

# Is Canadian Literature Still “National”? Twenty-First-Century Canadian Literature in Spatial Perspective

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# Is Canadian Literature Still “National”? Twenty-First-Century Canadian Literature in Spatial Perspective

SABINE MILZ

“**T**ORLIT, THE SUCCESSOR to CanLit, is about money,” writer and literary journalist Stephen Henighan proclaims in a chapter of *When Words Deny the World: The Reshaping of Canadian Writing* that carries the title “Vulgarity on Bloor: Literary Institutions From CanLit to TorLit” (159). In this chapter, Henighan argues that in the 1960s and 1970s a national literature came into life in Canada through the wide distribution and “laudable accessibility” (158) of Canadian-authored titles produced in distinctly regional settings. The national literary climate was one of “comfortable collegiality where everyone knew everyone else through their work, even though they might not have met” (158). To a significant degree, Henighan notes, this interactive environment and collegiality was fostered by governmental and arm’s-length granting agencies that supported a national dissemination infrastructure, and by literary journals, as well as by the national media, that were and still are largely centred in Ontario, and especially in Toronto. While Canadian publishing was (and still is) primarily regional — and Henighan emphasizes that the “southern Ontario commercial presses are no exception to this” (160) — the widely distributed literary product was distinctly Canadian: national. “With the advent of the globalized 1990s”, Henighan writes, this balance of regional production and national distribution/exposure got undone as English Canada’s publishing centre, Toronto,<sup>1</sup> “was plugged into the global marketplace,” leaving other English-Canadian publishers “corralled within their own regions” (159). Nowadays, these regional publishers “scrape by within their regional markets” (159) as consistent national distribution and media attention have largely disappeared — and with them, a truly (i.e., grassroots) national Canadian literature.

Henighan’s account of the disappearance of CanLit is a lament for a national literature as a space conceived in speech and writing as

national, a space of materialized practices and infrastructures reaching across a national territorial expanse called Canada, and a space directly experienced or lived as national through a range of social relations, symbolic meanings, individual and collective agencies, and routines of daily life. Henighan's lament is a nationalist one. For Henighan, 1970s Canadian literature was a lived national(ist) space in which a nationalist idea(l) of Canadian literature materialized through the wide distribution, media attention, and institutional support of regional, grassroots literature and literary activity. Institutional support, media attention, and an evolving regional and national literary infrastructure nurtured a national consciousness and a nationalist sentiment, and vice versa. In the Canada of Henighan's experience and recollection, the national as space of state power and of the reproduction of capital, and the national as space emerging out of the felt needs, experiences, and practices of daily life, seemed to have struck a cultural nationalist compromise. The problem Henighan sees with the present situation is that this compromise has been nullified. With Toronto plugged into the global marketplace, selling a Toronto-centred Canadian literature to the world and to Canadians, and the literary regions reduced to the production of local and regional literatures, the space of national literature has been eroded; the national circulation of literature has become the domain of a commercialized and Toronto-centred abstract space. The conceived space of national literature, taken for granted by Henighan to be a durable (even if changing) cultural nationalist space, is at odds with what Henighan experiences to be the physical, material space of national literature today.

Framing the concept of a national literature in spatial terms (as in the above paragraph), I borrow from French sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre's theory of space developed in *The Production of Space* (1974). In this seminal work on society and space, commonly credited with bringing space to Marxism in the 1970s, Lefebvre conceptualizes, analyzes, and explores the transformative potential of space as a process that is simultaneously — and often by conflict — perceived (material, physical), conceived (ideational, imagined), and lived (experienced). *The Production of Space*, and Lefebvre's critical work and activism more generally, has had a considerable impact not only on Marxist theory but also on urban theory and contemporary social and spatial theory — both in Europe and North America (see Harvey Molotch for an overview). The

book's basic position that social groups “can not constitute themselves, or recognize one another, as ‘subjects’ unless they generate . . . a space” (416) introduces space into social theory as a key variable; theorizing society, it propounds, involves theorizing social space and particularly the competition over the production of social space. *Abstract space* and *absolute space* are terms with which Lefebvre describes key forces in the competition over the production of space. Abstract space describes the processes by which space is put to the service of domination through state and economic power; it is produced for exchange value. On the opposite end, absolute space describes the processes by which space is put to the service of human need; it stands for use value and the kind of work organically emerging (rather than being produced) out of the practices and felt desires of daily life. Following Lefebvre's basic position that social (and thus cultural) relations are inherently spatial, I will pursue the question of what national literature means today in an Anglo-Canadian context by examining the space of that literature, and especially the contestation over the production and reproduction of that space. Can we, as Lefebvre's spatial theory suggests, clearly separate between an abstract and absolute space of national literature — a separation Henighan seems to undertake in his assessment of what has happened to CanLit? What tensions or contestations shape Canadian literature as national literature at the interlinkage of perceived, conceived, and lived space — as well as at the interlinkage of the spatial scales of the national, regional, local, and global?

