

## Malcolm Ross and the New Canadian Library: Making It Real or Making a Difference?

Laura Groening

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Article abstract

The conservative nature of the New Canadian Library as a whole has been accepted as a given; a growing interest in multicultural literature is cited as something that has developed in opposition to the canon that the NCL supposedly instituted. Smaro Kamboureli's anthology of multicultural literature, *Making a Difference*, claims that all "the contributors, by virtue of their race and ethnicity, belong to the manifold 'margins' that the Canadian dominant society has historically devised" (2). Nevertheless, all but one of Kamboureli's non-contemporary writers have been included in the NCL. Malcolm Ross remembers his goal in setting up the NCL list as an enterprise not in canon-making, but in putting before the Canadian reading public as many texts as he could find that showcased regional and ethnic diversity. That Ross is not celebrated for his contribution to the national literature but, rather, is relegated to a past Robert Lecker dismisses as narrow and materialistic because of his work, and Kamboureli defines as narrow and ethnocentric in spite of his work, is a travesty of cultural history. The reading of the New Canadian Library as a "classic deal," as an institution of canon formation primarily defined by economic interests, is one more colonial act of disparaging Canadian culture.

# Malcolm Ross and the New Canadian Library: Making It Real or Making a Difference?

LAURA GROENING

Our culture cannot be expressed in terms of someone else's experience. ... Like other peoples, and whatever the direction, we must advance over our own cobblestones.

(Ross, *The Arts in Canada* 5)

IN THE INTRODUCTION to *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions*, Linda Hutcheon writes, "There is no obvious place to start any investigation of the ethnocultural diversity that has created what we call 'multiculturalism' in Canada today" (5). "Fifty years ago," Marion Richmond, Hutcheon's co-editor argues, "the term multiculturalism — as we understand it in Canada today — was unknown, and a book such as ... [*Other Solitudes*] would not have been considered an important literary endeavour" (preface, n. pag.). In 1954, Malcolm Ross, the founding editor of the New Canadian Library (NCL) series, introduced a book called *Our Sense of Identity*, writing that

Ours is not, can never be, the "one hundred per cent" kind of nationalism. We have always had to think in terms of 50-50. No "melting pot." Rather, the open irony of the multi-dimensional structure, an openness to "the larger mosaic," to the vivid themes of A.M. Klein's Jewish heritage, to the fine Slavic interlacings of Winnipeg and the prairies. (xi)

This diversity Ross calls "the proper diversity of the full Canadianism" (xi). Surely this is precisely multiculturalism "as we understand it in Canada today"; that is, a view of the nation rooted in the idea that a multi-ethnic culture produces not a series of discrete and different communities, but rather a new community of many voices singing in harmony, what Ross calls "a diverse yet single people" in his introduction to F.P. Grove's *Over Prairie Trails* (v). Thus it is with the early work of Malcolm Ross and the NCL that I propose taking up Hutcheon's challenge to find a

starting point for an investigation into the development of a multicultural Canadian literary tradition, a literary tradition that is Canadian not in spite of being multicultural, but because it is multicultural.

It was not until 1962, five years after the inception of the NCL, that “Canada’s present universal and nondiscriminatory [immigration] policy was introduced” (Dirks 864). According to Ross’s logic, the NCL was working to foster a national imaginary well prepared to welcome such a change in social policy. Each text was selected to maintain a balance of regional, and, by extension, ethnic diversity. As Ross argues in the introduction to *Our Sense of Identity*, “there is a North Americanism which is Canadian and not ‘American.’ It is marked and structured by a phenomenon uniquely ours and the very contrary of the ‘melting pot’ imperative of United States nationalism: The ‘two nations’” (ix). Ross believes that as a result of reconciling French and English interests, we have become “the people of the second thought.” Our “characteristic prudence” is a “bi-focalism” that is structural and not ethnically-based. It “is not the Scot in us, or the Puritan, or the ‘North Irish’” (ix). Consequently, it is not the content of the ethnic diversity that matters, but rather the habit of first recognizing, then accepting, and finally celebrating difference that paved the way for a multicultural literature in contemporary Canada. “The opening out was never easy,” Ross allowed in 1954: “The taunt ‘Hunky’ or ‘Uke’ or ‘Kike’ has been heard in our air. There has been strain. And anguish. But we grow” (xi).

