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Introduction: (Im)possible Conditionals: Anglo-Quebec Poetry/ la poésie anglo-québécoise

by Jason Camlot

> If conditionals are of two kinds possible and impossible.
> —Anne Carson, "Seated Figure with Red Angle (1988) by Betty Goodwin"[1]

The questions worth asking a decade ago in a special issue of *Québec Studies* (Volume 26, Fall 1998/Winter 1999) are still relevant today: "What does it mean to write in English in Quebec? What is the place of such writing in contemporary Quebec culture? What should such writing be called? In what sense is it minority writing? What is the future of English-language writing in Quebec?" (Moyes, "Écrire en anglais" 3). Of course, given that the Quebec political landscape changes almost as frequently as the seasons, the answers we might find to such questions and even the way we might now approach answering them will likely be different from those that seemed satisfactory in 1998/99, which was, after all, just a few years after Quebecers were asked in a referendum if they agreed, *oui ou non*, "that Québec should become sovereign." If conditionals are of two kinds, as Anne Carson aphorizes in her poem about a Betty Goodwin drawing, the "should" in that 1995 referendum question came to resonate as a conditional that was at least as possible as it was impossible.[2] Quebec is deeply invested in conditionals and immersed in a discourse of conditions, whether it be weather conditions, driving conditions, ski conditions, "winning conditions,"[3] or, more specific to our purposes, the conditions in which in an identifiably distinct body of literature can be said to have emerged, to possibly exist. Carson's interpretation of the Goodwin drawing as a series of conditional proposals—the poem consists of a list of seventy-two "If" clauses—captures nicely the translucent "in between" quality of Goodwin's media and technique. Deployed on durable translucent geofilm, Goodwin's drawing technique at this stage in her career—and manifest in this drawing in particular—blurs the boundary between mark and erasure, and challenges the status of the contour line as definitive of a stable location in space. Carbon lines of contour and a floating red

angle do not suggest demarcations of territory limiting the body but are traces on the half-transparent plane indicating positions the body has taken or may yet take until a chiaroscuro of endless, kinetic possibility accumulates before the viewer's eyes. Carson underscores the simultaneity of gravity and ethereality visualized in Goodwin's drawing when she ends her list poem with an axiom about things written and (versus?) things looking for a place to be written: "If conditionals are of two kinds graven and *where is a place I can write this*" (101). The status of something called Anglo-Quebec poetry might be said to reside (or be suspended) in a similar kind of conceptual space. It exists as something that has already been graven into its specific geo-cultural locale and at the same time, as a body of literature still looking for a place to write itself down.

My first foray into exploring the possible interpretive connections between Anglo-Quebec cultural, social and linguistic conditions and poetic practice took the form of a collection of essays I co-edited with Todd Swift, entitled *Language Acts: Anglo-Québec Poetry, 1976 to the 21st Century* (Véhicule Press, 2007). Many of the articles found in that book explore the arguments of self-definition developed by anglophone poets in Quebec and provide readings of actual poems in light of an array of linguistic and geo-political realities that shape life in the province. While that book does not advocate a singular definition of what Anglo-Quebec poetry is, it does proceed with the inclination that such a critical category can provide interesting insights into poems that may also certainly be interpreted and enjoyed for qualities other than those of the local conditions from which originated. The work of *Language Acts* was to gather documentary evidence, contextual information, expository argument and critical analysis that focused on the potential usefulness of this conceptual frame for English-language poetry that has emerged from Quebec over the past fifty years. The essays I have gathered for this special issue of *Canadian Poetry* build upon the foundation provided in *Language Acts* and engage in rich speculation and analysis of a broad range of Quebec anglophone poets and poetry activities with the aim, not just of testing the limits of the idea of this poetry as "Anglo-Québec" poetry, but of exploring the concerns, themes and techniques of Quebec anglophone poets on their own terms. I will say more about the specific articles in this special issue at the end of my essay. My main concern here, by way of introduction, will be to articulate some of the limits, potential benefits, possibilities and impossibilities of examining poetry within this rubric.