After *When Words Deny the World* was nominated for the 2002 Governor General's Award for non-fiction, Henighan's lament for a national literature gained some currency.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Henighan's book addresses an important topic, that of the changed spatialities of Canadian literature as national literature in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries — with the term *spatialities* referring to the processes by which space, social relations, and literature mutually constitute and shape one another. Still, notwithstanding the importance of the book's subject matter, the spatial reconstitution — or rather, erosion — of national literature proclaimed by Henighan is significantly complicated — as demonstrated in interviews I recently conducted with book industry players from Canada's three Prairie provinces, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Alberta. (A list of interviews conducted can be found in the bibliography.) My interviews with literary publish-

ers, booksellers, writers, industry associations, and distributors active in the three provinces indicate that Henighan's argument, though at times echoed by these players, is oversimplified in that it is based on a chronological timeline of the rise/presence (1960s, 1970s, 1980s) and fall/absence (1990s, 2000s) of a national literary space. They further show that Henighan's globalized TorLit/marginalized literary regions spatialization, while pinpointing an important (though not the sole) geometry of literary power in English Canada, distracts from the very real ways in which material and lived literary spaces outside of Toronto have been affected by and reacted to neo-liberalizing and globalizing pressures, and have participated in the production and reproduction of the space of national literature both before and after the 1990s. To avoid (or counter) the risk of spatially limiting the effects of neo-liberalism and globalization to English Canada's chief publishing centre, Toronto, I decided to undertake an interview project that focuses on book industry players active in Canada's Prairie region, with the phrase "Prairie region" signifying a contested and multiply constructed spatial and temporal configuration (an issue that cannot be discussed in any detail within the scope of this paper). This choice of location was somewhat arbitrary, and a survey of voices from any other region would have been equally valid and significant.

This paper will present a synthesis of interview responses that reframes the spatial reconstitution of Canadian-national literature since the 1970s; it will focus on technological and industry developments, historical continuity and change, and a network of spatial relations in which the national is produced and reproduced (rather than eroded) at the intersection of a variety of shifting local, regional, and global forces that hold distinct social, cultural, economic, and political meanings. In terms of critical endeavour, this paper ties in with the collective effort undertaken in the third volume of *The History of the Book in Canada* (edited by Carole Gerson and Jacques Michon) to account for the production and dissemination of Canadian literature in the twentieth century. Its focus is on what has come after the 1980s (and thus after the period covered in the third *History of the Book in Canada* volume), as it examines if and how the networks of literary production and distribution in English Canada have been affected by a neo-liberalizing and globalizing shift in Canadian political economy. As such, the paper also provides an important complement to more theoretical

and textual-analysis-based studies on the intersections of Canadian literature and contemporary globalization. It adds an empirical-material dimension to the conversation on what Canadian literature means today — a conversation that has been framed through textual, institutional, historical, and cultural analyses in a growing body of critical work, which includes such tellingly titled studies as *Post-National Arguments* (Frank Davey), *Transnational Canadas* (Kit Dobson), and *Trans.Can. Lit* (a collection that grew out of the activities of the recently established TransCanada Institute and which is edited by Smaro Kamboureli, who heads the Institute, and Roy Miki). This paper aims to contribute to this conversation an encounter and exchange of academic and non-academic understandings of Canadian literature and its spatialities in the present neo-liberalized and globalized climate. This kind of encounter and exchange, I would argue, is key to gaining a nuanced understanding of the subject matter at hand.

### Reconstituting the Space of National Literature

The introduction to this paper started with a presentation of Henighan’s argument as to the erosion of a grassroots Canadian national literature. What makes this argument especially significant for the context of this paper is that it is not unique. Henighan’s argument can be found — with considerable variation in style and approach to the subject matter — in the work of other recognized Canadian writer-critics, including influential book-length studies such as Frank Davey’s *Canadian Literary Power* (1994) and Roy MacSkimming’s *The Perilous Trade* (2003, 2007). Henighan apparently addresses a very real concern and/or reality, one that is shared by other critics and writers. While vastly different and differently argued texts, *When Words Deny the World*, *Canadian Literary Power*, and *The Perilous Trade* concur in one important aspect: the claim that the material and, by consequence, lived space of Canadian national literature as grassroots literature was eroded in significant ways in the 1990s. Curious about this concurrence across writerly-critical positions, and about whether and how a similar concurrence can be found among frontline book industry players, I approached the interviews I conducted with the following overarching questions in mind: What (if any) symbolic and material meanings does the nation space hold today for frontline players in the production and dissemination of literature in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba? What has changed since the

