is underscored when viewed in contrast to how Atwood was situated in the field when she undertook the project. As a young scholar, accomplished writer, and a keen observer of the Canadian literary scene, Atwood was perhaps the ideal person to present such a controversial text, one that marked a significant change for the discipline.

By 1972 Atwood had published six collections of poetry, including *The Circle Game* (for which she became the youngest writer ever to win the Governor General's Award, in 1966) and *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*. She had also written two novels: *The Edible Woman* and *Surfacing*. Having been active in the literary community in Toronto since the early sixties, and acquainted with writers from across the country, Atwood was already a prominent figure in Canadian

literature. She was immersed in the English-Canadian literary scene, with first-hand knowledge of this group's concerns and of the literary momentum of that era. Canadian literature was not yet considered a legitimate area of academic study, and many writers found themselves struggling to have their works published and appreciated in their own country. Atwood's insider perspective was mentioned by publishers as a selling point for the French translation of her text, *Essai sur la littérature canadienne*: "le fait d'être écrit de l'intérieur, par une romancière dont l'oeuvre se situe aux tout premiers rangs de cette littérature, et qui a elle-même vécu et assumé, dans sa propre écriture, la problématique dont elle parle ici" (9). Academically, Atwood was aware of what had been and had yet to be published in Canadian literary criticism. She studied English at the University of Toronto under Northrop Frye, and carried out graduate work at Harvard University. The time that she spent living in the United States, particularly during the American involvement in the Vietnam War, influenced her considerations of the Canadian identity. Her first teaching positions were in Vancouver, Montreal, and Toronto, and centered on her area of specialization, Victorian literature. Despite a solid academic background, she was still an upstart in Canadian literary criticism when she undertook the project of *Survival*.

Controversy

Given Atwood's dual training as a writer and academic, she was able to speak both knowledgeably and frankly about the state of Canadian literature as she saw it. *Survival* was originally presented as an accessible reference guide, though the more pragmatic impetus for the project was as a fundraiser for House of Anansi Press. If Atwood did not consider herself as undertaking a scholarly analysis, her awareness of the body of English language literary criticism was nevertheless sound. The original text cites "Other Books of Criticism You May Want" (23), a now outdated list that was cut from the 2004 re-release of the book. This list includes *Read Canadian*, edited by Robert Fulford, Dave Godfrey, and Abraham Rotstein; *Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English*, edited by Carl F. Klinck; *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* by Frye; *Butterfly on Rock: A Study of Themes and Images in Canadian Literature* by D. G. Jones; and *Second Image: Comparative Studies in Quebec/Canadian Literature* by Ronald Sutherland. Notably missing from this list are more political texts, such as George Grant's *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism*, and any work by a Québec scholar, such as Moisan's *L'Âge de la littérature canadienne*.

Atwood attempted to deliver the content of Canadian literary studies to an audience she felt had yet to be addressed, and put forth arguments about the existence of, and underlying themes in, Canadian literature in a way that academics could not ignore. *Survival* strikes a delicate balance between pervasively colloquial language and strong political undertones about the

Canadian identity as it is expressed in literature. Critics took aim at the strong nationalist message of *Survival*, but as Russell Brown suggests in his article "Canadian Thematic Criticism: A Reconsideration," many of thematic criticism's "increasingly negative connotations may partly have reflected the academic establishment's discomfort with Atwood's immensely popular guidebook to Canadian literature" (656). Atwood agrees that many established scholars took offense at the boldness of *Survival*'s message:

> The few dedicated academic souls who had cultivated this neglected pumpkin patch over the meager years were affronted because a mere chit of a girl had appropriated a pumpkin they regarded as theirs, and those who had taken a firm stand on the non-existence of Canadian literature were affronted because I had pointed out that there was in fact a pumpkin *to* appropriate. (4)

The controversy that stormed around *Survival* in the years immediately following its publication still remains today.

The reaction that *Survival* incited was not only a result of the content of Atwood's message, but also of its delivery. Atwood wrote in an inflammatory style in order to draw greater attention to the topic of Canadian literatures. In the 1960s there were a number of Canadian writers, both English and French, who were writing texts with the purpose of raising the profile of literature and defending the freedom of artistic expression. These writers set an example of the style of writing intended to invoke a reaction from the reading audience. Louis Dudek, Irving Layton, and the anglophone small publishers working out of

Montreal at the time were already well known for this kind of work. As Dudek explains in *The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada: Essential Articles on Contemporary Canadian Poetry in English,* "Every bit of so-called reaction is useful, mainly, to stir up the fires of revolt" (141). In French Canada a similar movement was taking place, one that followed in the anarchist footsteps of the *Refus Global* group of artists and writers, into the quiet revolution, through to the turbulent seventies. The emotive capabilities of the manifesto genre were introduced by Paul-Émile Borduas with lines like the following: "D'ici là, sans repos ni halte, en communauté de sentiment avec les assoiffés d'un mieux-être, sans crainte des longues échéances, dans l'encouragement ou la persécution, nous poursuivons dans la joie notre sauvage besoin de libération" (82). Following the example set out by the generation of writers before her, Atwood structured *Survival* by assuming the genre of the performative text.

The *Survival* Manifesto

In writing *Survival*, Atwood had a clear agenda and a desired outcome in mind. She aimed to create a user-friendly guide that would facilitate a growth in readership for Canadian literature, both privately and within educational institutions. The style and tone of this work took on a genre of performative writing that could draw readers into the debate over the importance and value of studying Canada's literatures in their own right. The dual objective of *Survival* is described by Atwood as "a cross between a personal statement, which most books are, and a political manifesto, which most books also are, if only by default" (20).

The resulting text draws readers into a renewed consideration of what is at stake in the study of Canadian literature. In her article "A Plea for Criticism in the Translation Zone," Söderlind describes this style of writing as "a critical and pedagogical practice that would have an effect" on readers (4). She argues that there is a place for this type of active questioning in literary criticism, although it is seldom put to use: "In pedagogical discussions of affect in our discipline the focus is usually on how to manage affective responses to texts, not on how to produce affect as a pedagogical or critical tool" (4). The overt message of *Survival* is that a body of literature unique to Canada does exist and deserves to be studied. The implied message of the book, however, makes a similar kind of statement regarding Canadian identity and nationhood. In demonstrating that a Canadian literature exists, and that it is distinct, Atwood outlined what she saw as the Canadian-ness of Canadian literature (17). Beyond studying Canadian literature for its own sake, Atwood showed that examining society's self-representations in literature could also mean taking a more committed stance in the political and social concerns of the country.

Although postcolonial theory did not come into vogue in Canada until the early 1990s, Atwood anticipates its line of questioning with her promotion of a Canadian identity and literature that is separate from those of the founding countries of England and France. It is her opinion that the lingering influence of colonial powers in Canada have stunted the development of a body of literature unique to this country. Atwood diagnosed a colonial mentality in Canada that has caused a general disregard for Canadian literature at home: "Let us suppose, for

the sake of argument, that Canada as a whole is a victim, or an 'oppressed minority,' or 'exploited.' Let us suppose in short that Canada is a colony" (45). In a succinct way, *Survival* captured the concerns that hovered in Canadian society at the time of the book's conception – questions of Canadian identity, nationhood, and language politics, as they relate to the literatures that are written in Canada. This manifesto method was intended to stir the reader into new ways of thinking about the effects of colonial influence in this country. For Atwood, teaching Canadian literature "is a political act. If done badly it can make people even more bored with their country than they already are; if done well, it may suggest to them *why* they have been taught to be bored with their country, and whose interests that boredom serves" (21). A number of postcolonial theorists may have influenced the direction that Atwood took with her work, although these are not cited as such. Franz Fanon, Aimé Cesaire, Michel Foucault, Albert Memmi, and Paulo Freire all had published foundational works in the sixties and early seventies. Freire, in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, explains the colonizer's domination via the creation and dissemination of an inferior image of the "other" (64). A key structural component to *Survival* is the schema of the oppressed, and the possibility for transcendence from this relation. Atwood's "Basic Victim Positions" (45), of which there are four, can be related to an individual or a society. They chart an evolution from first denying one's victim status, to recognizing this status but viewing it as an uncontrollable state, to insisting on the possibility for change, to finally escaping victimization through creative negotiation. These victim positions employ a reversal of Freire's concept of the

oppressed, designed not to further entrench oppression, but to drive the reader towards emancipation through action. Atwood has drawn up a diagrammatic representation of Canadian society that many readers would take exception to. The reader's discomfort when being classified as a victim of both colonial power and the natural environment is one of Atwood's tools to invoke the reader's desire for change. By raising the profile of Canadian literatures, and getting readers and authors to consider the content of this writing, Atwood suggests how one can negotiate one's way out of the entrapment of victimization from natural and colonial powers.

The approachable tone, common language, and generalizations necessary to create such a succinct critical work were the main focus of the academic backlash to *Survival* in English Canada. It was Atwood's intention to write in a style that was "accessible to people other than scholars and specialists, and that would do it with simplicity and practicability" (20). Nevertheless, this form of writing lacks the precision and scholarly accountability that is now the established norm for literary criticism, and such a deviation could not be ignored. The impact that the book had on literary consciousness building in the country, and its rapid rise to popularity, made it such that academics had no choice but to engage with the arguments that it put forward, despite its style. Without carefully structured language and supported arguments, *Survival* was not adequately equipped to withstand the rigorous critical analysis that fell upon it. Such was not the case on the other side of Canada's linguistic divide, where *Survival*'s political undertones resonated more deeply. French Canada did not display the same academic

resistance to Atwood's text. As Kröller explains, "Few of the critics who mention the book bother to take issue with Atwood's reading of Québec writing, selective as it is. This, I suggest, is because francophone critics read *Survival* as an existentialist manifesto rather than as a literary handbook" (72). That French Canada picked up on and responded to the more socio-political undertones of Atwood's message attests to *Survival*'s having touched upon an area that was of real concern to her reading audience. This is a point that will be addressed further on in this section.

The process that Atwood led the reading audience through was akin to holding a mirror up for Canadians to consider themselves by. By reflecting her view of the major trends in the country's literature in broad strokes, Atwood invited readers to fill in the picture with their representations of the more detailed diversity that is their lived experience. Such a response did come, both in agreement and disagreement with Atwood's message.

Thematic Criticism

Survival's thematic approach to reading Canadian literature has been the text's most pronounced source of derision. While thematics was emerging in the 1960s as a legitimate critical approach to literature, the generalizations required of this mode may have been more than Canadian academics were willing to risk for the sake of analysis. Despite the backlash Atwood's thematic approach triggered, it did prove helpful in the book's overall goal of eliciting reader response. Brown supports this possibility: "Certainly there were weaknesses in the thematic

criticism of the 1970s. Atwood was frank, in *Survival*, in acknowledging her reliance on [generalizations]. Her intention in creating that book was not to provide a closely argued scholarly treatise but to engage the attentions of a broad general audience" (665). While both Atwood's and Moisan's uses of thematic criticism will be discussed at greater length further on, I wish to question here how thematic criticism could have served the overall purpose of Atwood's text, namely, to raise awareness and promote further discussion about Canadian literature. Brown supports this use of thematic criticism, saying that

> thematic statements can be understood as aids to dialogue – convenient ways of opening or organizing discussions of a literary work, either by itself or in a relationship to other texts or contexts. Readers do, after all, need to make connections between literary texts and the world that lies outside of books, and theme can help to bridge the gap between word and world. (674)

Many readers took to *Survival*'s message in much that way, seeing the broad theme of survival as a useful point of reference for their first forays into reading this country's literary works. However, those who did not feel represented by the grim message portrayed in the text, were compelled to speak out in a way that proved the existence of other traits.

Atwood became familiar with the thematic approach while carrying out graduate work at Harvard University, and through her study of Frye's critical writings. In line with previous works, such as Nicholas Pevsner's *The Englishness of English Art* and Leslie Fiedler's treatments of American literature, *Survival*

aimed at "the identification of a series of characteristics and leitmotifs, and a comparison of the varying treatments of them in different national and cultural environments" (8). Frye has been cited as the primary developer of the thematic approach as it relates to Canadian literature. The real impact of thematic criticism, according to Paul Stuewe, was felt once the trend was more broadly taken up by critics who had studied under Frye:

> Frye's remarks on Canadian literature are more important in terms of their effects upon others than as components of his own work. If not for a large and growing band of disciples, Frye's criticism of Canadian writing might well have been ignored in favor of discussion of his more grandiose general theories, since the former constitutes a very small part of the total of his critical writing. (15)

In the period following *Survival*'s first publication, the thematic approach to literary criticism received a great deal of attention. This way of seeing Canadian literature endured in high school curricula and university English classes, for the overall accessible nature of its structure. In some areas, *Survival* can be seen to have started a strong, however brief, wave of similar approaches to literature. Literary magazines up to the mid-eighties had published scores of articles employing this genre of criticism. Regarding the journal *Canadian Literature*, Stuewe remarks on "a surprising uniformity of approach to the work of criticism, as well as a general constellation of attitudes which reflects the dominance of the thematic method" (21). The prominence of this critical mode was nonetheless short lived, as the scholarly backlash pushed such studies out of vogue.