"Il n'existe évidemment pas telle chose qu'une littérature anglo-québécoise" (Marcotte 6). Gilles Marcotte's statement is an obvious place to

begin a discussion about the viability of Anglo-Quebec literature as a critical category, if only because he makes several bold and compelling arguments against its possibility. As in the formation of many arguments that work to define a national literature, Marcotte's speculations originate in a model of reading for self-recognition. Often the moment of critical realization that arises from this model of reading is the result of the failure to recognize oneself in the literature at hand. So, Margaret Atwood begins the argument of *Survival* with an anecdote about how her nascent Canadian literary identity originated in a sense of otherness felt during her early reading of Captain Marvel comics and Walter Scott romances: "I knew, even then, that wherever I lived it wasn't *there*" (29). Similarly, Marcotte says of his experience of reading English-language literary works from Quebec: "Il m'est assez évident que, lecteur professionel ou lecteur d'occasion, je ne suis pas chez moi, ou je ne suis pas tout à fait chez moi dans les oeuvres anglaises du Québec" (Marcotte 7).

The first question about this model that comes to mind is why would anyone want to feel completely at home in one's reading? Why would one want to read about *here* when one can read about *there*? But of course these authors are not denying the pleasures of estrangement that arise from reading about places, themes and ideas unfamiliar to the reader (castles and Popsicle Pete, for Atwood; references to world politics and representations of a "worldly" Montreal in the novels of McLennan, Klein and Richler, for Marcotte). They are engaged in an analysis of what makes them feel that there is such a thing as Canadian and Québécois literature, respectively. Marcotte anatomizes his encounters with English-language writing from Quebec into a sense of categories of estrangement that are used, in turn, to define what is distinct about *la littérature québécqoise.* So, in reading D.G. Jones, F.R. Scott, and David Solway, Marcotte encounters a set of conventions of thought and representation, including concrete and precise imagery (in Jones), socio-political references (in Scott) and dense description (in Solway) that embody "une definition de la poésie qui nous est aussi étrange que possible" (8-9). Among the other elements of estrangement he experiences in reading anglophone Quebec writing is its deep interest in questions of origin, its mythification of the present, its universalist purview, and its geographically open and permeable conception of local space (8-11). In the end, these observations are not meant to serve as notes towards the development of a thematic guide to *la littérature anglo-québécoises* (à la *Survival*)—which, as I have already noted, "n'existe évidemment pas"—but as means of consolidating the reality and significance of the "nous" upon which Marcotte's critical practice often depends. Si *nous*

all experience this estrangement in reading English-language works written in and sometimes about Quebec, then my sense that a native *québécoise* literature in which I can encounter "des signes de ma culture" without such alienation exists, is reinforced (10).

I tend to agree with Marcotte that there is no such thing as Anglo-Quebec literature in the sense that there is now Can Lit and *la littérature québécoise*. A key reason for this is that there has been no lasting "self-recognition" narrative to originate a critical, and finally an institutional justification for the assertion of Quebec anglophone writing *as* Anglo-Quebec literature. Further, even if there were such thing as an Anglo-Quebec poet, an Anglo-Quebec poet would probably be the last to want to identify himself or herself as such, or at least to do so at the expense of other potentially broader designations. Why would anyone *want* to be identified as an Anglo-Quebec writer, a designation so deeply entangled in awkwardly comprised, historically-specific, geo-linguistic identity categories?[4] Certainly there have been occasional manifestos and rally calls over the years that have articulated the literary and political integrity of such a category, but the effect of these has proven to be as ephemeral as the little magazines in which they have appeared. While such calls prove nothing, in my opinion, about the existence of Anglo-Quebec literature, they are interesting to know about and tend to underscore the positional nature of attempts to assert the existence of an Anglo-Quebec literature *ex nihilo*. Take, for example, the following excerpts from Raymond Gordy's position paper entitled "The English Speaking Poet in Quebec Today" published in the second issue of the Montreal experimental little magazine *booster & blaster* (December 1972)[5]:

> BOOSTER & BLASTER publishes Montreal Poets only. There is a reason in this. We are an English-speaking community, physically circumscribed within a larger French-speaking community, but paradoxically, a minority which shares a majority English-speaking consciousness. This is difficult politics and should create a poetry of meaningful content and commitment. Too much poetry in Canada is a poetry of experiences, a recording without reflection. Here in Québec that approach is unacceptable. Here, great English-speaking poetry will be written, not only confessional but historical, dealing with Québec's distinctive and local reality—survival.
>
> English-speaking however, does not mean English poetry…The identification of our poetry with the English concentration in this city, and that with English Canada, has alienated it from Québec. This city was, and retains, French, Slav, Jew, Latin and English populations. A first generation Slav

writing in English certainly will not reflect English manners. In fact, he is bound to have schizoid usage of the English language paralleling a French-English-Ethnic multiplicity in his cultural experiences. In this way he redeems it. Makes it ours. For us, English-speaking poets in Québec—language and society are one.