Ironically, the growth Ross foresaw almost fifty years ago has been forestalled by a discourse that seeks to open up the nation to voices of difference, specifically to the multiethnic voices that the Canadian “main tradition” is accused of marginalizing (Kamboureli, *Making* 1) and to the experimental writers who were supposedly overlooked because of the conservative political interests of Ross, a man in search of “cultural self-recognition” (Lecker, *Making* 158).

The man at the centre of contemporary debates about the dangers of canon formation finds the term “canon” itself inappropriate. “My main role,” Ross told Judith Breen and Lynn Atkinson in 1974, “has been ... to get these books moving so that people could use them” (60). Prior to the founding of the NCL in 1957, Canadian literature was seldom taught in university departments of English, largely because there were no texts in print to teach. When Ross approached John Gray at Macmillan Canada about a paperback reprint series of Canadian books, Gray predicted that they would lose their shirts: he did not even think paperbacks were here to stay, let alone Canadian paperbacks (Staines 14). At

McClelland and Stewart, Jack McClelland was eagerly taking over the family business. A young maverick, he wanted to make his mark on the bastion of Canadian publishing he was going to head. He listened to Ross's dream and decided to take a chance. In 1957, Grove's *Over Prairie Trails*, Callaghan's *Such is My Beloved*, Sinclair Ross's *As For Me and My House*, and Leacock's *Literary Lapses* appeared under McClelland and Stewart's imprint. Ross (and others) could, for the first time, teach a course in the literature of their own nation. The New Canadian Library was born.

Today, nearly fifty years later, this remarkable story of cultural achievement remains largely untold. Robert Lecker alludes to it throughout "The New Canadian Library: A Classic Deal" (*Making* 154-72), but he also calls David Staines's summary of Ross's remarkable contributions in the introduction to *The Impossible Sum of Our Traditions* "hyperbolic" (156), and he refers positively to the period in which Ross was unable to teach Canadian literature as "a decade central to the recognition of Canadian culture" (154). James King scatters about a dozen pages on the NCL throughout his biography of Jack McClelland, and Sam Solecki's selection of McClelland's letters contains about the same number of entries from Ross. Meanwhile, academics in Canada and the United States are largely preoccupied with questions about the nature and value of literary canons. In Canada, Lecker has led the debate, with the publication of two books, *Canadian Canons: Essays in Literary Value* (1991) and *Making It Real: The Canonization of English-Canadian Literature* (1995). Lecker has immersed himself in the theory American critics developed in their attempts to "open" the powerful institution of American literature to the voices of Black, women, and gay writers. Particularly influential to his argument has been the work of John Guillory, who has theorized a relationship between canonical literature and institutional authority. Lecker writes,

Even the most pointed challenges to what has been called the Canadian canon have been met with indifference rather than hostility. . . . This indifference contrasts sharply with the conditions prevailing in France, the United States, and Great Britain, where for years critics have been engaged in what John Guillory calls 'a legitimation crisis with far-ranging consequences' in which 'pressures conceived to be extrinsic to the practice of criticism seem to have shaken literary pedagogy in fundamental ways.' (*Making* 50)

It is Lecker's desire to insert Canadian critics and "what has been called the Canadian canon" into a debate that has been defined by the

American experience, and that determines his reading of the Ross-McClelland correspondence and consequently his interpretation of the significance of the NCL for Canadian culture. Lecker quotes Guillory's insistence on the "unveiling of the canon as an institutional construction" in order to argue that "Canadian critics and literary historians have turned a blind eye to these delegitimizing activities" (26). However, Lecker ends up calling on Canadian critics to delegitimize an entity whose legitimacy they still cannot take for granted. As Tracy Ware points out, "It is true, as Lecker observes, that Canada has nothing like the revised *Norton Anthology of American Literature* . . ., but it is also true, as he does not observe, that Canada has nothing like the unrevised *Norton Anthology*" (486).