The Indeterminacy of Ambivalent Language

The language with which Atwood builds her case is intended to temper how the audience receives her message. There is ambivalence present in her work that consciously creates interpretive openings in her arguments. Definitive meanings are deferred, closure is withheld, and the reader's response is encouraged. Through the use of such techniques, Atwood's writing style invites the reader into the process of creating meaning. Roland Barthes has described the different types of texts that require varying amounts of involvement. First is the "*lisible*" (10) or readerly text, one that puts forth a readily consumable meaning, such as a canonical work that is closed to alteration. The second kind of text, however, is the "*scriptible*" (10) or writerly text, which is open to multiple interpretations. The writerly moves away from realism towards the avant-garde, resisting habitual reading. "The reader is no longer a consumer but a producer of the text," says Steve McCaffery, "The writerly proposes the *unreadable* as the ideological site of a departure from consumption to production, presenting the domain of its own interior, interacting elements" (143). Closure is made impossible by the slurring of meaning that is Jacques Derrida's concept of *différance* (3). Joining the concept of difference and deferral, Derrida demonstrates the inability of words, and entire works, to faithfully transmit a singular meaning.

Survival is rife with examples of this discursive language, using qualitative words such as maybe, irony, humour, and wit. Atwood is not ashamed to admit the provisional nature of some of her statements: "again this is a guess"

(147). This analytical approach tries, according to Atwood, to avoid evaluating, which is reminiscent of Frye's work. She adds, "But I'll let you do that kind of evaluation for yourself" (52). The onus is placed upon readers as to whether or not they agree with her hypotheses: "What I'm doing is looking at what the writers have in fact 'said,' what kinds of patterns they've made; it's up to you to decide whether or not you like those patterns or think they are accurate (not necessarily the same thing)" (133).

The 'horizon of expectations' discussed within reader-response theory may provide insight into Atwood's style of argument. As Jonathan Culler explains, "all readers are part of interpretive communities which train the reader into a shared set of expectations about how a text should be read and what it might mean" (146). This may explain why critics responded to *Survival* the way that they did. Prior to *Survival*'s publication, the norm in the field of Canadian literary criticism was established by lengthy tomes that conveyed a thoroughly developed take on the canon, such as A.J.M. Smith's *The Oxford Book of Canadian Verse: in English and French*. If specialists in this area consider *Survival* with past expectations in mind, their disappointment becomes understandable. The reader is warned that *Survival* "is not an exhaustive, extensive, or all-inclusive treatise on Canadian literature" (17). In light of the resoundingly negative reviews that *Survival* received, it appears as though many critics have judged this summary text against the canon of their own expertise.

There are generalizations made in *Survival* that Atwood tries to quickly diffuse with qualifying statements. This incites the reader to respond to her

controversial remarks. Rather than self-censoring contentious issues, she draws the reader into responding by showing her awareness of other points of view. For example, the claim that every country has an underlying symbol is followed by a quick parenthetical cover: "Please don't take any of my oversimplifications as articles of dogma which allow no exceptions; they are proposed simply to create vantage points from which the literature may be viewed" (40). The pervasiveness of survival in Canadian literature, "like any theory," says Atwood, "won't explain everything, but it may give you some points of departure" (45). These diffusing statements are all the more surprising when they follow, not generalizations, but lengthy schematics such as the evolutionary victim outline. The caveat is given: "[T]his is a verbal diagram: it is intended to be suggestive rather than totally accurate" (50). The ultimate success of this technique is suspect. It is unreasonable to expect other critics and reviewers to abstain from seriously challenging Atwood's claims simply by virtue of her having stated her awareness that they are not absolutely sound.

Atwood credits the contributions of a number of colleagues. The project, she explains, "is practically a community effort [. . .]. The accuracies and fine points in this book were for the most part contributed by others; the sloppy generalizations are my own" (ix). This displacement of responsibility is continued in the introduction to the 2004 edition of the book. Atwood explains that she had a great deal of help when she was "writing this book – or rather when I was putting it together, for it drew on the work of my predecessors and the thoughts of my contemporaries, and was thus more an act of synthesis than one of authorship"

(4). If, indeed, *Survival* was a "group project" (7) by the team of writers at Anansi Press, Atwood was the only author the work was attributed to, and accordingly she has been the sole recipient of the book's negative reviews, accusations of weak scholarship, and personal defamation of herself as a representative of the now discredited mode of thematic criticism. The summary nature of *Survival* inherently excludes a great deal from consideration. Such a short overview of Canadian literature was intended to present a starting point from which readers could begin their own explorations. Indeterminacy clears a space in her work, leaving an almost audible silence that begs the reader's response.

Moisan's Reaction to Atwood

In *Survival* Atwood asserts the existence of literatures unique to Canada and separate from those of England, France, and the United States. She sought to prompt further discussion about the country's literatures in order to reverse the under-appreciation of Canadian literatures at home and abroad. Atwood put out a call to French Canadian scholars to create a mirror text to hers: "If you're a French teacher teaching Canadian literature, presumably you already know more about this area than I do; for you, there ought to be a book written in French, describing more of the key patterns in Québec literature, and with a single chapter on 'English' Canada parallel to this one" (259). Despite the presence of more than one Canadian identity in Atwood's thesis, her recognition of, and address to, French Canada was enough to prompt Moisan to respond in kind. As I move forward with my consideration of Moisan's critical text, the hypothesis that I want

to test is that francophone critics may have been more ready to receive Atwood's outwardly political and culturally critical approach than their anglophone counterparts. Moisan's very different perspective as a Québec scholar enabled him to approach *Survival* with a heightened sensitivity to the broader political and cultural implications it bore. *Poésie des frontières* took off from Atwood's incomplete treatment of the underlying social and political history of French and English relations in Canada, and the implications this can have for the study of the country's literatures. In this section, I will first explore Moisan's motivation to respond to Atwood's works, over those of other comparatists working at this time. Second, I will discuss the questions Moisan raises, from his observations of contemporary poets in English and French, about the project and purpose of speaking of Canadian literature in a country where political unity and plurality are hotly debated issues.

As a prominent Canadian comparatist, Moisan was already well-acquainted with the field prior to the publication of *Survival* in 1979. In the spring of 1966, the Imperial Tobacco Company of Canada launched an essay competition with the theme "Canada – An/Year 2000." The call for papers was intended both to commemorate the 1967 centennial of the Canadian Confederation and to "inciter les Canadiens à réfléchir sur l'avenir de leur pays et à proposer des solutions originales aux problèmes d'aujourd'hui" (Moisan, *Âge* 7). The first prize was awarded to Moisan for his essay, "L'Âge de la littérature canadienne," which was subsequently expanded and published in book form in 1969 under the same title. Prominently situated at l'Université Laval for the

duration of his academic career, Moisan was influenced by Québec cultural and political events, including the emergence of the FLQ and the October Crisis in 1970; the election of the first sovereigntist party, le Parti Québécois, in 1976; the referenda on sovereignty or sovereignty association in 1980 and 1995; the constitutional rounds of debate at Meech Lake in 1988 and Charlottetown, 1992, and the creation of the Bloc Québécois in 1991. In developing his methodological approach to comparative Canadian literary criticism, however, Moisan struggled to reconcile the unifying trend that was popular in Canadian literary criticism at that time with his own lived experience.

Dissatisfied with the use of the term "Canadian Literature" to describe the writings that originate in a country of "deux langues et deux cultures" (*Âge* 17), Moisan consistently focused on the English-French divide. While recognizing this cleavage within the country's literatures, the potential benefits of reading these two together served as his motivation: "Mais, tout compte fait, l'étude comparée des deux littératures du pays, à partir d'un même point de vue, ne peut qu'aboutir à d'heureux résultats et fournir des lumières nouvelles sur le caractère marginal de leur situation présente" (*Âge* 14). Moisan's comparative analyses of French and English literatures in Canada have marked significant developments for the discipline. *Poésie des frontières* details the close relationships within Canadian poetry, taking a thematic approach to their shared formal, linguistic, and historical aspects. A line of continuation can be drawn between *L'Âge* and *Poésie des frontières*, with the latter text offering Moisan the opportunity to test his initial hypotheses on a more specific area: "L'ouvrage que je présente maintenant a

précisément pour but d'étayer quelques thèses de l'essai de 1969 dans le champ de la poésie contemporaine du Québec et du Canada" (13). Because the call for papers that led to *L'Âge* carried the unifying theme of Canadian confederation, this work seeks more to draw out the similarities between French and English Canadian literatures, all but ignoring the differences that exist between them. The commonality that Moisan set out to demonstrate, however, was divided along many lines: "les frontières existent donc, d'abord linguistiques, puis culturelles, intellectuelles, historiques et géographiques" (*Poésie des frontières* 7). Conscious of this shortcoming in his earlier text, Moisan places equal importance on the similarities and differences for *Poésie des frontières*. He examines the interaction of Canada's literary works along these borders, with the belief that "les frontières peuvent aussi devenir, outre des endroits de séparation, des points de rencontre, qui permettent de connaître l'autre, voire de la comprendre" (*Poésie des frontières* 8). Above all, Moisan demonstrates the relationships (la parenté) between Canada's literatures by broadening his critical glance beyond unilingual, unicultural perspectives.

In considering Moisan's early engagement with the field of comparative Canadian literature, it is evident that Atwood's *Survival* was by no means the sole impetus behind *Poésie des frontières*. Atwood's influence is nonetheless clear, given the topics that take centre stage in this text. By narrowing his focus where Atwood's was less developed, Moisan chose to concentrate on the intricacies within the Canadian English-French situation, leaving Canadian-American relations aside. Unlike Atwood, whose objective was to show the thematic traits

shared between Canadian works, *Poésie des frontières* does not exclusively pursue similarities; it is also open to the differences that may be found between the two literatures. Moisan sought to "placer celles-ci face à face de manière à les mieux apercevoir dans ce qu'elles ont de particulier et de différent" (16). By drawing on how Canadian poets express the theme of survival in different ways, Moisan focused in on the borders that keep Canadians separated. Following a general overview of each language's poetic history in Canada, there are four thematic sections to *Poésie des frontières*: "poésie de la clandestinité"; "poésie de la résistance"; "poésie de la libération"; and "la nouvelle culture, la contre-culture." Each section features up to three poets from each language (eighteen poets in all), whom Moisan reads as addressing a particular theme. Although Moisan's work is not exhaustive in the material that it covers, it is far more comprehensive than Atwood's treatment of Canadian literature. Rather than select his examples randomly, as Atwood did, Moisan appears to have made an effort to be as representative as possible. The treatment of French and English texts is symmetrically balanced, despite Moisan's admission that his familiarity with English Canadian poetry is not as thorough as his knowledge of Québec poets. While Atwood had to rely on English translations of French texts for her readings, the bibliography for *Poésie des frontières* shows that Moisan's comparisons are based on the original texts.

The components of Moisan's analysis of Canadian poetry in French and English are form, structure, and themes: "Mon intention serait de comparer pour eux-mêmes les deux corpus poétiques c'est-à-dire leurs formes, leurs structures,

leurs thèmes afin de tracer quelques voies d'explication de leur orientation et de leur situation dans les contextes québécois et canadien" (14). Moisan is looking for universal ground between English and French poetries, basing this on human nature, and the over-arching qualities inherent to artistic production: "Par la suite, de ce promontoire on pourra sans doute apercevoir un certain universel, l'Homme, qui est l'éternel objet de la création et de l'art" (14). Antoine Sirois points out in his article, "Compte Rendu – Moisan, Clément," that by thematically juxtaposing English and French poets, Moisan demonstrates how both contribute to contemporary Canadian culture: "Le sujet est bien situé dans le contexte des études actuelles, la comparaison des auteurs spécifiques s'inscrit dans la continuité des panoramas de chacune des poésies en question" (413).

Unlike Atwood's grim picture of the general lack of appreciation she perceives Canadian literatures receive at home, Moisan's outlook is more optimistic. In *Poésie des frontières*, he points to improvements that were just emerging when Atwood wrote *Survival*, such as the increase in the number of literary programs at Canadian universities like Alberta, Toronto, and Laval, and the emergence of academic journals such as the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* and *Ellipse*. This progress only goes so far, however. Moisan recognizes "l'intérêt accru des étudiants pour le domaine littéraire canadien et québécois qui détermine chez eux de nouvelles formes d'enracinement" (20), although for the most part students were more concerned with the literatures of only one culture: "l'intérêt se porte presque exlusivement sur l'une ou l'autre littérature, en fonction du lieu où l'on habite et de la langue de l'enseignement"

(20). It is this divided interest in Canada's literatures that Moisan is working against by drawing out the similarities between English and French poetries in Canada.