Let there be no mistake—we are Québécois first. Since the reality of the English language in Québec is predicated upon historical conquest; creation, not entrenchment must be our collective apologia. Our presence here as poets must be an act of faith in geography, people and destiny. Toronto and the Tamarack Review is far away; Vancouver and Very Stone House further; Ottawa close, Fredericton close.

Gaston Miron's work is "nothing less than the creation of a people and a language."

Where does this leave the English-speaking poet in Québec? For us, in Québec, language is the excuse to dismiss one another: "bloody French' or 'les Anglais'. We know each other by an easy and suspect totalism. If we were only a physical presence, emigration might solve the impasse. But we share each others' consciousness, we are implicated in and with each other. To deny the English language would be to deny Québec. Herein lies our voice. As English-speaking poets we must with Miron embrace language like ourselves, stripping away the insinuations and threats, leaving imagination and love. (Gordy)

There are the makings here (in 1972) of a passionate argument for a new vision of the anglophone writer in Quebec based upon the peculiarity of his geo-political and linguistic situation. Gordy catalogues many of the elements that continue to be discussed in debates about the significance of anglophone writing in Quebec, including 1) the physical circumscription of anglophones in Quebec and its relative significance, 2) the strange minority-majority status of English in Quebec, 3) the ethnic multiplicity that may be typical of the Quebec anglophone's experience, and 4) the historical conditions that have informed and continue to politicize the significance of English in Quebec, and that establish an ongoing dialectic between these two language groups in the province. Elements of Gordy's little known manifesto have since been rearticulated in selective ways by numerous critics writing in Quebec, for example, by David Solway writing on the supposed "double exile" effect at work on the Anglo-Quebec poet due to his physical and linguistic circumscription,[6] Peter Van Toorn on "the fusion of English and French sensibilities" in English-language poetry

(Van Toorn 63), and Sherry Simon on the "diasporic consciousness" reflected in the writing of much anglophone writing in Montreal (Simon 60). Less common since has been the call here made by Gordy to convert the social and linguistic circumstances of the anglophone in Quebec into the Miron-like project of articulating, and indeed creating a language and a *peuple*.

The lack of will on the part of anglophone Quebec writers for such a project, the inherent sense that it would be an overly parochial designation and one for which there is no overarching sense of commonality among those who would identify with it is one reason such calls for collective creation are uncommon, even unlikely. Indeed, when you get right down to it, what underlying sense of identification, whether political, social, cultural or poetical do Robyn Sarah, David McGimpsey, Erin Moure, and Endre Farkas share? The very implausibility of a *Survival* type argument for a coherent Anglo-Quebec literature rooted in a shared sense of self-recognition may be explained, in part, by the apparent "coexistence of several potentially contradictory concepts of the Québec political subject" at work in Quebec society (Beauchemin 29), and the likelihood of a conditioned resistance on the part of anglophone Quebecers to overarching normative identity claims of any sort. As Jacques Beauchemin notes, the conception of québécois citizenship within a pluralistic framework often results in contradictory tensions between the particularist claims of diverse identities, on the one hand, and the continuing claims of "a political subject capable of transcending competition between particularisms," on the other (23). The conception of the political subject wavers between monologic, ambivalent and dialogical models, which serve different functions under different conditions of debate and discussion (23-28). These categories (and there are certainly other models to add to the list) represent what Dimitrios Karmis would call conceptual expressions of normative pluralism in contemporary Quebec society (70). If we construct (by reading) an idea of an "actual" plural sociological makeup of a place—what Karmis refers to as "sociological pluralism" (70)—then we still have to do the work of identifying the extant normative theories that allow us to understand our place within the pluralist social reality. Is the normative theory that best explains the pluralism of Quebec society one of civic nationalism, multi-nationalism, multi-culturalism, integration nationalism, interculturalism, or some other theory (73-80)? That is to say, what model do we use to understand the relation between different cultural (and linguistic) bodies in Quebec society? If it is not primarily a normative, top-down model of either civic or ethnic nationalism, then does it recognize plurality in terms of national

communities (multi-nationalism), ethnocultural communities (multi-cul-turalism), gradual integration to the majority (integration-nationalism), or does it recognize and promote the pluralization of identity at the level of the individual to such an extent that process and indeterminacy are valued over the goal of achieving the formation of a national identity (intercultur-alism)? While this last category is a flux model that works without anxiety of cultural change and loss, all of the others manifest *degrees* of anxiety about normative identification, even as they attempt to assert the integrity of normative categories.[7]