Guillory argues that "it has not been sufficiently acknowledged how much the language of [canonical] revision owes to a political culture which is specifically American" (4). The point is immediately relevant for the NCL, because, as Guillory explains, "the theoretical assumptions upon which the practice of canonical revision has been based . . . derive without question from . . . liberal pluralism" (3). In other words, in the United States, where historically immigrants have been encouraged to submerge their ethnic heritage in a giant melting pot, specific material and intellectual constructs had to be broken down in order for canonical revision to take place — that "specifically American" political culture to which Guillory refers. Such a theory cannot be imported without careful examination into Canada, a nation whose history is both colonial and marked by a belief in a cultural mosaic.

When I interviewed Ross, he described his experience initiating the NCL as an adventure in multiculturalism that began during his years with the National Film Board (1942-1945). He talked about the excitement of being a young man from small-town Fredericton, New Brunswick, given the opportunity to travel across Canada and meet people from different ethnic backgrounds. He remembered his subsequent goal in setting up the NCL list as an enterprise not in canon-making, which is an activity he associates with the work of orthodox religion, but in putting before the Canadian reading public as many texts as he could find that showcased what he calls regional and ethnic diversity (the two very much going hand-in-hand for him in the 1950s). The introduction to *Our Sense of Identity* confirms his recollections, and the early NCL list bears out the idealism of his first attempts: books by F.P. Grove, Gabrielle Roy, Ringuet, Martha Ostenso, and A.M. Klein appeared within the first few years. The only way a critic could argue the revision of this canon as the

triumph of liberal pluralism over a narrow conservatism would be to rewrite history.

This, in fact, is what is happening: the history of the NCL is being rewritten before it has been written. The early need to support the series financially with the annual inclusion of a popular Stephen Leacock reprint becomes evidence in Lecker's *Making It Real* of the suspect nature of the integrity of the Canadian canon as a whole (161). Robyn Gillam, in a review of Lecker's book, refers to the early NCL list as McClelland and Stewart's "cash cow." Jack McClelland's risky financial venture on behalf of the national culture (the details of which are available in Carl Spadoni and Judy Donnelly's introduction to *A Bibliography of McClelland and Stewart Imprints*) is thus being reread as an act of monetary opportunism. When the NCL did begin to become economically viable, Macmillan of Canada started its own reprint series in competition with McClelland and Stewart, making it increasingly difficult for Ross to obtain publication rights to a number of texts he felt belonged in the NCL. Lecker reads this development in publishing as an early event: "As early as 1976," he writes, "Other publishers had started their own reprint series" (167). He might just as well have said, "It was not until 1976, almost twenty years after the inception of the NCL." By transferring the significance of this economic impediment to Ross's ideal list from the later years where it restricted the free-flowing expansion of the already-established series to the early years, Lecker suggests that the enterprise was strangled by financial interests from the beginning. Furthermore, the absence of these (more recent) texts is now cited as evidence of the conservative nature of Ross's vision (Lecker 167).

The conservative nature of the NCL as a whole is being accepted as a given; the growing interest in Canada in multicultural literature is cited as something that has developed in opposition to the canon that the NCL supposedly instituted. For example, Smaro Kamboureli's anthology of multicultural literature, *Making a Difference*, claims that all "the contributors, by virtue of their race and ethnicity, belong to the manifold 'margins' that the Canadian dominant society has historically devised" (2). Nevertheless, all but one of Kamboureli's non-contemporary writers (at least, all who were living and writing in Canada) have been included in the New Canadian Library, that publishing venture the name of which is becoming synonymous with canon formation in Canada.

In "The Canonization of Canadian Literature," Lecker carefully lays out the parameters of his argument against the New Canadian Library:

If other national literary canons have begun to decompose in the face of current ideology and theory, it is because the "fantasies of ortho-

doxy” enshrined in these institutions have also begun to decay while the forces accounting for exclusion and “difference” have replaced orthodoxy and become a “central critical category” (Guillory, “Ideology” 195). In Annette Kolodny’s words, the delegitimation crisis “asserts as its central critical category not commonality but *difference*” (293). Such an assertion obviously undermines the canonical values associated with commonality: the orthodox belief in a great tradition; the notion that a national literature expresses shared cultural values; the idea that any literary or cultural undertaking can be explained in terms of inclusion. (*Making* 29)