By taking up the study of English and French Canadian literature in *Poésie des frontières*, Moisan is in good company. A number of influential works of comparative Canadian literary criticism had already been published prior to 1979. These include Lorne Pierce's *An Outline of Canadian Literature (French and English)*, Anne Hébert and Frank Scott's *Dialogue sur la traduction*, D.G. Jones's *Butterfly on Rock*, Ronald Sutherland's *Second Image: Comparative Studies in Québec / Canadian Literature*, Northrop Frye's *The Bush Garden*, and Atwood's *Survival*. Moisan demonstrates a broad awareness of other comparative Canadian critical works, and how he situates himself with respect to these. This is to say that there are a number of texts that could have served as influences to Moisan's *Poésie des frontières*. The question remains, then, why Moisan demonstrated such an affinity for Atwood's work above other, perhaps better-established, scholars who were doing similar work in the field, such as Frye, Sutherland, Sirois, and Jones.

Frye was the most prominent Canadian scholar working in English and French whose work set an example for comparative readings. By the time that *Poésie des frontières* was written, Frye had earned an international reputation as a literary critic, however, his treatment of Canadian literature was still sparse, and relatively unknown in French Canada. Although *The Bush Garden* was published in 1971, Moisan makes very little mention of this critical work in *Poésie des*

frontières. The one reference that Moisan makes to Frye's book is in relation to Atwood's treatment of the relationship of Canadians and to an aggressive natural environment (211).

Moisan does credit other comparatists for the influence their work had on the field: "On doit accorder une place à part aux travaux de Ronald Sutherland, Antoine Sirois et Douglas Jones, tous trois de l'université de Sherbrooke, qui ont fait oeuvre de pionniers" (21). He briefly outlines the contributions each has made. Moisan's treatment of Sutherland's work is positive, calling *Second Image* an "oeuvrage essentiel" (21), one that demonstrates "la nécessité de ces comparaisons entre les deux littératures canadienne et québécoise pour ouvrir les frontières de chacune d'elles" (27). This, however, is the extent of Moisan's treatment of Sutherland. Antoine Sirois is mentioned still less, Moisan noting only his 1968 doctoral thesis on the topic of Montréal in the Canadian novel, as a study that joins French, English, and a number of cultures, such as Montréal's Jewish community. Moisan credits Jones with advancing knowledge of English texts in the realm of comparative literature, and for his contributions as co-founder and co-editor of the bilingual literary journal *Ellipse.* Moisan does not express a view of Jones as someone who has contributed extensively to our understanding of French literature in Canada, or to the relationship between the two. With reference to Jones's treatment of both English and French Canadian literature, Moisan writes of his role as a poet and his creative observations of the two cultures living in Québec. As he explains, "D. G. Jones illustre assez bien dans sa poésie la thématique du pays. Ses contacts avec les poètes du Québec, où il réside, l'ont

sans doute incliné dans ce sens" (85). More often than not, Moisan's references to Jones are preceeded or followed by more in-depth credit to Atwood's critical work. This imbalance in focus between Jones's and Atwood's critical work is curious, given the similarities between *Butterfly on Rock* and *Survival*. Both critics studied under Frye, and their texts offer a comparative look at Canadian literature in French and English with a less than equal treatment to Québécois writing. Could it be that Moisan chose to deal more extensively with Atwood's text because she was a more strictly anglophone scholar, living in Toronto, working mainly in English? By the time that Moisan was writing *Poésie des frontières*, Jones was living in Sherbrooke, Québec, was fluent in French, and was married to Sheila Fishmann, who became one of the foremost French-to-English translators in Canada. Despite the availability of other critics for Moisan to base his responding text on, Atwood (an anglophone writer living in Ontario and garnering an ever-increasing popularity) emerges as an easier choice of critic to place in opposition to his own work.

By responding seriously to Atwood's text, Moisan has taken a stance that appears to be unfazed by the controversial nature of *Survival*'s message, and the volatile response the text was receiving. Considering his status as a well-known scholar in the field, it is very likely that Moisan was aware of the storm of criticism brewing around *Survival*, but he nonetheless chose to forge ahead in considering Atwood's influence, such was his conviction of the value of her work. Although *Poésie des frontières* was published seven years after *Survival*, it is curious that Moisan makes no mention of the considerable response that Atwood

received in English Canada that largely attacked her use of thematic criticism. A comprehensive look at Québec's reception of Atwood is included in Eva-Marie Kröller's essay "Les talents de la voisine: Margaret Atwood and Quebec." Atwood's popularity in Québec is quite recent, says Kröller, due mainly to a lag in publishing translations of Atwood's works:

> These gaps in making available translations of earlier works, in tandem with almost instantaneous translation of virtually anything written by Atwood during the nineties and beyond, suggests that her celebrity status in Quebec is relatively recent. Indeed, early commentators on her work often allude to the absence of translations that would allow francophone readers to familiarize themselves with it. (66)

The French language translation of *Survival* was not available in Québec until 1987. This may explain the relative lack of criticism of the work from Québec, since only bilingual Québécois scholars had access to the text right away.

Moisan composed a scholarly response to *Survival*'s deliberately non-academic work, supporting his arguments while continuing to ask fundamental questions about the discipline of comparative literature. Not only were Moisan and Atwood at different stages of their academic careers, their perspectives vis à vis the production of literature were different as well. While Atwood formed her argument more from the point of view of a young Canadian writer than an academic, Moisan's familiarity with Canadian literature is based solely on

academic experience. This difference shines through in the varied levels of intimacy with which each author speaks of literature.

Despite their different perspectives, Atwood and Moisan mutually struggle within the field of comparative Canadian literature to negotiate the tensions between scholarly objectives and Canadian political and cultural realities. It was Atwood's controversial tone, and the underlying political message of her text, that struck a chord with Moisan. The postcolonial approach of her work presented Moisan with the opportunity to scrutinize the effects a colonial relationship can have on how comparative literary studies are carried out on both sides of the linguistic divide. Although these issues are introduced in Atwood's book, they are suggestions only, and remain undeveloped. Moisan picked up where Atwood's analysis left off, seizing the opportunity to delve deeper into how political and cultural relations emerge in Canadian literary works. Moisan concurred with Atwood's theme of survival, and suggested how this theme can present a crucial opportunity to delve into the broader *raison d'être* and methodology of the discipline: "La *survivance* que Margaret Atwood a expliquée dans *Survival* est bien le thème d'élection des poètes actuels du Canada et du Québec. La question qui se pose maintenant à eux est celle-ci: survivre, mais pourquoi? et pour quoi faire?" (9). The possibility of Québec sovereignty present in the 1970s, a phenomenon crystallized by the 1976 election of René Lévesque's Parti Québécois, required a re-articulation of the image and purpose of the political community, and a confrontation of the question of whether the entity known as Canada was to contain more than one nation, or further, if Québec should

separate. When Moisan reads the theme of survival in English and French poetry, he sees that each group could be striving for the survival of a different thing altogether. Pan-Canadian nationalists could be trying to keep a multicultural country safe from external encroachment, especially American, while Québec separatists are concerned with protecting their French culture and language. In the essay, "L'Espace dialogique de la comparaison," reprinted in *Comparaison*, Moisan poses fundamental questions regarding the purpose and methodology of comparative Canadian literary criticism. With the composition of Canada at stake, even questions as to the value and approach of literary comparisons must be revisited. In this light, Moisan asks other comparatists:

> [P]ourquoi faisons-nous ce travail? Et pour qui? Après cela, nous pourrions revenir sur le *comment* nous devons procéder afin d'arriver à ces fins. Car il se peut bien que nous ayons entrepris un travail que personne ne souhaite, ou qui ne sert qu'à très peu de gens. Si tel était le cas, nous serions mal venus de chercher une méthodologie propre à un excercice non souhaité ou totalement inutile. (113)

For Moisan, methodological development in comparative Canadian literature can only be addressed once the value of studying these literatures together is no longer a question. Both Moisan and Atwood sought to push their critical methodologies in a way that reveals to the reader a new perspective on Canadian literatures while also underscoring that this pursuit is essential to how Canadians negotiate such questions of identity and diversity.

Atwood's assessment of the political and cultural tensions in Canada touched on concerns that were already common currency in Québec. Réjean Beaudoin, in his 1999 essay "Axes de comparaison entre deux littératures," cites colonization as one of the critical forces behind Atwood's thematics. More importantly, however, he points out how poignantly this theme could have spoken to the experience of the French-speaking Québécois:

> L'auteure va plus loin en n'excluant pas la possibilité que le rôle de la victime soit assez souvent dicté par une obscure compulsion qui oscille entre le refus d'admettre son aliénation et la secrète complaisance de s'en délecter, faute de pouvoir en sortir. Cette problématique n'est-elle pas familière au paysage psychologique québécois? Est-il étonnant que l'écrivaine torontoise reconnaise la même attitude défaitiste dans la production des écrivains du Québec, sans vouloir réduire leur altérité? (485)

For Beaudoin, the crucial development in Atwood's text is not her having pointed to a similar sense of struggle within English and French Canada, but her respect for the differences in how each group expresses this drive for survival in a socially and historically particular fashion.

The political undertones of *Survival* matched the general atmosphere in Québec in the seventies, one that was acutely conscious of culture, language, and the country's political environment. Readers in Québec identified with this message, and appreciated the novelty of hearing it from a prominent figure in

English Canada. Kröller made this observation in her analyses of media representations of Atwood in Québec:

> [A] closer look at Atwood's reception in Quebec over the years reveals how worries about cultural autonomy hover even behind Quebec's current enthusiasm for her work. [. . .] [S]ome of Atwood's francophone readers are alert to aspects of her work that rarely occur to their anglophone counterparts precisely because the cultural sensitivities they bring to the task are so different. (68)

It is on this basis that I believe that French Canadian readers could have responded differently to *Survival* than English Canadian readers. It would seem that Atwood's demonstration of a willingness to frankly discuss the country's issues surrounding identity and nationhood was sufficient incentive for a French Canadian scholar to join the dialogue of cross-cultural, bilingual scholarship in Canadian literature.

The Use of Translated Texts in Atwood and Moisan

Atwood and Moisan took up the project of comparative Canadian literary analysis from either side of Canada's main linguistic divide with the understanding that translation could provide them with a means of negotiating this barrier. Both Atwood and Moisan confronted the scholarly limitations of working with translations. One such limitation is the shortage of texts available in translation and the influence this shortage can have on the shaping of a different canon of works. There is also the question of the faithfulness of translations to the original texts. The reasoning behind their choice to consider translations can

be seen as both pragmatic and ideological. The two critics' fluency in the other language and the political and cultural implications of such work had an impact on the material that they chose to study.

The first aspect of translation to consider is the varying linguistic fluency of either critic, as well as that of the target audience for their texts. While Atwood's knowledge of French was basic, her perspective as an anglophone literary scholar is evident. This renders a fully bilingual reading of Canadian literature unrealistic for Atwood's project: "Although I've done some of my reading in the original (usually with the aid of a dictionary, I must confess), I've relied for the most part on translations" (259). *Survival* was written with an anglophone audience in mind: "I'm assuming you're like me – that is, you learned French in high school, you can blurt out a few phrases when necessary, and you can read it but not fluently. Therefore I've limited the discussion in this chapter to works available in translation" (259). Basing her choice of texts on what was available in translation was a serious limiting factor for Atwood. She explains, "For instance, if I were French-speaking and wanted to read English Canadian literature through translations, I'd be confined at the moment to fewer than ten novels. Though the situation is better for the English-Canadian wishing to explore Québec, and improving all the time, there are still a lot of books which should be available and aren't" (259). Despite the limited resources Atwood pulled from, *Survival* mentions six poems and ten novels by sixteen French-Canadian writers. By relying on French Canadian works available in translation, Atwood's research

lacks the depth of Moisan's project, although her breadth, under the circumstances, is considerable.

Moisan's use of translation is minimal, owing primarily to his linguistic fluency, and an expectation that his reading audience is similarly fluent. For this reason, citations are made in their original language, with whatever necessary paraphrasing or context provided by Moisan in French. Compared to *Survival*, the broadened scope of Moisan's project is considerable. By treating texts in their original language, Moisan was easily able to maintain the format of his comparisons, pairing nine francophone and nine anglophone poets over four chapters. In this way Moisan's work stands apart from Atwood's, holding up the bilingual standards common to the discipline of comparative literature. The first instance of a translated text that Moisan makes mention of is his disapproval of the 1972 Parisian translation of Leonard Cohen's poetry and songs, *Poèmes et chansons*: "La traduction française de ce requeil comme du suivant, *L'Energie des esclaves* (1974), est assez mauvaise. Le traducteur ne connaît pas l'Amérique visiblement" (79). Moisan's references to translated texts are minimal, and appear to have come about more by happenstance than deliberately. He cites Robertson Davies's *Cinquième emploi* (80), and a French translation of Louis Dudek's review of Raymond Souster's poetry (159). The bibliography for *Poésie des frontières* includes a number of texts that address Canadian literature in translation (298).