1970s when small presses such as Winnipeg's Turnstone Press (1975), Regina's Coteau Books (1975), Saskatoon's Thistledown Press (1976), Red Deer's Red Deer Press (1975), and Edmonton's Tree Frog Press (1972) and NeWest Press (1977) emerged onto the publishing scene, and with them a new generation of regional writers and advocates of Canadian literature? How are we to understand the variously intersecting spatial scales of the national, regional, global, and local that take place in processes of literary production and distribution — today and in the past? I will start addressing these questions with a short historical overview.

As interview conversations with representatives from Thistledown, Turnstone, Coteau, NeWest, Tree Frog, and Red Deer make clear, the very beginnings of these presses in the 1970s were part of a national movement to get unknown regional writers into print.<sup>3</sup> Recalling the cultural nationalist climate in which Thistledown began, publisher Allan Forrie notes that it was a “philosophical mandate to say that you want to be a literary publisher because you want to contribute to the culture of your country and bring new voices and allow a literature to grow” (interview). Dennis Cooley, co-founder of Turnstone Press, recounts that Turnstone's beginnings were similarly, in many ways, a political move, a move by its founder-writers to create opportunities for emerging writers from Manitoba “to come into voice, into articulation, to begin to culturally construct and invent and remember their world.” (interview). According to Cooley, Turnstone authors such as Robert Kroetsch, David Arnason, and Cooley himself grew up in a cultural and intellectual environment that was still colonial in that literature was assumed to be written and also published somewhere else, in Europe and the United States — not Canada, let alone Manitoba. The 1960s and 1970s surge of decentralized regional literary activity,<sup>4</sup> Forrie sums up, “forged a Canadian literature with a national face on it” (interview); it forged “the fabric of Canadian literature.” Gary Hyland, then an emerging writer and publisher with Coteau Books, remembers that “there was a sense of community among the members of the writing profession. There were publications like *NeWest Review*<sup>5</sup> that covered the Prairie scene and frequent interchanges at conferences, courses, and professional associations” (interview). “Back in the late 1960s and early 1970s,” Robyn Maharaj, executive director of the Manitoba Writers Guild, at the time of our interview, “there was a real excitement in terms

of local cultural media and national cultural media; there was a real excitement about the dawn of a new publishing age" (interview). The volume of published titles vying for national attention was relatively small then, Paul Wilson, writer and co-publisher of the Regina-based Hagios Press, notes; this meant "that almost any book that came out, particularly from the region, got attention" (interview). Many newspaper editors, Wilson concurs with Maharaj, "were nationalistic in their approach to culture."

Established in 1975, the Literary Press Group became the vehicle of countrywide sales representation and distribution for small Canadian-owned literary presses (MacSkimming 269-71). It worked closely with independent<sup>6</sup> bookstores, which saw some waves of expansion between the 1950s and 1970s (269-71). In the Prairie provinces, this expansion included the establishment of, among others, Calgary's Evelyn de Mille Books and Owl's Nest Bookstore; Edmonton's Hurtig Books and Greenwood's Bookshoppe; Regina's Book & Brier Patch and H.B. Mann Books/Julian Books; Saskatoon's Broadway Book Merchants and Saskatoon Bookstore; and Winnipeg's Mary Scorer Books and Merrihew's Book Store. Between the 1960s and 1980s, Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan joined most other Canadian provinces in the foundation of provincial writers guilds and publishers associations. The Saskatchewan Writers' Guild was officially established in 1969, the Writers Guild of Alberta in 1980, and the Manitoba Writers' Guild in 1981. The Book Publishers Association of Alberta started out in 1975 as the Alberta Publishers' Association, the Association of Manitoba Book Publishers in 1976 as the Manitoba Independent Publishers Association, and the Saskatchewan Publishers Group as a more ad hoc body until it was officially incorporated in 1989. Between 1981 and 1989, the three provinces even organized a Prairie Publishers Group (PPG) to work together on issues of marketing, access, and professional development, as well as to act as "a political voice at the national level" (Jane Bisbee, second executive director of the PPG).