The attempts to delegitimize national canons as sites of authority, as defined by American critics Guillory and Kolodny, must proceed through a discourse of difference, a rhetoric of negativity. And so it is that Lecker announces his purpose in the first paragraph of the introduction to *Making It Real*: “Frankly, my original intention in writing ‘The Canonization of Canadian Literature’ was to stir up some dust.... By the late 1980s I was beginning to feel that the institution and its members were suffering from complacency. Hierarchies had been established. There were no heated debates and there was little in the way of contestation” (3-4). He defines “a pluralistic vision of the country” as a “conglomeration of competing forces and centres of power” (9), and he argues that one needs a “vision of the nation” “in order to destabilize it” (10). Our literary histories, he laments, are “unbearably polite” (7).

Lecker begins “The New Canadian Library: A Classic Deal” by asserting the primacy of the NCL in the production of a canon of Canadian literature:

In many ways, Ross’s New Canadian Library selections *formed* this imagined tradition. They influenced a generation of students, and helped to define which texts would become the subject of serious critical inquiry during the 1960s and 1970s. I can’t think of any other canonical activity in Canada that would rival this. Given its enormous impact on the teaching and study of Canadian literature, we might well ask why Ross chose the texts he did for inclusion in the New Canadian Library. (*Making* 155)

Lecker then poses a series of critical questions, the answers to which we might reasonably expect to find in the article that follows:

Think, for example, of the first four titles to appear in the series: Grove’s *Over Prairie Trails*, Callaghan’s *Such Is My Beloved*, Leacock’s

*Literary Lapses*, and Ross's *As for Me and My House*. Why were students and teachers given these particular texts? Or why the selections that followed? These questions imply larger ones: What values informed the pedagogical canon at its inception? What was the controlling vision behind the selection process that would determine so much of what would come to be received in Canadian classrooms as the canonical norm? What kind of critical standards accounted for the choice of scholars who were asked to contribute introductions to NCL volumes? (155)

Although he refers to the way "Ross's selections" defined the "pedagogical canon," and insists "we might well ask why Ross chose the texts he did for inclusion," in reality Lecker equates the NCL with Jack McClelland, publisher, not with Malcolm Ross, general editor.

Consequently, when the article moves to an examination of the Ross-McClelland correspondence, the correspondence between an editor and a publisher, it shifts its focus away from cultural issues and comes up with an argument that is almost exclusively economic. That there is little discussion between Ross and McClelland about the literary value of texts Ross has chosen strikes Lecker as evidence of the absence of aesthetic values (although, in spite of financial considerations, there is no actual evidence of Ross's aesthetic choices being rejected for economic reasons). Lecker writes:

The formation of the New Canadian Library was essential to the development of Canadian literary studies, and it served the crucial function of creating the canon on which the Canadian literature industry could be built. But the fact that it was industrially valuable should not lead us to conclude that it was the product of a sustained aesthetic/critical vision or that it embodied any recognized expressions of excellence. The values established by the New Canadian Library series were as new and unquestioned as the series itself. (171)

He concludes, "For the most part, the series responded to economic, rather than aesthetic, pressures. Right from the start, it was conceived of and constructed as a marketing device" (171).

Although Lecker may find evidence of Jack McClelland's concerns about keeping the New Canadian Library financially viable, it was not McClelland who conceived of the series, but Ross. Nevertheless, Lecker does not turn to either the NCL introductions, where literary and cultural values are examined, or to Ross's academic prose, where Ross explains his motives for suggesting the series:



In the fall of 1956, I approached Jack McClelland with a proposal to publish a series of Canadian novels in paperback. I was teaching then at Queen's University and was anxious to prepare a full course on Canadian literature. We were teaching some Canadian literature from anthologies at the tag-end of a course on American literature. But you cannot teach a novel with only a chapter in an anthology to go by. The older novels were out of print, and the recent ones too expensive for classroom use. ("Achievement" 125-26)

Ross's frustration with a situation that left him attempting to teach Canadian novels on the basis of single anthologized chapters suggests that cultural issues were of primary interest to him. If we no longer see Ross as "the radical, pioneering visionary" that Beverley Slopen termed him in 1978, it is because his work with the NCL has made such dire circumstances now seem unimaginable.