Translation does not figure solely as a useful mode of broadening the reading audience for Canada's literatures. Both Atwood and Moisan discuss the

ideological benefit that translation brings to the field of comparative Canadian literary studies. Addressing her text to the "reader as citizen" (22), Atwood builds her argument for a Canadian readership that should be aware of the literatures written in Canada, in both official languages. Following this line of thought, Atwood suggests that it is not possible to fully understand Canadian literature without casting one's net widely to consider what is being written on both sides of the language divide: "The study of Canadian literature ought to be comparative, as should the study of any literature; it is by contrast that distinctive patterns show up most strongly. To know ourselves, we must know our own literature" (24). Moisan's take on translation's ability to spread awareness of these literatures is considerably more didactic than Atwood's. Moisan writes that language difference stands between any possible exchanges within Canadian literatures: "En effet, la langue différente qu'utilisent les écrivains est déjà une barrière assez solide pour empêcher tout échange véritable entre ses contrées; il faut pour visiter ces pays se munir de passeport et même de visa, qui sont en l'occurence des traductions d'oeuvres." (7). For both Atwood and Moisan translation stands as the first and most important step towards opening up a dialogue and broadening understanding of Canadian literatures.

Atwood and Moisan salute new endeavours in Canadian literary translations that have helped to raise the profile of this mode within the discipline of Canadian literary studies. At the time when both texts were written, the field of comparative Canadian literary criticism was still very new. Moisan explains, though, that translation played a key part in making these studies possible: "Les

études comparées en littérature québécoise et canadienne sont encore dans les langes. Il ne faut pas s'en attrister outre mesure, si l'on songe que bien des activités connexes, en particuliers celles de la traduction des oeuvres en anglais et en français, ont aidé à la connaissance de quelques-uns des meilleurs écrivains de l'autre littérature" (19). Among the works of comparative Canadian studies mentioned by both Atwood and Moisan are Frye's *The Bush Garden,* Jones' *Butterfly on Rock*, and Ronald Sutherland's *Second Image*. Both critics make mention of John Glassco's translations in his collection *The Poetry of French Canada in Translation*, released in 1970. All French-Canadian poems cited in *Survival* were taken from this collection. Also making a big mark on both Atwood and Moisan was the bilingual journal *Ellipse*, which published poetry and commentaries by two Canadian poets per month – one French Canadian, one English Canadian. Besides academic texts that were being released then, a number of initiatives also emerged around that time that served to foster the project of translating Canada's literatures. Moisan goes into particular detail on these: "On sait quels efforts sont faits actuellement pour traduire les oeuvres canadiennes et québécoises" (19). These include the translation of English Canadian novels by the "Collection des deux solitudes" released by Cercle du Livre de France, HMH, and le Jour; and the release of French Canadian novels by McClelland and Stewart's "The Canadian Library" series, House of Anansi, and New Press. Moisan also discusses the prize being offered by the Canada Council for the Arts in the categories of English and French Canadian literary translations. A thorough account of both the incentives behind translation programs, national

awards for literary translations, and the impact this type of financial assistance has had on the proliferation of these texts in Canada is provided by Ruth Martin in her 1994 article published in *Ellipse*, "Translated Canadian Literature and Canada Council Translation Grants 1972 – 1992: The Effect on Authors, Translators and Publishers."

The 'Other's' Reception of Translations of *Survival* and *Poésie des frontières*

Both Atwood and Moisan are in favour of the translation of Canadian literary texts, and the expansion of cultural horizons this enables. It is ironic, then, to note that the translations of both *Survival* and *Poésie des frontières* were ill received, for different reasons. Eva-Marie Kröller explains that even in light of Atwood's growing popularity in Québec, and the overall respect that she receives there as "a public intellectual with powerful influence," (72) *Survival*'s translation barely makes an appearance in French Canadian press. The Boréal translation was released in 1987 under the title of *Essai sur la littérature canadienne*. Appearing fifteen years after *Survival*, this translation was by all means late. Consequently, as Kröller's examination of the Québec media on the subject of this translated text found, "the book was well known in its English version well before 1987 and the original continues to be referred to even after the publication of the translation" (72). Despite her negative reception in English Canada, Atwood has gradually earned an esteemed reputation in Québec as a solid-minded scholar who takes a deep interest in Canadian cultural and literary issues in both English and French. Any reluctance on the part of Québec critics to appreciate Atwood's work, says Kröller, is a result of wider-reaching cultural and linguistic politics:

> Above all, Quebec's complex relationship and occasional difficulties with Margaret Atwood are a sort of *mise en abyme* for the traditional tensions between the Anglo-Canadian and Quebecois cultures. [. . .] Commentators have been preoccupied with the competition between English and French and the questions of power associated with language. As a result, they have been wary of her insistence on speaking French in interviews. (67)

Atwood's positioning as an anglophone concerned with francophone affairs causes tension. Nonetheless, she is recognized as an important figure in Canadian letters and is shown the same respect as many of Québec's literary elite. Her reputation is evident in the documented conversations she held with the prominent Québec separatist and literary figure Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, *Deux Solicitudes: entretiens* and *Two Solicitudes: Conversations*. Atwood's relative popularity in Québec has diffused the negative reception that *Survival* received in English Canada, and the resulting opinion from Québec critics on *Survival* has been minimal. Atwood's reputation is such in French Canada that many scholars are familiar with this work, and willing to accept it as a foundational text in the discussion of Canadian literature as it relates to their own concerns of culture, language, and nationalism.

In English Canada next to no mention can be found on the topic of the English translation of Moisan's *Poésie des frontières*. *A Poetry of Frontiers: Comparative Studies in Quebec/Canadian Literature* was published by Press Porcépic in 1983 after a long delay with translation. The editor's note to this

edition explains that the original intention was to release an English version of the text very soon after the publication of the original French edition. The publishing team found that "Unfortunately, the translation of such a complex work which expresses many subtle ideas proved to be a more lengthy task than first anticipated" (vi). Two translators worked on this project, although in both cases Moisan was "not satisfied with the results" (vi). Moisan remained unimpressed with the delay that ensued, demanding that the publisher include an additional erratum explaining that "the omission of some more recent material which the author would have included in a work published at this time is entirely the responsibility of the publisher and is due to the long delay between the author's completion of the manuscript and the publication of the final work in English" (vi). As was the case with the translation of Atwood's text, Moisan's *A Poetry of Frontiers* makes no appearance within works of English-language comparative Canadian literary criticism. Moisan is well known and widely respected for his work as a comparatist, and the large number of full-length texts and articles that he has written are often cited by contemporary comparatists. Always, however, quotations of Moisan's work are given in their original language, rendering the English translation redundant.

In the process of speaking to Canadian literatures across linguistic and cultural borders, both Atwood and Moisan encountered methodological problems. First, the two critics began by trying to address the entire body of Canada's literatures within a single study. Unlike Atwood's shifting focus on external and internal national relations, Moisan remains consistently focused on English and

French struggles in Canada. Neither critic achieves a picture of the true diversity that exists in Canada. The other fundamental problem for both projects is the critical laxity of generalizations often drawn by thematic criticism, which I will discuss further on.

How Atwood Speaks of, and to, the Other

The idea of the nation appears consistently throughout *Survival*, given that the text's analysis focuses on the literatures of more than one nation within Canada. Atwood is doing her part to reverse a trend that she has observed in past studies, which is to "emphasize the personal and the universal but to skip the national or cultural" (22). Her account of Canadian literature does not operate unilingually, as though French Canada did not exist. Within the context of literary criticism in the early 1970s, Atwood's view of the nation as one that includes French Canada is a marked development. In "Ghost National Arguments" Söderlind explains the significance of Atwood's perspective:

> Atwood represents the opposite – and equally questionable but more common at the time – attitude to Québec to the separatist one that was commonly adopted by subsequent critics; she happily admits her scant knowledge of French before going on to defining Quebec as emblematic of Canada. Although this is problematic, Atwood – who does not claim to make a comparative study – thus shows that her understanding of Canada depends on a perceived national ethos of Quebec. (687)

Bilingual and comparative literary analyses were still rare at the time when Atwood and Moisan were writing, although this point in Canada's history marked the beginning of a shift in interest to include multicultural issues. Atwood's recognition of French Canada opens up the comparative field significantly. Many unilingual, unicultural literary analyses preceded *Survival*, including works by Smith, Dudek and Gnarowski, Frye, and Klinck. The most prominent bilingual comparative analyses prior to *Survival* are those by Jones and Sutherland.

Atwood's objectives in writing such a "thematic guide to Canadian literature" had underlying political implications. She wrote this text at a time when Canada's unity was threatened by Québec's fight for sovereignty. In projecting what she perceived to be shared components of Canadian literature, she drew out a common denominator across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Operating in this way, *Survival* could be read as supporting a federalist view of Canada, one that supports the inclusion and subordination of Québec particularity as a province within a larger pan-Canadian national body. While English and French in Canada argued across language-based national lines, Atwood's project crossed these in her pursuit of the universal.

Representations of the "other" appears throughout Atwood's writing, and the relational nature of self-definition is a prominent concept in her work. A creative piece can serve as a litmus test, one that helps the reader gain a better understanding of both him or herself and the surrounding world. The text thus ties reader and society together, creating as Atwood says, "the reader as citizen. A piece of art, as well as being a creation to be enjoyed, can also be [. . .] a mirror.

The reader looks at the mirror and sees not the writer but himself; and behind his own image in the foreground, a reflection of the world he lives in. If a country or a culture lacks such mirrors it has no way of knowing what it looks like" (23). If, indeed, Atwood conceives of the creative text as a mirror, an analysis of a country's literatures would have to represent the cultural variety in a realistic fashion. Despite the complications surrounding English and French relations in Canada, a bilingual, bicultural project would be a reasonable starting point for a representative study. At the same time, going only as far as a bilingual analysis results in a faulty mirror indeed – one that is blind to the deeper diversity of the Canadian population.

The Canadian identity is not as unified as Atwood's thematic approach would imply. Her conception of Canada shifts in relation to the oppositional group she is naming. At one moment a unified Canada is presented that includes both English and French, defending itself against American encroachment. The next moment, though, a sudden turn reveals the Canadian universal split when Atwood speaks of the French struggle for cultural continuity under British rule. The unifying trait that spans these changes is survival: "For French Canada after the English took over it became cultural survival, hanging on as a people, retaining a religion and a language under an alien government. And in English Canada now while the Americans are taking over it is acquiring a similar meaning" (41). Beaudoin observes that the most important alterity in *Survival* is represented by the United States, not Québec. He does not, however, make any mention of how this comes to bear upon the Canadian identity that Atwood is

simultaneously constructing, the 'we' that shifts depending on whether Atwood is addressing Americans or Québécois as an opponent:

> Mais le terme de comparaison le plus crucial de l'essai de Margaret Atwood n'est pas le Québec: c'est l'Angleterre et, surtout, les États-Unis. Ce choix résulte logiquement de la théorie du colonialisme et de la langue de l'auteure. Si le Canada souffre, en effet, d'anémie culturelle, c'est faute de vouloir ou de pouvoir opposer une culture canadienne défendable à l'hégémonie mondiale de ces deux impérialismes consécutifs. (486)

Atwood's use of ambivalent language weakens her argument for a unified Canadian identity. Once she turns her attention to Canadian English-French relations, the singular national identity that she pits against encroaching American colonial threat shatters – at this point, she subdivides the Canadian national identity along linguistic lines. Looking back on *Survival*, and at the text's continued pertinence, Atwood suggests "its central concerns remain with us, and must still be confronted. Are we really that different from anybody else? If so, how? And is that *how* something worth preserving?" (10). She does not qualify who she is speaking of when she says 'we,' beyond the assumption one could make that she is referring to all Canadians. Nor does she explain who we may compare ourselves to, when she refers to 'anybody else.'

Moisan's Treatment of the Nation

Moisan, like other Canadian comparatists, has had to face the inherent challenges of discussing literature in a country where language and culture carry with them significant political implications. Due to the relational nature of selecting comparative units, there is necessarily content that is not addressed in a single comparative framework. In dealing with the Canadian situation, and literatures written in French and English, the scholar runs the risk of being perceived as supporting or refuting the Canadian state's bilingual policy and federalist constitution. Moisan claims that his writings "ne proposent pas de solutions politiques, car les poètes, s'ils ne se désintéressent pas de solutions politiques comme telle, on le verra, n'ont pas pour fonction d'éclairer la lanterne des gouvernants" (*Poésie des frontières* 9). While it may have been Moisan's intention to avoid political commentary with his work, his selection of language groups as grounds for comparison remains politically pertinent.