Taking stock of the literary and national(ist) fervour that pervaded 1970s Saskatchewan in "By Way of Background," Hyland reviews the kinds of grassroots and institutional developments that took place in Saskatchewan (and most other provinces) during that time: the rise of local writing and reading groups, chapbook publishers, and literary trade publishers (Coteau, Thistledown); the foundation of the



Saskatchewan Writers' Guild and its launch of the literary magazine *Grain*; the Saskatchewan Arts Board's inauguration of a publisher assistance program; and the introduction of Canadian literature (and later Prairie literature) courses at Saskatchewan universities. Involved in these developments were writers, publishers, policy-makers, arts funders, universities, and the general reading public. Provincial institutional initiatives such as publisher assistance programs and writers' grants complemented and were complemented on the federal plane by Canada Council for the Arts funding for writers and Canada Council and direct governmental funding for publishers. The most important programs in direct support of Canadian-owned book production and dissemination have been the Canada Council's Block Grant Program (established in 1972) and the Department of Communications' Canadian Book Publishing Development Program (established in 1979 and which was replaced in 1986 by the Book Publishing Industry Development Plan).

All of this, then, has been part and parcel of the cross-national literary infrastructure that took shape in the 1970s and that, according to writer-critics as diverse as Davey and Henighan, was eroded in the globalized 1990s. What exactly happened in the 1990s that led these critics to make this argument? Henighan's "Vulgarity on Bloor" holds but a vague answer. The text never conceptualizes the term *globalization* or explains the phrase "the advent of the globalized 1990s," but (like other chapters in *When Words Deny the World*) it echoes not uncommon, overgeneralized notions of global cultural homogenization, commercialization, and Americanization, as well as the view that these processes have been supported by federal cultural decision making. Davey discusses the phenomenon of globalization in more detail, and for Davey, as for Henighan, globalization finds expression in a culturally fragmented Canada — a Canada in which the national as a site of cultural exchange and community has been eroded (see Imre Szeman, 156-60, for detail). An avowed critic of the centralist federalist state and its nation-building agenda (see, for example, his *Surviving the Paraphrase*), Davey nonetheless seems to hold on to the nation as political and literary space that can counter the erosion of community — its atomization and dispersal into the circuits of global capitalism. The preface to *Canadian Literary Power* contains a dedication "to the continuation of a national English-Canadian literary community . . . not imagined in Toronto and constructed by authoritative national anthologies, or at another extreme a

battlefield of mutually suspicious, self-aggrandizing cultural interests, but a polylogue of strong, locally produced institutions, discourses, and practices.” This vision straddles hope and impossibility. While articulated in *Canadian Literary Power*, Davey’s analysis of sixteen novels in *Post-National Arguments* (a text published one year prior to *Canadian Literary Power*), ends on the following note:

“Specific novels may argue for a humanist Canada, a more feminist Canada, a more sophisticated and worldly Canada, an individualist Canada, a Canada more responsive to the values of its aboriginal citizens, but collectively they suggest a world and a nation in which social structures no longer link regions or communities, political process is doubted, and individual alienation has become normal” (266).

The dispersal of literary power and infrastructures, *Post-National Arguments* suggests, has not led to new forms of community but to fragmentation, disconnected special constituencies, and atomized individuals.

Providing first-hand experiences of the material and institutional changes that have taken place in English Canada’s publishing industry since the 1990s, the interviews I conducted also provide frontline perspectives on the issues of globalization, fragmentation, and community that to some extent give evidence to Davey’s and Henighan’s claims of fragmentation but also complicate them. Like Henighan and Davey, the interviewees point to a significant reconstitution of the conceived space of Canadian literature. Susan Hogarth, executive director of the Saskatchewan Writers Guild, echoes the sentiments of many of the interviewees with her observation that what distinguishes the 1970s from the 1990s and today is that “there was very much a national consciousness then” and “a belief in the role of culture, or the arts, within the creation of a distinct national personality” (interview). Today, Hogarth notes, the need to assert a national consciousness or personality or culture is not felt that strongly anymore; the need to relate to the world in that way is not strong. As Forrie puts it, “there may no longer be the need to portray Canada under one face” (interview). Echoing the views of Hogarth and Forrie, many of the people I interviewed indicate that global and local consciousness have strengthened over the past decades, and national (in the sense of nation-state) consciousness has weakened. They suggest that the lived spaces of twenty-first-century Canadian

literature and nation are ideationally shaped by localism and globalism more than by nationalism — and thus may be, as studies by critics of globalization indicate (e.g., Jan Aart Scholte, Edward Soja), reflective of more comprehensive experiences of identification and belonging in the contemporary postmodern nation-state in which power is territorially and institutionally more decentralized, both sub- and supra-nationally, than it was in the modern nation-state. Canadian literature today, the interviews indicate, is conceived less as a space of assertively national literature — of national community — and more in and across the spaces — and communities — of local literatures, provincial literatures, urban literatures, post-national or transnational literatures, and/or literatures not conceived in terms of spatial markers. Yet this does not necessarily mean, as the following discussion will make clear, that literary community has been fragmented to the point of erosion. Nor does it mean that the national is no longer imagined, materialized, and lived — and thus contested — as space of literary community that is intricately and simultaneously absolute and abstract.