Ross's introductions to five NCL volumes also make clear his concern with cultural and literary issues. He chose to introduce two of the first four selections, Grove's *Over Prairie Trails* (1957) and Callaghan's *Such is My Beloved* (1957), as well as subsequent editions of Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1960), and Richler's *The Incomparable Atuk* (1971). He also brought out *Poets of the Confederation* (1960), a selection of poetry by Roberts, Carman, Lampman, and D.C. Scott. Each of the introductions stresses the writer's mastery of his craft. Ross praises Grove's evocative language and strong sense of place, concluding, "Here is lore for the naturalist and the historian — but shaped and held in the hand of the artist" (x). Callaghan is singled out because "well in advance of the vogue of Graham Greene and Evelyn Waugh," he had "written a religious novel" (v), the symbolism of which is "controlled and objectified by irony" (viii). Richler is endorsed for the brilliance of his satire, while Leacock is defended against charges that he is a failed novelist: "he writes *sketches*, and the Leacock sketches are a blessed compound, like nothing else that ever was or ever shall be, of caricature, anecdote, and *essay*" (x). Ross argues on behalf of Leacock's genius: "To attack and defend, to love and hate in one breath, is not the genius of satire but the genius of irony, the subtler art, the deeper wisdom" (xi).

Although his diction implies confidence in a receptive audience, each of the introductions indicates that Ross is conscious of the challenges of presenting a reprint series to a nation ignorant of its own accomplishments. Only after carefully detailing the distinctive quality of each of Grove's trails does Ross say, "No one, surely, will deny to this first book

its permanent place in our literature” (x). Looking at Leacock, he muses, “It is hard to imagine anyone reading *Sunshine Sketches* for the first time” (ix). “The editor’s job (and the publisher’s),” he adds, “is simply to keep the book going *ad infinitum*” (ix). The perspective of time, of re-reading, that can be brought to a reprint series is a quality Ross deeply values. “The first thing that strikes one on re-reading *Over Prairie Trails*,” he argues, “is Grove’s almost incredible love for the harsh, punishing, desolate Manitoba land” (v). Turning to Richler in 1971, he writes, “Perhaps [*The Incomparable Atuké*] makes more sense now than it did in 1963” (vi). Thus he echoes his conviction at the inception of the NCL, when he wrote,

*Such is My Beloved* is unmistakably a novel of the Thirties. The date is stamped on every page. And yet this novel is not “dated.” Indeed, while so much of the writing of the Thirties seems as remote and as alien as the Gothic romance of Monk Lewis, Callaghan’s novel can now be read as it was meant to be read. (v)

For Ross, the passage of time enables the critic to transcend ideology. Callaghan, for example, “has no slogans for the day” (v), and it was his “ironic vision of social crisis which puzzled the reader of the 1930’s” (viii). But, Ross insists, “after these years of ‘iron curtain,’ ‘cold war’ and now ‘co-existence’ we presumably have second thoughts about the desirability (and even the possibility) of ‘liquidating’ our ideological opposites” (viii).

Fundamentally, however, it is the whole idea of a reprint series that Lecker finds questionable:

[The NCL] was designed as a reprint series that would resurrect important texts that had gone out of print. But the very nature of this exercise raises a central question: If these works were so important — if they were truly of classic status, as McClelland and Stewart’s promotion would eventually claim — why were they out of print? (156)

Lecker’s response to why the NCL texts had gone out of print in the first place is based on a surprising faith in the infallibility of popular taste:

In some cases, the answer to this question is that the books had never aroused much interest when they were first published and had quickly faded from public view. In other cases the works in question had simply fallen by the wayside, mainly because the public had not judged them worthy of being kept in view. (156)

This does not constitute two different cases. The books were out of print because a sufficient number of readers did not value them enough to keep

them in print. The assumption, however, that this meant the books were not “important” says perhaps more about Lecker’s critical views than the critical view of the NCL. If aesthetic value is determined by popular taste, then why is the NCL excoriated throughout this article on the basis of economic arguments? “Usually,” Lecker writes, “books that are out of demand are dropped from the canon” (171). He continues:

