

Introduction

In a discussion of marginal genres, Brian Loftus argues that attempting to make claims about the field of queer writing (and autobiography, in particular) is that “it is a tradition without a base of reference”; and more specifically, he wonders “How can a text consolidate a subject on the grounds of sexuality when that sexuality has no history to document, no proper cultural space and no symbolic categories?” (31). Loftus wisely leaves it up to us to ponder how it might be that homosexual writing—whether poetry or prose—can even be considered possessing its own (historical) tradition, since it seems not to have any roots. We do know, though, that such writing is found within, for example, the literary canon, by default assumed to be (invisibly) heterosexual. It’s always been there; it’s just that most often no one has looked, or looked *differently*. But for those who have, the rewards have come by reading between the lines. Not to find a tradition, perhaps, so much as the signs and symbols, those textual nuances that document a cultural space, that have said “We are here; you are not alone.”

With contemporary queer poetry, this, of course, is not the case. Hiding the object of one’s desire, in a poem, by referring to a non-specific “you,” is an ambiguity no longer courted, or much needed. “Homosexual,” the binary complement of “heterosexual,” has itself given way to the more polyvalent and inclusive “queer” (a word that does not please everyone, but that’s another story). With the relaxing of boundaries of all sorts, new writers and subjects have come to the fore. While it may be too early to determine, then, if queer writers have “arrived”—or even if they care about arriving—perhaps it is easier to now determine the breadth of a queer poetic tradition in Canada.

Queer writing might be said to have a base of reference (if only historical), and part of that is found in the works of poets such as EA Lacey and Ethelwyn Wetherald, two authors included in this issue. While their presences here are not meant to indicate that they are exemplary or have influenced later writers, they at least indicate that the study of Canadian queer (including lesbian and gay) poets is still in its infancy. Daphne Marlatt, also studied here, would appear to disprove this; yet it appears that the wealth of critical writing on her work occurs simply because she has also written prose and has been deeply and successfully committed to lesbian and feminist politics.

The other writers appearing here—Greg Scofield, Trish Salah, Anurima Banerji, Kathryn Payne, and Barbara Brown—reveal how much of the formative poetics and politics of earlier writers have been built upon, and sur-

passed. No longer solely concerned (as Lacey and Wetherald may have been) with covert identity and life in the margins, these poets have been free to overturn the assumptions of the (largely white) traditions and address concerns both urgent and necessary: transgenderism, colonialist legacies, diasporas and exclusionary nationalisms, AIDS, First Nations histories, sexual geographies, the ongoing regulation of sexuality, and racialized desires (among many other things). The queer tradition in Canadian poetry, ever more visible, is clearly not easily definable, nor is it exclusionary.

Similarly, this issue of *Canadian Poetry*, in its selection of the studies of certain authors, is not meant to be comprehensive, either in its historical scope or in its addressing of socio-political concerns. Rather, it affords a glance at the exciting possibilities in the field. And for helping to enlarge that field, I want to express my gratitude to the many vectors whose collegiality make journals like this possible; and especially to David Bentley for his encouragement and for continuing to make *Canadian Poetry* a forum for critical exploration and vitality.

Work Cited

- Loftus, Brian. "Speaking Silence: The Strategies and Structures of Queer Autography." *College Literature* 24.1 (1997): 28-44.