Still, the weakening of national consciousness and cultural nationalist idea(l)s of Canadian literature, the interviews indicate, has coincided with (and may, to a certain extent, have even contributed toward) a change in the national literary infrastructure. A significant number of the interviews I conducted resonate with Henighan's views in that they depict a geometry of contemporary literary power dominated by a Toronto-centred, market- and media-generated locus of national literature. Thistle-down's Allan Forrie, for instance, portrays today's national literature as abstract space "exclusively generated by the new marketing order and the controlled media activities that awards generate" (interview). "Rarely," Forrie notes, "do we see a national literature anymore emerging from the grassroots level," as absolute space of grassroots literary practices, agencies, and idea(l)s. While there is "a national profile of literature" today, it is not "a national profile of Canadian writing." Hagios Press's Paul Wilson similarly observes that "there is a kind of predetermined definition of a national publisher that is a publisher that has a lot of resources behind it to compel attention from the national media system" (interview). *The Globe and Mail*, Wilson notes, pretends to represent a national view of books, but it is more like "a Toronto favour system." Many of the people I interviewed agree with Forrie and Wilson as to the reconstitution — rather than erosion — of the space

of national literature as commercialized abstract space generated by a network of big national and international awards; the Toronto-centred national media; Canada's big bookselling chain headquartered in and centrally directing its orders from Toronto; and the major domestic and foreign publishers based in Toronto and equipped with distribution arrangements and marketing budgets that target broad national and international markets.

Indeed, interviews I conducted with Canadian-owned publishers in other parts of Canada (within the context of another project) also reverberate with this idea of the reconstitution of the material and lived space of national literature. Richard Almonte, for instance, who was editor and marketing coordinator of the Toronto-based *Insomniac Press* at the time of our interview in 2003, explained to me that the Canadian presence of foreign-owned multinational publishers and their concentration in Toronto is a challenge for *Insomniac* but not the key challenge. While multinational publishers are powerful players that need to be reckoned with, the more pressing issue, Almonte emphasized, is the cliquish relationship the mostly Toronto-based national media have with the big branch-plant presses and domestic publishers in Toronto. Similar to Wilson and Forrie, Almonte contends that the major national media “are convinced that the only interesting, worthwhile, and sexy books come from the big publishers” (interview). Canadian literature tends to take the guise of Henighan's *TorLit* in the book segments of these major media, whose Canadian allotment is dominated by titles published by the large foreign-owned and domestic Toronto presses (Toronto itself is home to a wide variety of media outlets and to numerous independent publishers and booksellers that publicize a diverse range of Toronto and non-Toronto authors). For a mid-sized Canadian-owned press such as *Insomniac* to get some attention in the national media, Almonte notes, means investing large sums of a tight budget in advertising and relationship building, or having a book nominated for a national or international award. Literature produced by independent Canadian-owned presses, an overview of the interviews affirms, encounters many challenges today when it comes to getting the traditional media exposure that makes possible broad, countrywide distribution. That does not mean, however, that small- and mid-sized independent presses do not get any such exposure; they do now as they did in the past, just not as consistently as their large-sized Toronto-based counterparts. A recent, and remarkable,

example is Freehand Books, a small literary press established in Calgary in 2007 and owned by the academic publisher Broadview Press. Winner of the 2009 Commonwealth Writers' Prize Best Book Award, Canada and Caribbean, and shortlisted for the 2008 Scotiabank Giller Prize, Freehand Books's very first title, Marina Endicott's *Good to a Fault*, catapulted the press into the national media spotlight. Building on this success, Alberta's youngest literary press has received national media exposure for several of its subsequent titles.

