INTRODUCTION*

This special issue offers a rich and diverse range of perspectives on English Canadian literature and culture of the last quarter of the 20th century. In the chronological and thematic planes, they implicitly or explicitly take the nationalist movement of the 1960s as their starting point, a time when the supposed absence or weakness of a national sense becomes the touchstone for official discourses about the cultural identity of the country. Together with the use of the well-known connection between Canada and the wilderness, many texts of that period, draw on a victimized sense of the national, deliberately producing an image of Canadian identity as weak or "feminine" (a process later known as *the feminization of national identity*). At the time, that type of metaphor provides the country with the distinctive elements it is looking for, contributing thus to the creation of a sense of tradition that has survived to the present. In the following decades, however, artists and writers have repeatedly questioned such a model of the national identity, introducing alternative perspectives, and thus intervening in a notion of tradition still fragile and in need of full articulation. We could, in fact, suggest that the artistic and cultural flowering we are now experiencing in Canada at the beginning of the 21st century is, to a great extent, based on the dismantlement of the few images constructed only 30 years ago to represent the nation.

The essays that follow provide analyses of specific instances of such changing nature of contemporary Canadian production, focusing on a wide variety of texts, analyzed in their turn from an equally varied selection of theoretical frameworks, often tracing interdisciplinary connections between theories and texts. By so doing, they also implicitly articulate the relationship of this production with major contemporary theoretical discourses, social contexts and movements in and outside Canada. These critical readings retrieve and reclaim a corpus of texts, a region or a perspective as belonging and contributing to the national tradition. Additionally, they evaluate the influence of current social and discursive paradigms, such as multiculturalism, new historicism, diaspora studies, environmentalism and gender studies, on the current processes of construction and revision of the literary canon.

In "Erasing the Nation: Canada's National Literature in the Age Of Globalization," Albert Braz starts with an innovative perspective on contemporary Canadian literature in English by focusing on texts which consciously write against the national paradigm and writers who, despite their success in and outside Canada, make a conscious effort not to be identified as "Canadian." Engaging in a shrewd reading of works by well-know writers such as Douglas Coupland, Thomas King or Margaret Atwood, Braz draws from social, historical and political analyses of the country to find out the reasons why Canadian critics would insist on celebrating those texts as *Canadian* assets.

"'The Nature Of My Belongingness': Diaspora In M.G. Vassanji And The South Asian Novel In Canada" takes up a similar argument in exactly the opposite direction, by examining the case of diaspora Canadian writers who rarely set their fictions on Canadian soil. In this essay, María Jesús Llarena Ascanio first discusses the various approaches to the notions of diaspora and cultural identity to then centre on recent South Asian Canadian fiction and the question of its belongingness to the national tradition. An analysis of M. G. Vassanji's work, and especially of his novel *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*, will serve as paradigm of the obstacles for full integration of the immigrant into the Canadian multicultural society as well as of the South Asian Canadian texts into the CanLit canon.

And so does "Space Invasion: Jewish Canadian Women Writers and the Reshaping of Canadian Literature" involve a discussion of Canadian multiculturalism, although from a very different perspective. In this article, Julie Spergel examines the role of spatial metaphors in two Jewish Canadian novels: *Fugitive Pieces* and *Your Mouth is Lovely*. The essay initially draws on the Bakthinian notion of the *chronotope*, to argue for the importance of the social and the historical layers in any reconceptualization of space, as well as of the past in any figuration of the present. From there, the author takes the argument to the Canadian scene of writing, demonstrating how, by self-consciously situating their works in specific Jewish chronotopes, Michaels and Richler construct the contemporary Canadian city in a truly multicultural fashion, redefining thereby the very notion of what it means to be Canadian today.

The Bakhtinian chronotope will also provide the theoretical starting point of "Margaret Atwood's Metafictional Acts: Collaborative Storytelling in the *Blind Assassin* and *Oryx and Crake*," in which Pilar Cuder Domínguez scrutinizes the role of storytelling and the function of narrative self-reflexivity in two recent novels by Margaret Atwood. This essay draws on narratological as well as postmodern theories of textuality to analyze the peculiar narrative triangle that typically structures Atwoodian texts, and argues for the importance of "the lover's room" as the site in both novels of challenging meanings affecting the whole work. In so doing, it offers

not only a critical reading of questions of readership, authorship and textuality in the last decade, but also a contextual approach to the works of one of most important Canadian writers of the past 30 years.

The next essay, "Linguistic Fragmentation as Political Intervention in Calgarian Poetry," takes the reader on a challenging trip to the alternative scene of younger Canadian writers. In it, derek beaulieu inquires into the role of a group of Calgary poets in the unmaking of a traditionalist view of Alberta writing as landscape-based, and explores the possibility of looking at these poets' rejection of imposed literary/regional models as a political choice. In his freshly critical appreciation of the urban fragmented poetry of Jordan Scott and ryan Fitzpatrick, beaulieu convincingly explains how these poets break regional expectations, ideologically charged, as well as the convention of linguistic structure, syntax, form and meaning.

"Where Has 'Real' Nature Gone, Anyway?: Ecocriticism, Canadian Writing And The Lures Of The Virtual" intersects at different places with the issues analyzed by the previous essays, by offering an approach to ecocriticism in the context of contemporary English Canadian literature and culture. This article analyzes definitions of the national identity in the past three decades in connection with Canada's real and/or imaginary wilderness. Following a period of dismantlement of such associations, a period characterized by the rise of a fundamentally urban multiculturalism in Canadian literature, the ascent of ecocriticism in the 1990s might be interpreted as a conservative move towards the recuperation of the unified national metaphor the country's association with the wilderness seemed to provide. But, is there anything Canadian about ecocriticism? What could Canadian writers and critics contribute to it? To answer these questions, the essay will scrutinize various moments of the metaphor in criticism and fiction, along with changing concepts, in the age of technology, of nature and of our relation to it.

The special issue closes with "Two Voices from Newfoundland: History and Myth Addressed by Maura Hanrahan and Paul Butler," a double interview conducted by María Jesús Hernáez Lerena in which anthropologist Hanrahan and novelist Butler reflect on writing and history in Newfoundland, on the paths of creative non-fiction, and the refashioning of foundational myths of Newfoundland. Through their personal, fresh and honest, rendering of the realities, the history, the literature, and the culture of Atlantic Canada, these interviews contribute a most welcome perspective to the analysis of contemporary Canadian production in English, acting like a Derridean *supplement* to the issue in that *they add something that was missing while they add something else*.