The evolution of the New Canadian Library, however, demonstrates that just the opposite may occur: in this case, books that were out of demand or out of print for many years (books that had become *unvaluable*) became the very works considered to be worthy of inclusion in a series that marketed its titles as classics deserving curricular and critical attention — truly an original concept for determining literary value. In the topsy-turvy world of the New Canadian Library, what was not wanted was often wanted most. (171)

This is indeed true. What Malcolm Ross, teaching a few Canadian pieces at the tag-end of a course on American literature, realized in 1956 was that Canadian literature was not “wanted.” There were few non-contemporary Canadian books in print; certainly there was no canon of Canadian literature, from which books that were out of demand could be “dropped.” If Ross struggled to insert Canadian texts into a course on American literature, Lecker is struggling to insert Canadian literature into an argument on American cultural history.

Lecker believes that the nature of a reprint series dictates the kinds of choices that will be made in one key area other than economic: the choice of out-of-print books means the selection of non-contemporary texts. Ross would agree: he readily admits that contemporary texts were too expensive for classroom use. For Lecker, however, contemporary is synonymous with experimental, and non-contemporary is synonymous with conservative:

Perhaps it is this emphasis in cultural self-recognition that accounts for Ross’s initial interest in titles that were so firmly rooted in mimetic assumptions about the relationship between people and place. Perhaps it also accounts for his reluctance to include titles that challenged cultural norms. (158)

Lecker does not specify which titles that challenged cultural norms were overlooked. He believes that “What is certain is that the series was eminently conservative in its formation; its version of newness was grounded in books that were old” (158). For Lecker, “the main effect was to introduce the idea that contemporary texts had less confirmed cultural relevance than historical texts, that experimentation or culturally transgressive works

had no place within the canon that was being established with each new title in the NCL series" (158). The equating of contemporary and experimental denies the historical context for what constitutes "experimental" and reinforces Lecker's confidence in the significance of the text that has not had to stand the test of time in order to be considered of lasting value: "contemporary texts had less *confirmed* cultural relevance." Ross's contribution, first termed by Lecker as "one man's fun" (156) and then as "genuinely noble intentions" (159), gets folded into the overall debate, without any consideration being paid to what Ross himself actually said. Simultaneously, the genius of Leacock's irony, Richler's satire, and Callaghan's symbolism are by implication erased.

Lecker's argument that there is a canon of Canadian literature that is a false, institutional construct founded on economic values cannot be separated from current arguments that national canons silence voices of difference, the argument Smaro Kamboureli brings to *Making a Difference* and *Scandalous Bodies*. Both positions adopt an understanding of culture that deploys a historical discourse that functions as though it were responding to a specific, established entity — a canon of Canadian literature. The situation the discourse responds to, however, is in fact rooted in an alien literary history and consequently filled with unproven assumptions.

If the national canon *was* determined by economic reasons and if excellence *is* a product of popular taste, then indeed one might worry about the fate of an "ethnic minority" writer whose work depended upon the literary tastes of an "ethnic majority" and the economic interests of a publishing house. However, what Lecker's argument really reveals is that there was no mainstream (majority) literary establishment in 1957, something Ross has pointed out on numerous occasions in his discussions of attempts to teach Canadian literature. There were few, if any, celebrated Canadian authors, either of Anglo-Celtic or any other ethnic background (certainly none whom Lecker names). There was a highly colonial atmosphere in which a national culture was not valued because it was national.

Kamboureli, however, does not examine the origins of Canadian culture. Rather, she argues that there is a traditional marginalization in Canada of those who fall outside the Anglo-Celtic tradition:

*Making a Difference: An Anthology of Canadian Multicultural Literature* at once celebrates what has been called minority literature in Canada and attempts to change our understanding of what minority literature is. What makes this anthology of Canadian literature different is its gathering together of both poetry and fiction by authors who come from a wide range of racial, ethnic, and cultural

backgrounds. Beginning with F.P. Grove and Laura Goodman Salverson, the first non-Anglo-Celtic writers to achieve recognition in Canada, and including First Nations authors, this anthology belongs to the genealogy of Canadian literature, a body of writings that come from a variety of traditions that used to be kept separate from the so-called main tradition. (1)

None of this, from who has used the term “minority literature” to what the “so-called main tradition” refers to, is footnoted. It is assumed that we can take marginalization for granted. Lecker, too, builds the authority of his argument in the introduction to *Making It Real* on a series of statements he presents as facts that can be taken for granted.