### Being Part of the Physical Space of National Literature

It is worthwhile at this point to query whether or not the challenges of national media exposure small- and mid-sized independent publishers face today are really, as suggested by some interviewees and by Henighan, that particular to the present market- and media-driven realities of Canadian literature alone. For instance, when I asked what she considers to be among the key challenges publishers in Saskatchewan face today, Brenda Niskala, executive director of the Saskatchewan Publishers Group, said that "for our publishers in Saskatchewan, it has *always* been getting the word out, distribution. Promotion and distribution are the two big issues" (emphasis added). Robert Calder, president of the Saskatchewan Writers' Guild at the time of the interview, similarly noted that "it has *always* been difficult for Saskatchewan writers to be recognized outside of Saskatchewan and to have their books available and reviewed, say, in Ontario or B.C. . . . An awful lot of the energy and the work stays within the province" (interview, emphasis added). "Alberta is a 'region,'" concurs A.P. Schroeder in his 1988 study *Word for Word: The Business of Writing in Alberta*, and "this means that very little is noticed about it in the national media until such a phenomenon actually arrives in Toronto, preferably through the winning of enough national or central-Canadian awards" (41). As these statements by Niskala, Calder, and Schroeder indicate, the challenge of consistent national distribution and media attention is nothing new for independent Canadian presses and writers published by these presses. Neither is the centralization of national literary capital — be it aesthetic, cultural, or economic — a development particular to the 1990s and globalization. Niskala, Calder, and Schroeder suggest that the cultural nationalist ferment coming from Canada's various regions in the 1970s existed within a dialectics of national centre and regional peripheries — a dialectics

that may stem from Canada's very beginnings as a nation-state critically shaped by the Macdonald government's National Policy, which subordinated the development of the Dominion's western, eastern, and northern territories to the needs of the federal centre. In terms of literary activity and power, the dialectics of national centre and regional peripheries may have been of a more dialogic nature in the 1960s, 1970s, and even 1980s than now — in dialogue about a national literature — but it remained a both material and ideological reality built on important colonial legacies and configurations (which have been documented by book historians such as George Parker).

This is not to deny, though, that the dialogue of a national literature has, as affirmed by the majority of interviewees, shifted in important ways with the strengthening of a market-driven dialectics of literary centre and literary regions, and the weakening of cultural nationalism and cultural nationalist activity. In what follows I will discuss manifestations of this shift in Prairie publishing. For instance, three of the four literary presses that emerged in the Prairies in the cultural-nationalist climate of the 1970s (and are now mid-sized literary publishers) defined themselves as decidedly national publishers in interviews with me. Still more significant, they defined themselves as national publishers in market-reach-based terms even as they were critical of the geometries of power driven by market forces and concerns that presently shape the space of national literature. While drawing attention to an exacerbated, market-driven dialectics of literary centre and literary region that propels the production and dissemination of national literature in English Canada today, Thistle-down's Allan Forrie simultaneously pointed out to me that Thistle-down is an “emerging national publisher” rather than a “Prairie publisher” (interview). Thistle-down is an “emerging national publisher,” Forrie explained, in the sense that it has started attracting writers from all parts of the country to its publishing program and promotes its books on a countrywide scale. Like Thistle-down, Turnstone Press, another mid-sized Prairie publisher that started in the 1970s, considers itself an active part of the space of Canadian literature. Managing editor Todd Besant described Turnstone as both a regional publisher — in the sense that the regional mandate reflects the press's roots and interests and helps it focus its list — and a national publisher — in the sense that Turnstone markets its titles nationally, participates in a specifically Canadian cultural model built on governmental support for

domestic cultural activities, and is part of national associations such as the Association of Canadian Publishers (interview). Likewise, Coteau Books defines itself as a “‘regional press’ in terms of [its] geographical location only, not in terms of [its] editorial and marketing reach” (Coteau Books Web site). In interview, Nik Burton, Coteau’s managing editor, and Geoffrey Ursell, Coteau’s president and publisher, gave the following definition of Coteau as national publisher: “for us ‘national’ means having a presence in all parts of the country; (Yes) it doesn’t mean seeking to express something particularly Canadian, or pan-Canadian in nature or essence.”

Don Kerr, who has been on the board of directors at both Coteau and NeWest Press, told me that unlike Coteau, which is “consciously national,” NeWest, the fourth Prairie press from the 1970s that is still active as a literary press today, “is in a debate” (interview). Doug Barbour, another NeWest board member, similarly remarked that “there has been an argument within the board about the whole question of whether or not regionalism as such or the region as such is that useful a descriptor anymore.” Asked whether or not he considers NeWest a national publisher, Barbour noted that while NeWest’s outreach and sales “have been much more in the west,” the press has also reached out across Canada, with certain of its books (e.g., Sharon Pollock’s *Blood Relations*, Fred Wah’s *Diamond Grill*, and Thomas Wharton’s *Icefields*) being “bestsellers over the long term, which are books that are usually found to be generally important Canadian works.” Barbour here echoes a correlation of national literature/publisher and market (reach and long-term market reach in particular), as do more recently established presses such as Great Plains Publications (GPP), which was founded in Winnipeg in 1992 as a publisher specializing in Prairie history and biography, and Freehand Books, Alberta’s youngest literary trade publisher. Commenting on GPP’s recent expansion into “fiction with a national focus” (GPP website), publisher Gregg Shilliday noted in interview that “interestingly, the Great Plains Fiction imprint name has turned out to be a liability when it comes to attracting novelists from across the country and selling books across the country. Therefore, I have decided to launch a new literary fiction imprint in the fall of 2008, called Enfield & Winzenty.” Freehand Books’s founding editor, Melanie Little, declared in interview with rob mclennan: “We don’t intend to operate as a regional press. I . . . see Canadian literature as a conversa-