Moisan's analysis follows Atwood's lead as it carries forward the guiding theme of survival and the role of the victim in Canadian literature. A close reading of Moisan's text reveals that one interpretation of this theme stands out for him above all others – a political, cultural struggle unique to the Canadian colonial situation. A tension exists between Moisan's argument for the plurality of Canadian literatures and the internal limitations he places by naming these as English and French. His intention to avoid political commentary in his works is undermined by the comparison itself. From his first work, Moisan acknowledges Canadian cultural and linguistic plurality. He contends, "Parler d'*une* littérature

canadienne n'implique pas d'ailleurs qu'il faille postuler au Canada une seule littérature ou une seule culture. La vie canadienne démentirait cette affirmation" (*Âge* 14). This variety is limited, however, by Moisan's focus on linguistic duality instead of on a broader, multi-vectored plurality. His approach, explains Joseph Pivato, "is essentially binary and does not include the possibility of a third group" (24). Beyond Pivato's suggestion for a third group, Canadian comparative methodologies must be further expanded to include other possible studies that extend beyond those of nation, language, or cultural group.

Both the generalizations inherent in a thematic approach and the consistent use of a English-French binary suggest a unity in Moisan's comparative framework that many Canadians could take issue with. By presenting as complete something that could be expanded by nuances of personal identities, Moisan compromises his contribution to the field. For instance, in *Poésie des frontières* little mention is made of immigrant writers, First Nations, or francophone communities living outside of Québec, although other comparatists have written on these literatures. The "thrust towards a unifying thesis for Canadian writing," explains Pivato, "fails to deal with the minority status not only of French-Canadians but of other ethnic groups as well" (23). More recent comparative analyses have taken up the task of representing a broader diversity in Canadian literature. These include Pivato's *Contrasts: Comparative Essays on Italian Canadian Writing*, Linda Hutcheon and Marion Richmond's *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions*, Söderlind's *Margin/Alias: Language and Colonization in Canadian and Québécois Fiction*, Smaro Kamboureli's *Making a*

Difference: Canadian Multicultural Literature in English, and Peter Dickinson's *Here is Queer: Nationalisms, Sexualities, and the Literatures of Canada*.

Moisan remarks on what Canadian literatures have in common: "a mesure que j'avançais dans mes lectures et ma documentation [. . .], je retrouvais les mêmes données, les mêmes problèmes, la même évolution [. . .]. En un mot, mon travail s'organisait sous forme de parallèle entre les deux littératures, tout en respectant l'identité de chacune d'elles" (*Âge* 13). This focus on similarities sweeps differences aside. Moisan's comparative framework does not move beyond the limiting representation of Canada's literatures, and therefore some potential implications of his works are thwarted by what it does not include. By consistently following the English and French binary, Moisan appears to have unintentionally written himself into an awkward position. Despite his stated desire to avoid unnecessary politicization of his works, he has mirrored the classic notion of a bilingual Canada.

Thematic Criticism in *Survival* and *Poésie des frontières*

In considering the relationship between *Survival* and *Poésie des frontières*, I remain aware of the controversy surrounding Atwood's and Moisan's critical and methodological choices. At the same time, I wish to explore the role that thematic criticism may have played in sparking the relationship between these two works across languages and cultures in Canada. It could be that the same penchant for generalization that has so discredited thematics is also what created a pool of similarities between these two texts. Atwood's theme of *Survival* struck a nerve with Moisan, as it is open to interpretation whether one is speaking of

survival in a hostile physical environment as Atwood is, or of the cultural perseverance that Moisan observed from his position in French Canada. Moisan clearly read the Québec experience into Atwood's hypotheses sufficiently enough to create a link between their two critical works.

Thematics forms the critical backbone of both *Survival* and *Poésie des frontières*. The broad generalizations of this mode may have helped Atwood and Moisan gloss the country's literatures, but critics were not able to see past the inaccuracies both projects perpetuated. A wave of thematic criticism emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, marking a definite movement in Canadian literary criticism. Brown presents an overview of the rise and fall of this critical approach. The Canadian social and political environment provided fertile ground for thematics. "The anti-American cultural nationalism of the 1960s and the centennial celebrations of 1967 had provoked new interest in the old question of whether Canada had a coherent or distinct culture and tradition," says Brown, adding that thematic critical approaches "answered the question with a strong affirmation" (655). From that social context emerged Frye's "Conclusion" to the *Literary History of Canada*, published in 1965 (reprinted later at the end of his collected essays, *The Bush Garden*), and a number of books following the thematic approach by critics like D.G. Jones and John Moss.

Despite this rise to relative popularity, it did not take long for thematic criticism to fall out of use, becoming even a primary point of attack for literary critics. This move can be at least partly explained by the rapid change in Canada's social and political climate by the end of the 1970s. The anti-thematic movement

gained momentum within the field of comparative literature in particular, says Brown: "even though as a larger enterprise thematic criticism had originally been the product of and had long been associated with the discipline of comparative literature, a special issue of the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 'Comparative Canadian Literature,' made expressions of hostility to thematics a minor theme in its own right" (658). At a time when the unity of the country was in question, thematic critical texts tended too much towards seeking out the similarities that existed between hotly defended cultural and linguistic camps. This unifying tendency represented a politically charged stance that many scholars were not willing to support, for the apparent alignment it caused between the critic and the pan-Canadian nationalist perspective.

Above all other scholars, Atwood rose to the top as the one who made thematic criticism best known in Canada. As Brown suggests, "it was undoubtedly the appearance of the word 'thematic' in the subtitle of *Survival* that was responsible for 'thematic criticism' becoming in Canada the identifying tag for this group of critics" (656). By taking on the status of the prime example of thematic criticism in Canada, *Survival* may have unjustly been dealt the burden of all critical backlash against thematics. An active detractor of the thematic movement was Stuewe, who in 1984 published his rebuttal to Atwood, *Clearing the Ground: English-Canadian Literature after Survival*. Stuewe names two major pitfalls with thematic criticism, the statistical fallacy "which arises from the understandable tendency to consider those themes that appear most often as the themes that are most important" (13), and exclusivity, which he refutes by saying

that "if thematic criticism is *a* useful and valid mode of literary analysis, this does not mean that it is *the* only such method" (14). Brown is skeptical of such passionate backlash as Stuewe's, suggesting that the momentum behind thematics' detractors may have made this critical mode into an ideal scapegoat for a number of other critical thorns in the side of literary academics. He states, "The distrust of this critical mode has conflated it too easily with a larger constellation of topics: questions about canon formation and critical evaluation; [. . .] the relationship of criticism and the problems of nation; the possible exclusion of writers from marginal groups and privileging of the cultural dominant; and the relationship of texts to culture" (666). As a result of such backlash scholars continue to tread lightly around the topic of thematic criticism.

In both of their projects Atwood and Moisan place great importance on the value of reading Canada's literatures together. Although aware of the complications that opposing political factions pose to the comparative process, both had faith in the ability of thematic criticism to bring out the common traits in Canadian literature in a way that other approaches could not. There is a tension within both critics' projects, however. The desire to recognize the different national identities in Canada is undermined both by thematic critiques and by the consistent use of binaries such as the English and French divide. Moisan claims that rather than merely recognize a garrison mentality, "c'est tout le contraire qu'on cherche: sortir de soi et sortir des murs de sa prison" (9). This underlines his overarching desire to reach beyond cultural and linguistic constraints, seeking a universal in Canadian literature. Unfortunately for Moisan's and Atwood's

projects, however, this kind of broad-reaching analysis is not easily achieved, particularly not when structured within the confines of linguistic and national groupings as their works are.

Despite the limitations of the thematic approach to literary criticism, a great deal can be gained from the interaction between Atwood's and Moisan's texts. By studying how their works meet, future comparatists could learn how to better deal with an increasingly diverse body of Canadian literatures. The methodological flaws of both *Survival* and *Poésie des frontières* should not stand in the way of all that can be gained by the interaction of two critics across cultural and linguistic boundaries. To disregard these texts on the basis of their shortcomings would be shortsighted.

Atwood and Moisan can serve as examples for today's comparatists who must also wrestle with the desire to study Canadian literatures while coming up against similar obstacles. The future of this discipline depends upon contemporary comparatists finding a balance between a fortified belief in the value of studying Canada's literatures comparatively and the flexibility to find new means of addressing the complications of this process. Moisan's decision to carry out a thematic analysis of Canadian poetry in English and French is based on his desire to demonstrate qualities that transcend the borders separating these two cultures. In taking up the same critical approach as Atwood, Moisan added to the work that she began, one that argues for the validity and necessity of paying due respect to the literature written in Canada, across cultures. Rather than each language and cultural group in Canada carrying out separate analyses, Moisan shows the

validity of trying to consider all of Canada's literatures together. As though aware of the controversial nature of thematic criticism, Moisan clearly outlines his opinion that what could be gained from a comparative reading may be worth the risk: "Le mieux semble de risquer l'aventure, c'est-à-dire proposer quelques comparaisons qui par leur solidité, leur fondement pratique, leurs perspectives ouvertes, convaincront, mieux que les théories mêmes, de la nécessité de se doter d'ouvrages mettant en reflief chacune des littératures concernées, en les comparant l'une à l'autre" (33). By revealing such commonalities, Moisan is making a case for why Canada's literatures should be read comparatively. In this way, he agrees with the spirit in which Atwood undertook *Survival*:

> il est urgent que cette discipline réussisse à vaincre certains préjugés qui tendent à minimiser chez nous l'importance des études comparées, soit pour raisons politiques (un pancanadianisme de mauvais alloi), soit pour des partis pris méthodologiques (les comparaisons sont toujours boiteuses, fausses, inopérantes), soit pour des motifs de mépris (ce domaine *canadien* ne mérite guère d'attention, présente peu d'intérêt par rapport à d'autres). Répondre à toutes ces objections demanderait bien du temps et de l'énergie, et, à la fin, on n'aurait sans doute convaincu personne. (33)

Even as early as the 1970s, Moisan recognizes the challenges that the discipline is facing. He sees the political and methodological issues, along with the defeatist preconceptions that are stunting the progress of comparative studies in Canada.

While he identifies the urgent need to address these, Moisan is also aware of the possible futility of the comparatists' effort to solve such problems. His works beg the question, if the discipline cannot overcome such obstacles, what direction should contemporary comparatists take? Rather than advocating a retreat from the project and purpose of comparative Canadian literary criticism, there are comparatists working today who are looking for ways to forge ahead despite the difficulties faced within the discipline. The next section will address more contemporary work by critics like Blodgett, Söderlind, Dickinson, Moyes, among others.

Part Two

Introduction

Canada is a country of two official languages, and multiple cultures, including indigenous peoples and immigrants recent and past. Accordingly, the study of the literatures written in Canada is inextricably linked to the need for border crossings – linguistic and cultural. A comprehensive view of the wide variety of literatures existing in Canada may not be graspable within a single study. At the same rate, a comparative look that encompasses such groups ultimately requires intermediary modes of communication and methodological flexibility to change and grow in step with the population. While the material being studied has only become more varied and complex, today's comparatists are taking up new approaches to creatively negotiate and celebrate the diversity that exists within Canadian literatures. The following section will address key areas where these developments are being made. While bilingualism does present some opportunity for interlinguistic exchange, as is the case in Moisan's works, translation arises as both a model and a tool for the type of change that is necessary within the discipline today.

First, as literary scholars have had to learn to accept the imperfect practice of translation, there is a need to embrace the indeterminacy in the project of comparative Canadian literature, overcoming the desire to capture all of Canada's varied expressions within a single study. This is represented in Apter's citation of Alain Badiou's concept of "comparatisme quand même," which I will discuss. Blodgett's endeavours to broaden the field in his own works, and the limitations

of his approach, shed light on the need for an ever greater opening of grounds for comparison. Second, translation is a tool that may assist in methodological growth by helping the comparatist to displace the previous focus on the groupings of language, nation, and culture. The use of translation in comparative studies should be reconsidered as a positive means of mediating linguistic difference. This mode is not without its complications, but I believe that the benefits of such an approach outweigh the risks in the case of comparative Canadian literary criticism. This is an area that Söderlind advocates in her recent work. Third and last, I wish to discuss the significance of these new kinds of comparatism as they relate to the future of comparative Canadian literary criticism and the broader discipline of comparative literature as it is practiced globally.

Indeterminacy within Comparative Canadian Literature

As I have outlined at the beginning of this project, the fundamental necessity of recognizing difference within the comparative project makes it such that no methodology is able to completely grasp the diverse bodies represented in Canada's literatures. In order to move forward with comparative studies in the twenty-first century, contemporary critics must accept the indeterminacy inherent to the discipline. To accept the incompleteness of the discipline and push forward with comparative studies of Canadian literatures bears resemblance to some theories in translation studies. This is what Söderlind speaks to in a recent article when she asks whether literary criticism can become "zones of productive discomfort through the use of strategies inspired by theories of translation" (4).