Although Kamboureli asserts as fact the marginalization of ethnic minority culture, she also wants to reassure her readers about the quality of her chosen writers: “Nor is [multicultural literature], by any standard, of lesser quality than the established literary tradition” (3). To that end she cites the numerous literary awards that her contributors have accumulated, leaving her in the tenuous position of accusing a country of marginalizing its writers by granting them literary awards:

Canadian literature is, should be thought of, as reflecting the multicultural make-up of the country. That I *feel compelled* to spell this out, that I do so at a time when, for example, some of the contributors to this anthology have won some of the most coveted Canadian literary prizes, suggests that Canadian literature — Canadian literature as an institution — is still not as diverse as it should be. Prizes do not by themselves establish the literary significance of an author; still, they confer on authors a validity, they sanction the kind of affirmation that the Canadian literary establishment has long denied Aboriginal writers and writers of non-Anglo-Celtic backgrounds. (*Making a Difference* 1-2, emphasis added)

We are left with a reified Canadian literary institution (“institution” is also Lecker’s preferred word) that Kamboureli artificially separates from its writers and the literary prizes they have won. In spite of Lecker’s insistence on the defining power of the NCL selections, Ross’s diction of inclusion, which makes clear that Canadian literature *has* been thought of as a multicultural entity at least since 1954, is nowhere in evidence.

A diction based on unexamined historical assumptions is also used to give authority to the argument that opens *Scandalous Bodies*, where Kamboureli writes:

I was interested in tracing the principal events and ideological forces that had made ethnic literature marginal, the better to appreciate the intricacies of recent changes in the Canadian literary tradition. My reading of ethnic literature in a systematic way began at a time when the canon ignored an entire body of works by writers whose names, more often than not, were 'hard to pronounce,' or who wrote about cultural traditions beyond Canada's own. (vii)

Again, no attempt follows to prove the marginalization of ethnic literature, to indicate what the term "canon" is meant to refer to, or even to define "ethnicity" with a precision much beyond writers whose names are "hard to pronounce." She is prepared to allow that "There were, of course, articles and books on such authors as F.P. Grove" (vii), leaving one to wonder what an author such as F.P. Grove might be. The apparent contradiction that emerges when she later argues "in the early nineties, ethnic writing became a privileged mode of literary discourse in Canada" (40) remains unresolved.

The first writer that *Scandalous Bodies* examines is, significantly, Frederick Philip Grove, and Grove is certainly a perilous subject with which to begin a study of multicultural writers. "Why," Kamboureli asks, "has Grove been 'considered to be ethnic' only 'rarely,' at least until the early 1980s, as E.D. Blodgett observes (1982, 89)?" (28). Her question suggests the current determination to stress difference at all costs, for the case of Grove should surely warn us all about the slippery nature of identifying ethnicity. Certainly, Kamboureli cannot not argue that Grove was rejected on the basis of ethnicity, since she also refers to the "almost instant canonization" of *Settlers of the Marsh* when it was first published in 1925 (*Scandalous Bodies* 40).

If we examine Malcolm Ross's introduction to the NCL edition of *Over Prairie Trails*, published in 1957, we discover that Grove was recognized and celebrated as a writer of a specific ethnic background, that his invented background went unquestioned, and that ethnicity was not perceived as a dividing factor among Canadian writers. "Beginning with Grove is crucial because of the historical perspective it affords my overall argument," Kamboureli says in *Scandalous Bodies* (28). Ross thought beginning with Grove was crucial, too, almost fifty years earlier when he initiated the NCL:

*Over Prairie Trails* was written by a man born in Russia of mixed Swedish, Scottish, and English blood. Educated in Paris, Munich, and Rome, twenty-one years of age before he came to this country

after tours (large if not grand) from the Sahara to Madagascar to the Antipodes to America, Frederick Philip Grove is yet the typical, perhaps even the archetypal, Canadian. (v)