tion that needs to at least be national, so it's very important to me that Freehand titles get noticed and read by readers, writers, and literature students and teachers across the country.” For Little, Canadian literature today remains a national conversation, a contested space of literary community crucially shaped by idea(l)s and realities of market reach.

Burton and Ursell elaborate that Coteau's self-understanding as a national publisher, in terms of editorial and market reach, “did grow up in the 60s and 70s when a lot of ‘local-interest’ writing and publishing started to reach beyond those [local] boundaries” (interview). It grew out of the momentum of 1960s and 1970s cultural-nationalist literary activity, which saw the introduction of mechanisms of national distribution in a climate of broadening national interest and demand. Turnstone Press co-founder Dennis Cooley also notes that the turn toward a definition of the national publisher by editorial and market reach was conditioned (and that in no small measure), by funding agencies expecting publishers to have or to try to have a countrywide program of marketing and distribution (interview). With federal funding agencies, as well as several of their provincial counterparts, starting to talk about cultural industries in the early 1980s, Cooley notes, sales and promotion started to become “the measure of things” (interview).

To contextualize this statement by Cooley, the 1982 report of the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee is commonly seen as the tipping point, on the federal plane, in a shift toward an economic strategy for culture as industry and toward an economic, rather than national identity/unity, argument for government funding for culture (see Mike Gasher for a discussion of the report). The commitment to cultural industries development espoused in the report was first mapped out in *Vital Links: Canadian Cultural Industries*, a 1987 background paper issued by the Department of Communications. Its market-focused implications for Canadian publishing as cultural industry are discussed in Rowland Lorimer's *Vibrant But Threatened: Book Publishing in Canada*. As Cooley indicates in interview and Lorimer explains in *Vibrant But Threatened*, provincial governments, to varying degrees, joined the federal cultural-industries approach. For instance, in the case of provincial funding in Manitoba, the home province of Turnstone Press, the Canada-Manitoba Subsidiary Agreement on Communications and Cultural Enterprises was negotiated as part of the 1984 Economic Regional Development Agreement (ERDA), signed between Canada



and Manitoba. Joy Cohnstaedt, then deputy minister of Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Recreation, explains that with this subsidiary agreement Manitoba became the first province in Canada to officially join the federal government in adopting an economic strategy for culture and communications (134). The agreement was part of an attempt by Manitoba to “adjust to the economic pressures of the 1980s, while maintaining a policy of encouraging indigenous culture” (134).

In our interview conversation, David Carr, Turnstone’s managing editor until he joined Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Recreation to administer the new support programs for Manitoba publishers that ensued from the agreement,<sup>7</sup> explains that the development of the new programs

was our attempt to expand the ways cultural publishing was supported. I was part of the group that pushed for these new programs when I was still at Turnstone and certainly saw them as benefiting literary publishers like Turnstone. I believe we all felt that traditional arts funding had its limitations — that it helped to provide a base but could not grow or respond to the realities of book publishing as publishers themselves evolved. Quite simply, traditional arts funding (e.g., a block grant based on jury recommendation) may be enough for a smallish ‘cottage’ publisher (i.e., a publisher with a regional market and no full-time staff or very young, i.e., underpaid full-time staff) but it was NOT enough to help these publishers grow into the next level of business/publishing activity — where they had to start paying regular wages, had to have ongoing business relationships with customers and distributors across the country, and where they needed the ability to finance company improvements.

I chose to quote Carr at length here because he illustrates the points made by Cooley, Ursell, and Burton very well. With regional publishers expanding and turning into professional businesses came the need to expand market reach; this expansionist mode tied in with and was supported by federal and provincial measures for developing cultural industries. Government cultural-industry development measures helped publishers such as Turnstone grow from small-sized cottage industries with limited physical-territorial reach and influence into mid-sized professional businesses active in a physical-territorial space reaching all across Canada.