From this perspective of political conceptualization alone the difficul-ties for an anglophone writer in Quebec to identify thoroughly with a potentially normative category like Anglo-Quebecer seem rather obvious. The anglophone Quebec writer's inclination to resist normative designa-tions can also be explained from a literary historical perspective. There has not been a coherent, nationally recognized identity for anglophone Quebec writing since the 1960s when a lyric-based poetry in the tradition of Irving Layton and Leonard Cohen was still a dominant mode and was identified as a signature mode of *Canadian* poetry. Take the following editorial writ-ten by Frank Davey for a 1962 issue of *TISH* as an example of what I mean:

> Almost Every Month *TISH* is pestered by people who assert that "Canadian" poets such as Souster, Klein, Scott, Layton, Dudek, Birney, Cohen (to give one writer's list) are "equal" (usually "superior") to their contemporary American and English poets. We do not question here the merits of these so-called "Canadians"; what we object to is their classification by country.
>
> Poetry is not an international competition. Moreover, poets do not write as patriots, but as men. Their country is merely incidental. Canada does not exist except as a political arrangement for the convenience of individuals acciden-tally happening to live within its arbitrary area.
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> …
>
> Let's have no more superficial jingoism in poetry. If a man/poet comes to rep-resent his homeland or his home town, he will do so inevitably, not intention-ally. As for comparisons, the community of poetry is a universal thing, as is man, and political divisions can never apply. (Davey 155)

The TISH statement of supranationalist poetics must begin with a "writer's list" that represents a prominent Canadian canon of the time. Souster and Birney aside, the national canon in the early sixties still consisted mostly of English language poets from Quebec. In the early 1960s Vancouver and

Montreal represented two opposing schools of poetry in Canada; identifiable schools. TISH's arguments for a supranational conception of poetry based upon "humanity" rather than "political arrangement" were matched by Montreal writers like Louis Dudek who warned against the dangers of nationalist literary projects. As Dudek wrote in a 1968 essay on "Nationalism in Canadian Poetry":

> Nations, like egoists, are notoriously self-centred; and nationalism, in the narrowest forms, leads to policies of self-aggrandizement of one kind or another. In literature, as in trade and commerce, this usually means protective tariffs and embargoes. Such protection may, from a short-sighed point of view, help the domestic industry, but it neglects the general welfare and the larger human good. In the end we are all a little poorer, as well as more ignorant, though there may be minor gains. (557)

These arguments, while representative of earnestly cosmopolitan positions, were also manifestations of a confidence that resulted from the ascendancy of TISH and the Montreal poets within the specifically Canadian national arena of poetry. Dudek's essay, in particular, seems to represent a somewhat late manifestation of an earlier Montreal confidence in the international significance of its locally grown poetry. In fact, by the late 1960s English language poetry of Quebec no longer represented the Canadian literary establishment in the manner that it had a decade earlier, and the implications for Quebec anglophones of political events of the 1960s and 70s were too obvious to be ignored in the way the editors of TISH could.[8] At this point in literary history, when the Montreal scene was producing a new generation of poets who worked in the lyric tradition of Layton and Cohen—poets like Seymour Mayne and George Ellenbogen—TISH was developing a poetics that was free of obligation to such formidable predecessors. The next generation of Montreal poets kept up its defense of closed field versus open field poetics for a time. For example, on the next page of the same issue of *TISH* from which the Davey quote above was taken, we find a letter to the editor, from Montreal:

> Dear TISH,
> …I, however, try to write **poems**, not ejaculations, spittoonos, soliloquies, rambling, dribbling, drivels & inconsequentials.
>   Yours,
>   Seymour Mayne
>   Montreal, P.Q.
>   (Mayne 156)