Translation carries the reader into an experiential realm once linguisitically closed to him or her, risking the inaccuracies of such a conversion in exchange for the exploration it allows. Studying Canadian literatures across linguistic boundaries may be similarly disorienting and mired in political and cultural controversy, but this remains an area that is insufficiently chartered by today's comparatists. Söderlind's notion of the affective text encourages comparatists to look to such sources of tension in the discipline as areas that show promise for methodological growth. Much in line with Söderlind's work, Apter explores the role of translation within comparative literature from an American perspective. Apter cites the theories of Badiou to suggest the need for a comparatism that can operate within such conditions of imperfection as are presented by Canadian multicultural and multilingual literatures. In her contribution to the 2006 collection *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*, edited by Haun Saussy, Apter observes the tendency among critics to allow a fear of translation failure to limit the scope of comparative studies. This is similar to the specific situation within comparative Canadian literature. First, Apter suggests that

> The challenge of Comp Lit is to balance the 'singularity' of untranslatable alterity against the need to translate *quand même*. For if translation failure is readily acceded to, it becomes an all-purpose expedient for staying narrowly within one's own monolingual universe. A new parochialism results, sanctioned by false pieties about not wanting to 'mistranslate' the other. ("Je" 60)

This concept applies to the current struggle for Canadian comparatists to persevere despite the challenges presented by such plurality of perspectives. The political and social implications of a complex area could be reason enough for critics to avoid it altogether. It is not sufficient, however, to avoid speaking about Canada's literatures comparatively just for the sake of not muddying one's approach with controversial topics. What can result from this – and I would argue what *has* occurred to some extent in the past quarter century – is a significant trend that sees comparative Canadian literature fading into the shadows of Canada's otherwise active field of literary criticism. It may be time for Canadian comparatists to accept the inaccuracies the discipline carries with it, to the advantage of preserving the hard-founded tradition of reading Canada's literatures together.

We have seen the widespread avoidance of cross-linguistic, cross-cultural studies in comparative Canadian literature since the 1970s, largely due to the political undertones a project of this kind carries. What I wish to explore here is the possibility of turning to new methodological approaches in order to further open up the discipline via these lines of questioning. Before speaking to recent examples of such developments, I will first discuss the case of Blodgett's attempt to broaden comparative methodologies. While Blodgett maintains a firm belief in the need to stretch the discipline further than the linguistic and national groupings that Atwood and Moisan represent in their works, his project remains halted due to a preoccupation with cultural and national groupings. As I will further explore, it may be necessary to step away from this pattern all together.

E.D. Blodgett's Comparative Methodologies

From early on in his career, Blodgett has engaged in comparisons that reach beyond the English-French binary, seeking a more complete picture of Canadian literatures. He claims that "he who would compare the Canadian literatures, either with themselves or with others, ought, if I may borrow Jacques Maritain's phrase, to 'distinguer pour unir.' When we survey the literatures of Canada, whether they be francophone, anglophone, or allophone [. . .], all voices ought to be heard" ("Canadian Literatures" 24). Blodgett's primary challenge has been to develop a methodology that can accommodate many literatures, even those that extend beyond his own area of expertise. Despite his best intentions, however, the addition of clearly defined cultural categories may still prove insufficient when faced with a multitude of hybrid identities and perspectives that thrive within Canadian literatures today.

Blodgett's comparisons depend on both similarity and difference. His objective is to address the plurality of literatures, while taking into account "Canadian realities and the Canadian sense of distinctiveness" ("Canadian Literatures" 20). Employing the same terms "Canadian" and "Québécois" as Moisan, Blodgett states, "if we pretend to the full view of the Canadian literatures, we mean the fiction for the most part in French and English" ("After" 63). Blodgett's ideal comparative framework "would require some unifying *fil conducteur* as a principle of organization which would, in the end, so transcend linguistic and cultural differences as to leave difference behind" (20). While I argue in favour of moving beyond linguistic and cultural differences as the basis

of comparison, it is the very need for such a connective line designed to assemble a complete vision of Canadian literatures that I question. The first step Blodgett makes towards deepening the nuance of his comparative methodology is to transcend the English-French binary. When he entered the discipline, few scholars were writing about Canadian literatures that fell outside of this construct. Late in the 1980s he notes: "there is only one dominant consideration [. . .] which is the relationship between the anglophone and the francophone literatures of Canada" ("Canadian Literature" 905). There are, however, aspects within these categories that destabilize comparative units. Canadian multicultural legislation promotes cultural pluralism, which challenges the English-French binary. Blodgett recognizes that there are other literatures being written in Canada "in their native languages–German, Icelandic, Italian, and Ukrainian, to name the dominant languages." He continues by mentioning "a fact that is rarely taken into account, even in studies of other New World literatures, and that is the presence of native literatures, both Inuit and Amerindian" ("Canadian Literature" 905). Despite the complications plurality poses for comparative frameworks, it is not sufficient to act as though those problems do not exist. To ignore the distinctive factors in Canada's literatures would be to focus only on similarities and to dispel difference without properly addressing it.

By 1988, Blodgett had firmly established his perspective on "Canada's heteroglot cultural situation" ("Canadian Literature" 907). With the release of *Configuration: Essays on the Canadian Literatures* in 1982, he contends that no single study can do justice to the plurality of Canadian perspectives. Beaudoin, in

his essay "Axes de comparaison entre deux littératures," describes how Blodgett has altered his comparative method by seeking out examples of cultural plurality other than the English-French binary: "Blodgett réfute cette idée commune à diverses stratégies de comparaison [. . .]. Il montre que cette idée est impuissante à fournir un modèle opératoire pour comparer les littératures canadiennes, dont le pluriel, dans le titre de son ouvrage, veut affirmer la multiplicité réelle et non la binarité admise des langues et des cultures du Canada" (487). Dissatisfied with a purely English-French approach, Blodgett adopts the example of Canadian German writing and its relation to works in the two founding languages.

The subject of literary history is one that has interested many Canadian comparatists. Accompanying this line of study is a faith in the potential for a unifying grasp in the discipline. At the same time, Blodgett asserts that the way a history is told affects others' perception of the country: "[M]y history of the literatures of Canada would not aspire to some ideological pan-Canadian ideal, a place where those literatures would meet in (mutually) self-contained unity [. . .] unifying ideologies can only be developed at a cost" ("History" 3). This points to a tension in Blodgett's work, where, on one hand, he wishes to recognize the plurality of experience in Canada while, on the other hand, his methodologies serve to further contain Canada's literatures within distinct cultural groupings. *Five-Part Invention* is Blodgett's main contribution to writing about Canada's literatures within a framework that is as open and comprehensive as possible. The five "parts" or cultural groups that Blodgett discusses in this work are First Nations, Inuit, French, English, and immigrants. With this text he denies the very

potential for unity in Canadian literatures: "[T]he trans-national frame is not designed so much to internalize Canada as to open it to its several selves" (20). This fissured nature serves as a springboard for the rest of his work: "[W]e are still not in a position to speak, as we all do, of a Canadian literature and agree on a topic. I insist upon speaking of our literatures in the plural and continue to support another position of Frye that 'there is no Canadian way of life, no one hundred per cent Canadian [. . .] no symmetrically laid out country'" ("After" 906). The methodology that Blodgett developed for this analysis was one based on cultural plurality. "[M]ore is to be achieved through recognition than competition," he explains, "and one way of easing polarized conflict is by bringing more players into the game. One of the first players who ought to be invited, of course, is the native. The next is the immigrant" (908). Despite Blodgett's stated openness to the breadth of Canada's literary production, much of his considerations perpetuate a compartmentalized conception that, in reality, needs to be much more complex. Blodgett does structure his approach in a way that moves beyond those of previous comparatists, like Atwood or Moisan. He does not, however, elaborate sufficiently on the areas in which these divisive lines become permeable borders– the continuous sub-divisions within cultures that fuse multiple cultural and linguistic groups. Hybridity counters the polarity of "either/or" by introducing "both/and." These identities are multiple, performative, and in flux. As is demonstrated in the works of many comparatists today, which will be discussed below, embracing this plurality is a potential answer to the type of binary struggles commonly encountered in the comparative process. The categorization

of Canadian literatures is, to a large extent, indeterminately divisible. By putting forth as complete something that could be expanded by cultural and other nuances, Blodgett's contributions to the field are compromised. Pivato, who completed his PhD thesis at the University of Alberta in 1978 under Blodgett's supervision, demonstrates Blodgett's influence as he expands the English-French binary to consider Italian Canadian writing in his collections *Echo: Essays on Other Literatures* and *Contrasts: Comparative Essays on Italian Canadian Writing*. The collection of essays, *Adjacencies: Minority Writing in Canada*, edited by Domenic A. Beneventi, Licia Canton, and Lianne Moyes, came as the result of a conference held at Université de Montréal in 1998 on the theme of "The Third Solitude: Canadian Minority Writing." In her introduction to this collection, Sherry Simon explains how the essays "confront and complexify issues of minority writing," and "open into new zones of critical investigation" (10). These contemporary scholars represent a growing trend among comparatists who have narrowed their focus to a more limited, but specific area. When read alone they may not offer a complete view of the field, but together they offer an interesting and detailed patchwork of Canada's literatures.

There is a noticeable move among comparatists writing today to take up the task of representing specific multicultural perspectives in Canadian literatures. These publications include Linda Hutcheon and Marion Richmond's *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions*; Söderlind's *Margin/Alias: Language and Colonization in Canadian and Québécois Fiction*; Smaro Kamboureli's *Making a Difference: Canadian Multicultural Literature in English;* Peter

Dickinson's *Here Is Queer: Nationalisms, Sexualities, and the Literatures of Canada*; Winfried Siemerling's *Discoveries of the Other: Alterity in the Work of Leonard Cohen, Hubert Aquin, Michael Ondaatje, and Nicole Brossard*; Marie Vautier's *New World Myth: Postmodernism and Postcolonialism in Canadian Fiction*; and Marie Carrière's *Writing in the Feminine in French and English Canada*. These authors have chosen to carry out their comparisons in a way that seeks a more in-depth look at a particular section of Canada's diverse literary landscape, rather than attempting to address the entire body of work within a single study.

The Role of Translation within Comparative Canadian Literature

In her recent book, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature*, Apter refers to the "politics of translation" that occurs in countries such as Canada where "the embattlement of minority languages within official state cultures" (4) is an everyday reality. Although comparative literature is a discipline founded on the necessity of translation, the situation for comparative Canadian literary criticism is exponentially more complicated when one considers the political implications that are tied to the relations of majority and minority cultures within a single country. Despite the good intentions of critics such as Atwood and Moisan to speak to a more complete body of Canadian literature, the politicized nature of all linguistic and cultural crossings in Canada is one that is seemingly impossible to avoid. In this light the will to read the texts of the other is

confronted with the implicit struggles of dominant and minority languages in Canada. Translation plays a key role in this type of border crossing.

Translation emerges as a promising, however underused, component to comparative Canadian literature in the twenty-first century. When considering literatures in translation the chasm of linguistic and cultural diversity in this country can be at least temporarily thwarted, not with the malicious design to obscure difference, but to make space for other methodological approaches to Canada's literatures. In *Translating Montreal: Episodes in the Life of a Divided City*, Sherry Simon deals with the cultural plurality of the contemporary city, where translation enhances a fluid movement between cultures. She is of the opinion that "we need words that reflect the multiplicity of our many-layered lives, like so many perspectives across varied landscapes [. . .]. To live in a world of multiple languages is to be reminded of what is lost or imaginary in all language, and to know the risks and benefits of falling into the spaces between" (218). For Simon, translation is an unavoidable necessity in a multicultural, multilingual community such as exists in contemporary Canadian cities. Söderlind is another comparatist working today to increase the profile of translation in the discipline. In "Ghost-National Arguments" she suggests that an aversion to translation among contemporary literary critics has led to a shrinking of the field of study, rather than to an expansion of it. She implies that the trend to be countered is the unilingual "safe zone" that avoids the complications of translation and border crossings. From this emerges a tendency among literary

scholars in Canada to prefer silence over addressing the difficult terrain of language politics in their works. As Söderlind observes:

> The easy acceptance of anglophone unilingualism among the country's academic elite in the name of political correctness is cause for self-congratulation rather than embarrassment, and multiculturalism morphs into anglocentrism. Yet most comparatists would say that making an effort to approach other literatures through translation is preferable to ignoring them. (684)

This is a trend that has been noticed outside of Canada as well, as Apter has documented. Both Söderlind and Apter insist that it is not sufficient to avoid the use of translation in comparative literature. This is particularly the case when considering Canadian writing, which has been proven to be sufficiently diverse to require such an intermediary mode. Incorporating translation into the comparative norm in Canada would not only offer comparatists a broader field to work with, but would render the linguistic and cultural binaries used by Atwood, Moisan and Blodgett, among others, unnecessary. Rather than placing his focus on the differences and similarities between English and French Canadian poetries, for instance, Moisan could have concentrated his efforts on exploring specific literary developments across Canadian literatures. The same stands true with regards to Blodgett's research, whose methodology has favoured linguistic fluency to the study of translated works. Hence his decision to focus on German Canadian writing, leaving the writing from the rest of Canadian immigrant populations to the hands of other comparatists.