Ross not only focusses on Grove's ethnicity in his opening sentence, but he isolates Grove's background as the source of his Canadianism: Grove is the "typical, perhaps archetypal, Canadian." For Ross, however, the term "Canadian" has meaning that is enriched, not limited by ethnicity:

Grove's was no mere passport Canadianism. He was not just a writer who happened to be writing in Canada. He was a *Canadian writer*, wholly absorbed by the Canadian scene and by the pioneer drama of a diverse yet single people; wholly convinced that this scene, this people, could yield to the artist's vision themes and values at once unique and universal. (v)

But Ross's vision is suspect because, even though he celebrates Grove's ethnicity within a definition of the Canadian scene as a "diverse yet single people," he has inadvertently specified the wrong ethnic background. While Kamboureli can hardly fault Ross for not recognizing Grove's disguise, unknown until Douglas Spettigue published *F.P.G.: The European Years* in 1973, she can and does dismiss Ross's breadth of vision. She writes of Ross's introduction,

It is not difficult to ascertain why Grove qualifies so easily for the 1950s archetype of 'Canadian.' There is certainly a correspondence between the social and cultural credibility towards which Ross's litany of ethnic origins and Grove's own invention in the 1910s of his 'mixed ... blood,' which fits the positive figuration of the 'New Canadians' at the time like a glove. In the performative context of Grove's self-fabrications, Scottish and English blood clearly outweighs the accident of his birth in Russia as well as his mother's Swedish origins. (32-33, original ellipsis)

For Kamboureli, the content of ethnicity is more significant than the pattern of affirming a multicultural heritage, and she reduces Ross's Grove to just another Anglo-Celtic writer in the mainstream tradition. Ross, on the other hand, is trying to define a community that will not be restricted on the basis of a particular ethnic background. As he says in "American Pressures and Canadian Individuality" (1957),

I am trying to define a community which opens into the community of man . . . . Our task is to become what we are. We have learned that

we are *not* just a mixed batch of transplanted Englishmen, Frenchmen, Slavs, Jews. We are a uniquely structured community. As individuals we live by various and separate ethnic and spiritual inheritances. We preserve these differences. At another level, as Canadians, we take our cultural life from the lively collision and interplay of many inheritances. Thus we grow. It is not the item — French, Jewish, Slavic, or English — it is not the item but the pattern which is Canadian. (*Impossible* 122)

This is the defining vision of Malcolm Ross, the man who inaugurated the New Canadian Library series that Robert Lecker argues started out as a marketing ploy. It is the vision behind the series Lecker claims established the Canadian literary canon, the canon Smaro Kamboureli accuses of indifference to multiethnic voices. That Malcolm Ross, on the eve of his ninetieth birthday, is not celebrated for his contribution to the national literature but, rather, is relegated to a past Lecker dismisses as narrow and materialistic *because* of his work, and Kamboureli defines as narrow and ethnocentric *in spite* of his work, is a travesty of cultural history.

Lecker writes that “our canon remains unique by virtue of its rapid rise to power at precisely the time when other canons and literary institutions are being named, explained, torn apart” (29). However, as Tracy Ware (quoting Frank Davey) points out, “Despite the reference to ‘other national literary canons’ (660), the only one he has in mind is the American” (485). The development of a Canadian literary tradition, on the other hand, would look less unique if it were to be compared, for example, to the development of postcolonial literatures. The reading of the New Canadian Library as a “classic deal,” as an institution of canon formation primarily defined by economic interests, is one more colonial act of disparaging Canadian culture. Ironically, it is a colonial act which, in the name of delegitimizing literary canons, constitutes the ultimate acceptance of a Western canon: in working for the disintegration of the Canadian literary tradition on the grounds that it is represented by a powerful institutional canon, critics undermine one of the small (national) voices speaking against the idea of a unitary, monolithic western literary history. The space left waiting is unlikely to be filled by voices of difference. As Malcolm Ross put it in 1954, “Many tongues are ours. But this tower is not Babel” (*Our Sense* xi).



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