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But the fight on behalf of Montreal lyricism seemed largely lost (from a local perspective) when Layton moved to Toronto and Cohen became a citizen of the world. Despite John McAuley's description of Mayne as a poet who is "not simply a survivor of an earlier period" but whose work "has shown a constant evolution and refinement" (McAuley 64), to many Montreal poets of the 1970s, and especially to the TISH-inspired Vehicule poets of this period, Mayne would be remembered as one of a cluster of belated lyric poets, an epigone of the last national poetry movement to emanate from Montreal. According to this literary historical narrative, in the post-Cohen 1960s, "literary movements developed in other parts of the country, and Montreal fell silent for a time" (Farkas ix). From the mid-seventies on, when the Black Mountain influence eventually made some headway in Montreal, eclecticism became the dominant argument about English-language poetry in Quebec. While there was not (and is not) a unified Anglo-Quebec or Anglo-Montreal movement of poetry, there were, and continue to be, certain poetic "schools."[9] On the one hand, there were the Vehicule poets who shared a philosophy of aesthetic action more than a formally identifiable poetics, and on the other, a cluster of poets more recently self-identified as the Jubilate Circle, who critically distinguish themselves from other writers by identification with a stylistic and idiolectic excellence that is, for each member, distinctively resistant to "co-optation by a collective" (Solway 82). In short, both of the two primary discernible camps that have existed in the Quebec anglophone poetry community over the past thirty years have defined themselves in terms of the variety and eclecticism of their membership. This kind of argument for a coherent group that is based upon that same group's resistance to homogeneous collective seems to me a product of an inherent distaste on the part of anglophone Quebecers for arguments that promote communal hegemony.

But the fact that the poets might have difficulty condoning the designation "Anglo-Quebec poetry" does not necessarily preclude its critical usefulness and potential currency. Among the other reasons that this category seems to lack cultural resonance is the absence, for better or for worse, of a developed institutional and critical infrastructure to support it as a viable working category, and the absence of a coherent and viable audience for a body of literature that is framed in this manner. Theories of art developed by critics such as Arthur Danto and George Dickie explore the extent to which institutional conditions such as the existence of a viable contextualizing critical discourse and the formative presupposition of an audience determine the status of a body of work as an entity. I have used these kinds of institutional theories of art previously in a discussion of how the event-

oriented poetic practice of a poet like david antin can be discussed as constituting a poetic artifact, a literary entity.[10] They seem to me equally interesting and provocative for a discussion of the status of a conditional body of writing as a collective literary entity.

In his approach to the question that asks when a Brillo box transcends its status as a container for scouring pads and becomes a legitimate work of art, Arthur Danto notes that the carton's condition as an artifact in a museum is not enough. It is the conceptualization of something as an artwork that makes it so: "What in the end makes the difference between a Brillo box and a work of art consisting of a Brillo box is a certain theory of art" (Danto 180). Translated into the terms of the present discussion: it is not enough for poetry to have been written in English in Quebec for one to assert the existence of Anglo-Quebec poetry. There must be a critical infrastructure in place to support the assertion. Criticism, like that of Raymond Gordy cited above, which asserts situation-based arguments in support of the existence of Anglo-Quebec literature does exist (if you are inclined to go digging for it). But, as Danto notes, it takes a "certain theory of art"— a certain kind of theory, one might say—to establish the aesthetic nature of the Brillo box, and the criticism concerned with anglophone poetry in Quebec presently in existence is not the kind that effectively constitutes a literature. It has not been written by the right critics and published in the right journals. Little magazine assertions of the existence of something only become mainstream when they migrate (either by reproduction or paraphrase) into more institutionally sanctioned journals. This has yet to happen to the extent necessary for Anglo-Quebec literature to be said to exist, and it remains to be seen if it ever will happen, and to be debated whether or not it ever should. This last debate is as legitimate as any other surrounding the question, for the same reasons Dudek noted in the passage cited above. While the project of establishing Anglo-Quebec literature as a curricular field is not of the same proportion as the nationalist projects Dudek had in mind that were underway in the 1960s to establish Can Lit and *la littérature québécoise*, the points about self-aggrandizement, embargoes, short-sightedness, etc., may still be apt.

Or, they would be apt if the conditions for the establishment of Anglo-Quebec literature seemed favorable. I have been arguing that they are just the opposite. So, to continue that discussion: beyond the lack of a coherent and institutionally legitimized theory of Anglo-Quebec literature, there is no established audience, real or imagined, for this category of literature. Nor does an imagined Anglo-Quebec audience really exist in any extensive way for anglophone Quebec poetry, as one might say it exists for the