While translation is not a part of his comparative practice on the whole, Blodgett does show it to be an essential component to knowing the full body of Canada's literary production. In his article, "Is a History of the Literatures of Canada Possible?", Blodgett describes the process of translation as not a mere mirroring of content from one language to another, but a creative mode that constructs a body of work that, if taken in linguistic or cultural chunks, is fractured. He explains, "translation, as its own act of origination, 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" (10). Söderlind seizes on this point, arguing that it is what Blodgett sees as the "necessity of translation" that has been missing from contemporary analyses of Canadian literatures (10). In this way she advises comparatists to consider how it came to be that translation has fallen off the board when the implications of working unilingually could be severe. Furthermore, Söderlind urges us to consider what the implications may be of *not* making translation a cornerstone to how we view Canada's literatures. Without translation, what kind of comparative literary criticism do we have in Canada? Is it possible to carry out a unilingual, unicultural comparative analysis and still suppose one speaks to what one calls "Canadian" literature? As she underscores, "That something gets lost in translation goes without saying, while what gets lost without translation is rarely considered because it leaves no trace" (684). Ignoring the project of speaking across languages and cultures in Canada does little to advance the discipline of comparative Canadian literary criticism.

There are certain parties in Canadian literary studies that do not seek the permeability that translation can lend to the cultural and linguistic borders. Separatist Québécois, for instance, could interpret the translation of French Canadian texts into English as a sign of losing a foothold in their struggle for recognition as a political community distinct from English Canada. Mezei observes this trend in her article, "Translation as Metonomy: Bridges and Bilingualism," wherein "[t]he act of translation can be seen as cultural betrayal, and the normative concepts of transference and equivalence as detrimental to the preservation of a distinct identity. First, translation inevitably is an act of canonization and colonization, a bridge only of sorts" (91). Others are of the opinion that by sharing the content of French texts with English Canada a greater understanding between the two groups can be fostered, perhaps bringing forward the uniqueness of each. Mezei points to this trend, recognizing the initial objectives behind Canada's national program for funding translation: "federal and institutional support of literary translation seemed to imply that literary translation should function as a metonymy of bilingualism (and of biculturalism) by representing a language bridge between our two solitudes" (87). To explore to what extent an increase in literary permeability would be beneficial to the project of studying Canada's literatures, I will address a number of recent scholarly arguments in the fields of comparative Canadian literary criticism and Canadian literary translation studies.

Arguments Against and in Support of Translation

In the 1960s and 1970s, works of Canadian literary criticism that crossed linguistic boundaries were rare. Anglophone critics such as Jones, Frye, and Sutherland, among others, had contributed to this effort, while a smaller number of francophone critics at that time sought to similarly cross the linguistic divide. In this light, Atwood and Moisan stand out as critics who engaged in an academic line of inquiry that was particularly politically charged, drawing attention to the shared aspects of Canadian literatures written in English and French. The question of whether to unite cultures and languages in a study of Canadian literature, or to honour the divisions between groups, has remained a major preoccupation for Canadian comparatists. At the same time, however, the political implications of such a project have arguably been daunting enough to convince many scholars to avoid this line of questioning altogether. What I wish to explore here are the reasons why such studies did not catch on in the 1960s and 1970s, and furthermore, why studies across languages and cultures continue to be relatively rare in the field. One may ask if it is possible to separate the political concerns of such work from the desire to seek out a more thorough understanding of this country's literatures.

When one looks outside of the discipline of comparative Canadian literary criticism, there are already a multitude of arguments around the ability of translation to faithfully transfer both meaning and craft. Within postructuralist theory a single language has to cope with the lag or cleavage of meaning between the signifier and the signified, as is described by Derrida's notion of *différance*

(3). If, according to this theory, the words within a single language cannot be trusted to fully represent the actual physical object to which they refer, the potential inaccuracies of translation are, of course, amplified. George Steiner applies this to his understanding of all communication: "inside or between languages, human communication equals translation. A study of translation is a study of language" (384). This leads to his dual understanding of the endeavour: "'Translation', properly understood, is a special case of the arc of communication which every successful speech-act closes within a given language. On the inter-lingual level, translation will pose concentrated, visibly intractable problems; but these same problems abound, at a more covert or conventionally neglected level, intra-lingually" (383). Under this line of thought, no form of communication, whether it be within or between languages, is free from possible flaws. With this in mind, the act of translation loosens its relationship to faithful transference of a single meaning by focusing more on the successful delivery of some form of information.

Aside from the question of translation's ability to convey information, scholars are also divided on the fate of artistic craft when subjected to the processes of translation. An expert example of both the shortcomings and ultimate successes of literary translation is represented in Anne Hébert and Frank Scott's *Dialogue sur la traduction: À propos du Tombeau des rois*. For Scott, translating French Canadian poetry to English involves more than one mode of translation. First, "In one sense even the reading of a poem is a form of translation, for the reader must extract its meaning and significance. Without changing the words, he

fills them with his own content, which is not necessarily that of the poet. At another time he will find other meanings" (Hébert and Scott 95). Second, translation moves beyond the interpretation of a poem into the creation of a new poem all together: "Robert Frost has said that the poetry is what is lost in translation. This is a truth but, I believe – and [Hébert's] letter encourages me in the belief – not the whole truth. Not all is lost or need be lost" (55). The Canadian situation is not limited to the concerns noted above. In Canada, translation's detractors appear to care less about the possibility of 'translation failure' than they do about the political implications that come with acceding to the English language.

Due to the close but volatile relationship between Canadian cultural and linguistic issues and the topic of literary translation in this country, it is understandable that some scholars may feel that there is not room for reconciliation between the two. What I suggest, however, is that the potential benefits of incorporating translation into the comparative process give good reason to risk political discomfort. There are comparatists who have spoken out about their belief that translation is absolutely necessary to gain the broadest possible understanding of the literatures written in Canada. In his foreword to *Dialogue sur la traduction*, Frye celebrates the dual function that translation can play in Canadian literary studies: "Translation here becomes a creative achievement in communication, not merely a necessary evil or a removal of barriers" (14). As a renowned translator of Canadian poetry from French to English, and himself an accomplished poet, Scott makes his position statement in

Dialogue by underscoring the need for the cross-cultural exchange that translation can allow. He does not shy away from turning this into a political statement in favour of greater permeability between English and French cultures in Canada:

> Translation is itself an art, and one which surely has helped every writer to understand much of the other literatures of the world. Perhaps today we need to practice and encourage this art more than ever, since otherwise we deprive ourselves not only of great experiences but of that natural need of it, depending as we do so much upon the two chief cultural traditions which are at the base of our native arts. (55)

In the special issue of *Ellipse* published in 1977, "Traduire notre poésie / The Translation of Poetry," D.G. Jones defends the process of literary translation, urging that it is necessary as a means of mediating the differences between English and French Canada and of ensuring that the French Canadian perspective is heard by all. For Jones, the answer is quite clear: "Why do we translate Quebec poetry? Because, in a sense, we have been asked to. It is an immediate response to the cry to be heard, to be recognized, to be given existence in the eyes of others" (78). This opinion is based on his belief that, despite linguistic and cultural differences, all Canadians share enough common experiences to make them the most likely audience to take an interest in the writing of the other. Rhetorically, he asks, "And who is going to listen if English-Canadians do not, the people who have shared the same geography, the same history [. . .] for over two centuries?" (78). In the avant-propos to the same special issue of *Ellipse*, Jacques Brault

remarks that the objective of this magazine was to foster an environment of sharing through translation: “L’oeuvre unilingue cesse d’être étrangère si la traduction devient la courroie de transmission d’une nouvelle oeuvre d’un plus grand patrimoine” (6). Further on, Brault adds to the argument with his article “Remarques sur la traduction de la poésie” that it may be in the best interest of Québec to have Québec literature translated:

> Il est temps que la poésie québécoise consente, contre tout chauvinisme réducteur, à partager sa différence spécifique avec celles des autres poésies, à se situer dans le propre de toute poésie qui consiste à être une internationale où le language circule librement, non comme une monnaie mais comme le vent dans les arbres, et où l’on gagne une langue commune qui ne cesse d’étonner chacune et chacun qui la parle à sa manière. (28)

These are powerful opinions to express in the 1970s, when the unity of the country was a hotly contested issue on both sides of Canada’s language divide. What this demonstrates, however, is that Atwood and Moisan were not alone in their decision to step across the language barrier with their considerations of Canada’s literatures in English and French.

There are Canadian comparatists who do not view translation as the best way to read the country’s literatures. The root of this perspective is observed by Apter in *The Translation Zone*, wherein “Translation studies has always had to confront the problem of whether it best serves the ends of perpetuating cultural memory or advancing its effacement” (4). In the Canadian context this situation

leaves comparatists to choose either to increase the breadth of material that they study, or to honour the linguistic struggles of two separate groups by maintaining this divide. For Apter,

> This death/life aporia leads to split discourses in the field of translation studies: while translation is deemed essential to the dissemination and preservation of textual inheritance, it is also understood to be an agent of language extinction. For translation [. . .] condemns minority tongues to obsolescence, even as it fosters access to the cultural heritage of 'small' literatures. (4)

As Canada's populations become ever more diverse, what was once perceived as a bilingual, bicultural situation has blossomed into multilingualism. Comparatists are no longer left only to juggle the political implications of crossing the much-fraught English-French divide. If the use of translation continues to be constricted within the discipline, the very project of reading Canada's literatures together could be at stake.

Louise Ladouceur, in her article "A Firm Balance: Quéstions d'équilibre et rapport de force dans les représentations des litératures anglophone et francophone du Canada," suggests the possibility that anglophone Canadians (particularly anglophone comparatists) are more comfortable with translation because they, unlike francophone Canadians, have less to lose. She demonstrates how anglophone and francophone critics speak of the translation project in Canadian literature in very different ways. Anglophone images evoke a relationship between English and French Canada that is equal – the two solitudes,

for instance. This metaphor suggests that each group has grown in a parallel manner beside the other, which is a simplification of a more complicated relationship in Canada's history and present situation. According to Ladouceur, anglophones allude more often to equality, while francophones seek to maintain a certain distance between the two solitudes. She points to the origins and dubious stronghold of such unifying images: "Issus d'abord des études en literature comparée canadienne, ces emblems ont exprimé un idée égalitaire fort louable mais très éloigné de la réalité" (96). The majority and minority status of Canada's two linguistic groups makes it difficult to speak of equality in their treatment in this country, however desirable such a power relation may be for the sake of comparison. For Ladouceur, this relationship is "un rapport de force avoué entre littératures majoritaire et minoritiare, un rapport dont les enjeux sont de taille puisqu'il s'agit de donner sa propre voix et sa propre langue à la parole de l'autre" (96). Understood in this way, language, the necessary carrier of literary content, cannot be so easily disposed of at the expense of the political and cultural struggles it embodies. The problem this poses for my line of reasoning is that I read Ladouceur's argument as positioning political language struggles over the value of studying literary content in Canada. I cannot disagree with her observation that the symbols used to discuss translation in Canada have been unfairly weighted. What I take exception to is the suggestion that literatures produced in a minority and a majority language in Canada are not able to share the same comparative grounds on the basis of the political baggage each carries with it.

Mezei mentions the same bridging analogies as Ladouceur does, from her earliest work published in 1985. Her essay, "A Bridge of Sorts: The Translation of Quebec Literature into English," provides a thorough overview of literary translation in Canada, beginning around the 1950s. She takes an objective approach, pointing out both the possible negative and positive points to the process of translation. The observation that she makes is that early endeavours to translate Canada's literatures were predominantly motivated by the political events of the 1960s and 1970s, exhibiting a unifying desire in response to the threat of Québec's separation (226). She sees more recent translations as having been generated out of a curiosity about avant-garde literary stylings and feminist concerns prominent on both sides of the linguistic divide (226). Mezei's more recent articles, "Translation as Metonomy: Bridges and Bilingualism" and "Thinking about Canadian Literary Translation: Bridges, Passageways, Arcades and Doors" appeared in 1994 and 2008, respectively, and elaborate on her previous research. In "Translation as Metonomy" she states, "From the 1950s on, the activity of translation and the significance of bilingualism have been viewed through a variety of lenses and manifested in an evocative range of metaphors from mediating bridge to treason, betrayal, and blockade" (87). Her message very much echoes Ladouceur's, outlining the reception literary translation has received in Canada and the problems that continue to hinder comparatists' use of this mode.