political cartoons of Aislin that appear in the Montreal *Gazette*, for certain comedy routines of Bowser and Blue, and for other such localized forms of cultural expression.[11] As Dickie asserts, the framework within which an artwork comes to exist as art "must include a role for a *public*" to whom it is presented (201). Even if the work was not made for presentation before an actual public, the presupposition of a public is a constitutive element of a work of art. The kinds of publics presupposed in anglophone Quebec poetry are, in my opinion, fascinatingly diverse. This diversity is likely due, in part, to the writing situation of the authors in question and to their need or inclination to imagine themselves writing *for* publics that are not necessarily in existence nearby, if they are even in existence at all. To pursue the thesis that a certain kind of preoccupation with address and audience, diversely expressed is apparent in much anglophone Quebec writing might serve to identify a characteristic that would constitute Anglo-Quebec poetry as a meaningful category. Or, it might simply characterize a tendency in the work of a local body of writers who will likely continue to write under such diverse categories and forms of presupposition. The implications of the development and pursuit of such theses remains to be seen.

While I have argued that there is no theory of Anglo-Quebec literature that presently serves a constitutive function of the literature that might fall within this category, it is possible that a certain theory of *la littérature anglo-québécoise* has been articulated to the degree that *that* entity—*la littérature anglo-québécoise* as opposed to Anglo-Quebec literature—*does* exist. Similarly, while there is no obvious audience for Anglo-Quebec literature (although this is not to say that the potential is not there, if the resonance of a theory for this category accrues enough to enable its materialization), there may be an emergent audience of *la littérature anglo-québécoise*. This is so, in great part, because *la littérature anglo-québécoise* has some meaning in relation to its more institutionally sanctioned category, *la littérature québécoise*. So what is the nature of this status, and its significance in relation to this emergent audience? If the category of *la littérature anglo-québécoise* has found some institutional support of late, it has been mobilized, primarily, to function in Quebec literary studies as a foil to a more unified "we"—oriented model of critical discussion, the kind of "nous" we found in Marcotte—what Martine-Emmanuelle Lapointe has described as "Le *je collectif* de la critique québécoise (Lapointe 87). In short, the primary institutionally sanctioned use of *la littérature anglo-québécoise* so far has been to challenge, trouble and potentially undo the conceptual wraps that bind and give shape to a

national literature of Quebec. As Catherine Leclerc remarks, "l'appellation de littérature anglo-québécoise continue de susciter l'inquiétude" (72); and this is, in fact, one of its great contributions as a critically conceptualized body of work. As Lapointe continues: "Mon attachement envers la littérature anglo-québécoise, outré l'attrait du corpus lui-même, vient de la conception et du renouvellement de l'ensemble de la littérature québécoise que son inclusion pourrait autoriser" (73).

So, *la littérature anglo-québécoise* has a challenging function in the realm of theory, and an estranging function in the realm of pedagogy. Writing of a recent undergraduate course he taught on La littérature anglophone du Québec at the Université de Montréal, Robert Schwartwald remarks that he was "taken aback to discover that my students, *Québécois de souche* and néo-Québécois alike, had no idea there *were* English writers in Quebec, either now or in the past" (99). While such students were used to studying English-language authors in their American and Canadian literature courses, to confront an anglophone author in a course that was purportedly about the literature of Quebec raised the obvious question, "Where does English writing from Québec 'fit'?" The pedagogical point turns out to be that English-language writing from Quebec is valuable in great part because it does not fit. As Schwartzwald explains, this literature ultimately served "to show how the positioning of various writers—liminal at times to the world my students knew, central at others to aesthetic orientations and literary developments in the English-speaking world—called up specific writing practices and specific ways of telling stories that could render contingent what had been, for them, a familiar world" (99).

Having taught a graduate seminar on the topic of anglophone Quebec poetry in June 2008, I can attest to the fact that the argument for the pedagogical uses of the apparent liminality of English Quebec writing can work equally well in relation to the category of Canadian Literature. In my case the students in question were a mix of Quebec anglophones and allophones, Nova Scotians, Ontarians, Saskatchewanians, Manitobans, Albertans, and British Columbians. In teaching this course I quickly found myself uncomfortable with the enthusiasm and enterprise that my graduate students demonstrated in adopting certain arguments about the distinct nature of Anglo-Quebec poetry, arguments for the existence and legitimacy of such a category that I asked them to develop in the first place. Some of their enthusiasm was due, I believe, to a sense of opportunity on their part to unlearn arguments about Canadian literature they had inherited as undergraduates.

For example, as Courtney Richardson (one of three students from the abovementioned seminar whose essays I have included in this special issue) notes in her essay on the comedic and critical treatment of "Can Lit" as a national brand in the poetry of David McGimpsey, a key element of McGimpsey's engagement with an entity identified as Canadian Literature is his satirical treatment of the "physical bodies that have become mythologized as national mascots and the marketing strategies they represent to further both national and commercial agendas." While resistant to arguments that suggest Anglo-Quebec writing is somehow more cosmopolitan and European than strictly Canadian literature, the primary energy of McGimpsey's satire (as far as the conceptualization of literature in nationalist terms goes) is devoted to revealing that "there are political and commercial forces behind the propagation of a falsely singular and homogeneous idea of what it means to be Canadian and to live in Canada." The perspective from which such homogeneous national literary conceptions is critiqued is in some instances markedly local, which is to say, a result of McGimpsey's own particular position as an anglophone Quebecer in relation to that particularly Canadian brand of cultural hegemony. In another contribution from this seminar Katye Seip reads Carmine Starnino's word-choice and tactics of address as symptoms of an attempt to create an imagined "general readership" for a lexically complex yet aggressively idiomatic poetry. One point behind Seip's argument is that the lack of a substantial local "public" audience for English-language poetry in Quebec encourages vigorous and interestingly strategic apostrophic gestures in Starnino's poems.

I managed to get over the unease I felt with the development of normative arguments for the existence of Anglo-Quebec poetry as I came to realize that the argumentative assertions about this category were ultimately less relevant than the readings of the poems that were generated in their support. Apart from the work of A.M. Klein, Irving Layton, Leonard Cohen, and to a certain extent, Louis Dudek, there has not been much analytical study of many excellent English-language poets who have written and lived in Quebec over the past fifty years. Several of the essays contributed to this special issue make some progress towards rectifying this situation by focusing on close readings of the work of particular authors. For example, while part of Guy Davenport scholar Andre Furlani's interest in the poet Robert Allen has to do with the fact "that this English immigrant who left Toronto during the halcyon days of cultural nationalism to study and teach creative writing in the experimental milieus of the United States attended to these proselytizers without enlisting their causes," a major con-

tribution of Furlani's article lies in the seriousness with which it takes Allen's unique engagement with lyric, meditative sequence and fractal epic forms. Allen, a British born, American educated Montreal professor who lived in Quebec's Eastern Townships, held a Quebec Driver's license and an Ontario medicare card, is in his own way, exemplary of the Anglo-Quebec writer, not just for the hybridity (or fractured nature) of his identity when articulated in official terms, but for his engagement with a catholic range of literary modes and influences as he worked to develop his own unique poetics.

Translation as a creative practice has been one of the dominant conceptual categories through which Québécois and Anglo-Quebec writing has been approached to date, and the present special issue contains articles that explore two anglophone Quebec poets for whom the idea of translation means very different things.[12] Erin Moure/Mouré's "trans*e*lation" of Alberto Caeiro/Fernando Pessoa in *She's Vigil by Fergent Person*, which, as Tina Northrup notes, "fuelled, within the community of Canadian poets and thinkers at least, new discussions on the nature of translation itself" stands in interesting and stark contrast with the self-effacing translation poetics of a less well-known poet, Marc Plourde. Plourde, as Kasper Hartman remarks, is less ludic in his approach to translation than poets like Moure and Peter Van Toorn. Further, as a poet, his career moves from the publication of his own poetic works to a series of attempts to translate Québécois poet Gaston Miron as precisely as humanly possible. Hartman's argument that Plourde's aspirations as a writer culminate in the development of "a model of translation that is rooted in an aesthetics of self-sublimation" represents a suggestive, close textual analysis of identity construction within a linguistic framework, and bears consideration in relation to the various categories of political identification developed by sociologists and political scientists like those of Beauchemin and Karmis cited above.