New Developments in Comparative Canadian Literature

Reconsiderations of comparative methodology have begun to emerge that may help pave the way for future developments in the discipline. In recent publications both Dickinson and Moyes have taken up an approach that contemplates the utility of translation in a variety of forms and places linguistic and cultural concerns in a secondary position. Dickinson's considerations of nationalism and sexuality in Canadian literatures, and of film adaptations of Canadian literary works, are examples of how his research contributes to the field of comparative Canadian literature by focusing on specific areas rather than by trying to encapsulate the whole in a single study. In "Writing the Montréal Mountain: Below the Threshold at which Visibility Begins," Moyes carries out a study of nine Montreal novels in English and French by selecting a geographical feature as the fulcrum for her reading. By taking geographic relations to identity as a focalization that crosses linguistic and cultural boundaries, she has adopted an interesting comparative perspective that is at once innovative and insightful. While recognizing the potential in these two recent approaches to the comparative look at Canadian literatures, I am led to ask what such developments owe past comparative methodologies, such as thematic criticism.

Gender studies and film adaptation are two of Dickinson's access points to the social, cultural, and political contexts governing the production and reception of Canadian literatures. His analyses stand out in the context of my research because they reach across the boundaries of language and culture to concentrate on a specific area of Canadian literatures rather than the whole. In his book, *Here*

is Queer: Nationalisms, Sexualities, and the Literatures of Canada, Dickinson explores how the concepts of nationalism and sexuality have shaped the production and reception of English Canadian, Québécois, and First Nations literatures. He demonstrates how differences in sexual identities have contributed to what many critics have noted as a lack of a definitive national identity in Canadian literatures. In this way Dickinson responds to Frye's question "Where is here?" with the title of this book, saying "Here," meaning Canada, "is queer". This line of inquiry is an example of how contemporary critics are breaking away from the same critical questioning via national identity, language, and culture by looking for answers within the expressions of specific identity groups forming a part of the Canadian canon. By positing sexuality as the lens through which he studies Canadian literatures, Dickinson crosses over previous comparative preoccupations with opposing language groups or with the country's many-layered multicultural oppositions.

In "Literatures, Cinemas, Cultures," Dickinson compares film and television adaptations of English Canadian and Québécois literary works with an eye to what is lost and what is gained in the process of genre transfer and appreciation. While this analysis addresses the literary works of both English and French Canada, the emphasis is placed not so much on revealing the cultural points of contact or dissonance between the two groups as exploring how a broad sampling of Canadian texts have all met with the phenomenon of translation. Dickinson suggests that

> if we conceive of translation as an indeterminate and ongoing

> system of structural, linguistic, cultural, historical, and so on, transformations, borrowings, and mediations that occur between and across forms, and if we further examine what these transformations say about the historical context in which texts are produced and received, then translation's critical potential, as applied to the adaptive process, is, I believe, recuperable. (34)

His analysis has taken up the issues of both genre adaptation and the cleavage that can result in this transfer as it impacts both creative production and reception. While Dickinson's work does not evade the issue of cultural and linguistic diversity in Canada, this content becomes only a component of his comparative and theoretical questioning. It is that kind of peripheral incorporation of matters of language and culture that I am advocating with my call for an expansion of the grounds of comparison in Canadian comparatism.

Moyes has assembled what she calls a "literary genealogy," her adaptation of a Foucauldian concept that helps her track the power relations to be observed in various authors' treatments of the Montreal mountain as a primary situating structure within the city. While the mountain serves as the portal for her entrance into these novels, her analyses reveal a broad network of relations that are expressed in both literal and analogical ways in the author's use of this key landmark in the lives of Montrealers. At least ten interpretations of the mountain emerge through Moyes' readings. In these, the mountain is seen as a reproduction of the city's socio-economic ladder; as a space of leisure; as a location for the playing out of various expressions of identity, including sexuality, gender, and

race; as a structure that spatially locates a number of struggles, such as generational differences, religious-based social tensions involving the spiritual versus the secular, confrontations between tradition and modernity; and colonial relations between not only English and French Canadians but also with first nations and immigrants. She expresses how the framing of a narrative captures a representation of a social space and the perspectives of the people occupying that space. The theme of the mountain influences the perspectives in each individual text, but it does not occlude other important particulars such as these noted above. As Moyes explains, "A genealogy is based not on lines of continuity of the kind that generate a literary tradition, but rather on contradiction and discontinuity, on unlikely links among texts written in different languages, among texts marked by different aesthetic practices, among texts that figure in several fields of writing [. . .] at the same time" (60). Moyes first speaks to the similarities that thematically drew her to these nine books, but she then takes her study deeper to look at the particularities unique to each. She demonstrates how the perspective of who is experiencing life on and around the Montreal mountain changes the story greatly.

What draws me to Dickinson's and Moyes's works is that their methodologies bear some resemblance to Atwood's and Moisan's uses of thematic criticism. The question that this raises for me is whether contemporary critics have begun to reintegrate some form of thematic criticism into a new comparative methodology. A key difference between thematic criticism as Atwood and Moisan employed it and in these new studies lies in the extent to which each critic carries the conclusions they make about the presence of themes

in Canadian literatures. Both Atwood and Moisan named the theme of survival as a fundamental and overarching trait that is shared by the majority of the literatures written in Canada. With survival in mind, the two critics sought out Canadian texts that fit their distinctions – whether this was survival against a harsh natural environment, or a more political, post-colonial struggle between English and French in Canada or Canada versus the United States. Their analyses elaborate upon similarities and differences within these texts in so far as they corroborate the chosen theme. For that reason, Atwood's and Moisan's works have been accused of sweeping generalizations, exclusivity, and oversimplification. One may question whether thematics is a critical mode that will be granted any kind of a return to academia, given the largely negative reception that it received among Canadian literary critics. While such an overt return of thematic criticism may be neither likely nor possible, recent advances in the discipline point to the probability that components of this critical mode are useful in the development of a number of methodological angles from which to approach Canadian writing.

Comparative methodologies like Dickinson's and Moyes's do not carry the use of thematic criticism as far as Atwood and Moisan did. For both critics, a theme is used as an initial organizing tool to gather together the topic and content of their analyses, and this is later expanded upon via other critical perspectives. Dickinson's *Here is Queer* takes sexuality as a theme drawn upon to prove at least one source for Canada's lack of a literary national identity. This focus on a perspective that reaches across languages and cultures in Canadian literatures enables Dickinson to arrive at conclusions that previously were not available to

comparatists who were searching for reflections of Canada's political history in the main organizing structures of the country's literatures. Moyes' look at representations of the Montreal mountain in a number of texts is the net that gathers together the material for her deeper analysis of literary representations of the social, economic, and political factors of life in that city. Her study begins thematically, but the crucial point of her essay is how Moyes chose to follow through with her comparisons from the initial theme she had chosen. She explains, "Approaching my corpus genealogically allows me to attend to the specificity of each text and, at the same time, in the place of any supra-historical or totalizing perspective, to allow connections and contradictions to emerge" (60). The strength of Moyes' article lies in how each of the novels she examines expresses a view of the mountain that is shaped by particular and different identity politics. From there the thematic unity that began her study is abandoned to make room for a deeper analysis of the multiple and very different perspectives that coexist within Montreal. Because Moyes' use of thematics remains loose, delving deeper into specifics once a body of work has been assembled for comparison, her work does not appear to be as hampered by generalizations as Atwood's and Moisan's were. Her study has avoided the temptation to follow through with the sweeping conclusions that come with insisting upon capturing an understanding of all of Canada's literatures.

Saussy, among a number of comparatists who have spoken out against the use of thematics, has cautioned that "[w]hat comes across in thematic reading (a tactic devised in response to conditions of our encounter with translated literature)

is not necessarily what is most worth knowing about a work" (14). I cannot argue against this, but I would add that thematic criticism falls short when the line of questioning it initiates ends at the point of recognizing the mere similarities shared between texts. As for Moyes, the city represents "a trace structure of movement, exchange, and quotidian practices," (54) so too comparative Canadian literature represents the site of exchange for the multiple identities that are at home in Canadian writing. Both the similarities and the differences are allowed to show through when gathered together by theme. Thematic criticism was carried too far by critics like Atwood and Moisan when they sought out the meta-theme that could capture all expressions within Canadian literatures. Today's comparatists are, as Moyes puts it, "[r]esisting imaginary totalizations" (54) and using these rather as an entry point for a deeper, more specific kind of comparatism.

Conclusion

Broadening Methodology in the Twenty-First Century

As we near the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Confederation, the opportunity presents itself to reconsider the impetus behind the 1966 call for papers that began Moisan's career in this field. The future that Moisan first addressed is our present reality – Canada in the twenty-first century. While comparatists continue to strive towards an understanding of Canada's literatures, the internal variety being studied and the methodologies employed often complicate this goal. The value of reading Canada's literatures comparatively must not be lost, however: "the distinctiveness [. . .] is not allowed to appear [. . .] as long as the literatures of Canada are studied separately" (Blodgett, "Canadian Literature" 909). While Atwood, Moisan, and Blodgett each addresses the necessity of inclusion in their works, their projects are stalled at different points towards and because of this goal. A primary source of the paradox that has stood in the way of some early comparisons is the assumption that, on the basis of Canada's unity of statehood, the literatures produced here should be similarly unified. Beaudoin reiterates the need for comparative methodologies to move away from national and political concerns:

> C'est que la discipline est née d'un dialogue ambigu et qu'elle n'arrive pas à l'élucider sans risquer de dissoudre son objet. Je dis que ce dialogue est ambigu parce qu'il s'est engagé sur le terrain d'un conflit politique que la litérature ne peut ni transcender ni dénouer [. . .], mais considéré globalement et en tant que champ

> spécifique, le comparatisme n'a pas encore complété la mise au point de ses méthodes et de ses objectifs, et surtout, il n'a pas su détacher suffisamment ses enquêtes d'un débat national qui a trop inspiré sa théorie. (493)

In response to Blodgett's stated intentions to carry out the analyses in *Configuration* "on a fundamentally literary ground," (8) Beaudoin retorts: "Voilà une orientation qui méritait certainement d'être tentée" (488). My analysis of both past and contemporary comparative methodologies raises the question of what it could mean to turn Canadian comparatism back towards more literary concerns. In the works of Atwood, Moisan, and Blodgett, the methodological focus on politically sensitive areas such as Canadian language relations and the struggles of other nations within this nation proved to be serious impediments to their ability to speak clearly to the content of Canadian literatures. While one can identify the over-politicization of comparative literature in Canada as a hindrance in the discipline, the complete extraction of such concerns from comparative analyses may not be the answer to the discipline's problems.

It is not the place of comparative Canadian literature to solve all of Canada's political troubles. The discipline is not charged with the task of composing a new constitution that would give recognition and satisfaction to all communities in Canada. Just as the constitution is an instrument of recognition, and therefore of inclusion to and exclusion from the political community, so comparative Canadian literature is an instrument of recognition in the choices it makes about which writers it will study and reflect back to the country's reading

audience. In this way, comparative Canadian literary criticism is also a tool of inclusion and exclusion. It is thus neither desirable nor possible to completely remove the discipline from the realm of the political. Every writer represents his or her own notion of the good and forms a part of a community of perspectives.

Even in a study that takes on the most politically benign themes, such as Moyes' look at representations of the mountain in Montreal writing, the discussion of these texts becomes political through the perspectives represented therein. As Kamboureli notes in the introduction to the collection of essays, *Trans.Can.Lit.: Resituating the Study of Canadian Literature*, "literature functions as a sphere of public debates, but is never fully harmonized with them, thus registering the limits of cultural knowledge and politics" (viii). For this reason, it is not enough to advocate a retreat of the discipline from politically complex issues such as language and culture. It is fair, however, to suggest a repositioning of these concerns within comparative methodologies. Comparisons of Canadian literatures need not be centred on differences of language and culture, since the multilingual, multicultural nature of the country already essentially guarantees that a variety of perspectives will be represented in Canadian literatures.

Early Canadian comparatists, like Atwood, Moisan, and Blodgett have established the need to study Canada's literatures comparatively and with consideration given to the cultural and linguistic plurality that exists in Canada. They remain influential figures in the development of this discipline, whose works have situated future comparatists on the cusp of what could be a burgeoning time for the field.

Contemporary approaches to comparative methodology explored here in the works of Söderlind, Dickinson, and Moyes point to the viability of new directions for the discipline of comparative Canadian literature. Rather than continue to examine a literature of borders, one that will remain divided in so far as comparatists continue to mirror cultural and linguistic differences in their methodologies, the discipline is now ready for a new kind of comparison without borders, one that refuses to hold to set terms for comparison. In her article, "A Plea for Criticism in the Translation Zone," Söderlind envisions the discipline moving forward via a new "comparison without ground"(15). This approach would see methodologies move away from traditional comparative groupings, such as ethnic and language groups, and move into an ever-changing, unfixed realm. She explains, "In taking us out of our comfort zone and opening the door to others, moving among languages exposes practitioners of bi- or multilingualism [. . .] to ridicule and embarrassment, but in so doing also paves the way for the unexpected and for the delight of discovery, including most crucially the discovery of own precarious subject position" (15). Such a shift would break with the norm of past comparisons, but it is this defamiliarization that may clear the way for true methodological expansion for the discipline of comparative Canadian literature into the twenty-first century.

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