Other articles included in this dossier are different enough from each other to suggest that the avenues of research still to be pursued in the area of English-language Quebec poetry are multiple and rich. Daniel O'Leary's study of William Douw Lighthall is designed mainly to raise from obscurity the cultural and poetic activities of a Victorian Montreal poet; but his effort also raises interesting questions about the significance of this early mode of translatlantic cultural nationalism for contemporary anglophone writing in Quebec. In a very different vein, Vincent Tinguely's engaging personal essay recounting a fringier-than-fringe poetry reading that gained high praise from one of Montreal's most iconic poetry figures

represents an important document within a long Montreal tradition of 'outsider' poetry criticism. This piece which describes the process by which one Haligonian in the 1980s finds his way into the Montreal poetry scene and then comes to live there for the rest of his life, is written in the spirit of non-academic poetry-focused narratives, essays and manifestos as composed by poets and found in Montreal little magazines since the days of John Sutherland's *First Statement* (in the 1940s), Louis Dudek's *Delta* (in the 1950s), Seymour Mayne, K.V. Hertz and Leonard Angel's *Cataract* and *Catapult* (1960s), the myriad print projects of the Vehicle poets (1970s), *Zymergy* (1980s) and *Index* (1990s). Finally, by providing a case history of Signal Editions, the longtime poetry imprint of Montreal-based English-language publisher Véhicule Press, Julie Fredette's article makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the material infrastructure that allows much anglophone Quebec poetry to appear in public, and provides important information about the competing poetic positions that lie behind the founding of this imprint.

As with many of the contributions to *Language Acts*, the bulk of the articles included in this special issue do not attempt to answer any of the questions raised in the opening lines of the present essay in a definitive way. One might say that they expend valuable critical effort and analysis in *not* answering questions that should not be answered according to normative expository formulae; or, at least, that should not *yet* be answered in this manner. There is much still simply to document and observe about the many poets who have written and/or continue to write in English in Quebec since the 1970s. The essays in this special issue represent a continuation of that work of critical observation about a body of literature that is at once already graven in a particular time and space and hovering above its generative conditions like an idea waiting to be written.

Notes

1   Carson 98.
2   Betty Goodwin (1923-2008) was a Montreal-based artist of international reputation. For essays on Anne Carson's writing in relation to the Anglo-Quebec context see Rae

and Irvine.

3   "Winning Conditions" or "conditions gagnantes" was a phrase associated with former Premier Lucien Bouchard's governance of Quebec during the period following the 1995 referendum (from 1996-2001), referring to his platform "that a referendum on sovereignty should be held if, and only if, 'winning conditions' were met: If there was any indication that Quebeckers would again reject sovereignty, a vote would not be held" (Séguin A3).

4   Writing of the Quebec anglophone writer's resistance to "l'appellation d'écrivain anglo-québécois," Catherine Leclerc and Sherry Simon argue that "[l]eur reticence vient tout autant d'une inquiétude à l'idée d'usurper une identité gagnée de chaude lutte par les francophones, ou encore d'un refus de s'associer à une 'minorité' Anglophone qu'ils perçoivent comme trop vindicative" (Leclerc and Simon 19).

5   For further information on the little magazine *booster & blaster* see Camlot, "Anglo-Québec Poetry Periodicals c1976-2006: An Annotated Bibliography" 346-347.

6   See Solway, "Double Exile and Montreal English-Language Poetry."

7   One explanation for the distrust among anglophone Quebecers of normative "integration" models of political identity lies in the consociational democratic structure of Quebec up until the 1950s, and the localized control it entailed for the anglophone minority community. In consociational democracies, "the government delegates extensive control over their own affairs to the communities, benefits are allocated proportionally between communities, and each community can veto decisions that would threaten its fundamental interests" (Stevenson 332-333). Within such a political structure, the major social and cultural portfolios of Quebec anglophones functioned in relative autonomy from the State, and this lay the groundwork for a sense of localized empowerment. While the move away from this model was gradual, signature moments in its demise include the Jean Lesage Liberals' re-election under the slogan *Maitres Chez Nous* in 1962 (which ushered in the "Quiet Revolution" in Quebec), and the passing of Bill 22, the Official Language Act, in 1972.

8   For a brief account of the political events in question see Camlot, "Introduction: Anglo-Québec Poetry (b. 1976-)" 21-24, and Stevenson.

9   And then, of course, there are the numerous individual poets who resist identification even with the heterogeneous conceptions of collectivity loosely embraced by these schools.

10 See Camlot, "'The Talk' as Genre: David Antin, Apostrophe and the Institution of Poetry."

11 George Bowser and Rick Blue are a musical comedy duo from Quebec and authors of such musical shows as "Blokes," "Blokes Deux" and "La Fête Carée (a Wood Stock for Square Heads)". Aislin is the nom de plume of political cartoonist Thomas Mosher.

12 For articles that explore writing in Quebec through the lens of translation poetics, see, for example, Simon "A.M. Klein. Pimontel et les ratés de la traduction"; Wheeler; Lanthier; and Lane-Mercier.

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