## Twenty-First-Century Realities of a Market- and Reach-Based Space of National Literature

Carr emphasized in our interview conversation that the tenet of the new Manitoba programs was “to find ways to develop ‘industrial’ support programs that would support a cultural mandate or goal.” While this tenet to subordinate industry strategies to cultural objectives can be found in several seminal cultural-industries studies of the 1980s, such as Karl Siegler’s *Avoiding the False Dialectic* and the Department of Communications’ *Vital Links*, it is no longer so obvious today. The policy prioritization of cultural industries in the 1980s coincided with a movement now commonly called neo-liberalism that has de-emphasized Keynesian liberal doctrines for the sake of more classical liberal methods, such as the deregulation of markets and the adjustment of the role of state governments to that of enabler of a flexible system of regulation for the optimized flow of market forces. As an interdisciplinary session themed “Neoliberalism and Provincial Cultural Industries Development” held at the 2008 Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences expounded,<sup>8</sup> in the context of Canadian cultural policy, this neo-liberal turn, albeit diverse in its various provincial and federal manifestations, has found expression in a strengthening of the market- and consumer-based aspects of the cultural industries and a downplaying of cultural objectives and citizen-based concerns. In the context of Canadian literary production, it has moreover found expression, as interviewees have repeatedly pointed out to me, in a stagnant, and in the case of Alberta (see also David Whitson et al.) significantly decreased, funding envelope. The space of national literature has become noticeably commercialized in this neo-liberal climate, which, coupled with technological developments that have vastly diversified the cultural entertainment and publishing landscapes, has made it more difficult for small- and mid-sized publishers to compete for readers and expand market reach. It has made it more difficult for publishers such as Thistle-down, Turnstone, and Coteau, which over the 1980s grew from small-scale cottage industries into mid-scale professional businesses, to continue inhabiting the idea of a market- and reach-based space of grassroots national literature;

producing that space seems to have brought unanticipated consequences and constrained those (i.e., publishers) involved in its production.

The neo-liberal policy and market squeeze, it seems, has been harder on mid-sized players than it has been on small, cottage-industry-style players as mid-sized players have been more susceptible to shifts in funding and market conditions. Interviews with small, emerging publishers also indicate that it may be easier overall for them to get the funding support they need than it is for their larger, established counterparts. For instance, asked by me whether Freehand Books feels any commercial pressures from its provincial and/or federal funding sources, editors Robyn Read and Sarah Ivany gave the following reply: “The short answer is no. The reality is actually quite the opposite. When we received an Emerging Publisher Grant from the Canada Council, the diversity, quality, and innovative nature of our list were cited as the main reasons that we received the grant.” Hagios Press’s Paul Wilson similarly told me that the Canada Council’s Emerging Publisher program, along with provincial funding in Saskatchewan, “nurtures publishers who want to take risks with Canadian authors and titles” — risks that the mid-sized presses cannot take as readily anymore for various logistic reasons (e.g., staff, overhead, funding requirements). Talking about provincial funding in Alberta, Rose Scollard, co-founder of the micro-sized Calgary publisher Frontenac House, noted that “the province of Alberta . . . fund[s] us at the emerging level and as a recipient of these funds we are very grateful. However, they do not fund established publishers” (interview). Alberta has seen significant cutbacks in provincial funding for publishers since the 1990s that has led to a draining away of its mid-sized publishing companies. While it is impossible to discuss these funding issues in more detail within the scope of this paper and to draw definite conclusions, the interviews I conducted suggest that federal and provincial support for emerging publishers as start-up cultural businesses is more sustained than support for established publishing businesses.

Together, the interviews present a multi-layered account of the twenty-first-century challenges of belonging to a market- and reach-based space of national literature — a space that is simultaneously centralized and decentralized. A theme supported by all interviewees is that the literary community in Canada has expanded tremendously since the 1970s and even 1980s. “There are more writers per capita now

than there were ever before,” Robyn Maharaj, Manitoba Writers Guild executive director at the time of the interview, observes, and “things are way more competitive,” not only within the writing sector but also between the different cultural sectors (film, dance, opera, recording, publishing, etc.). Adding to this, technological developments since the 1960s and 1970s (a period during which the rise of small presses was itself enabled, in part, by technological developments such as cheaper printing methods) have made publishing much more broadly accessible. For instance, Alice Major and Paul Wilson told me that it was technological developments — and especially the introduction of the laser printer and the comprehensive application of the computer in the publishing process — that enabled their respective publishing ventures, Rowan Books (established in 1991, no longer operative) and Hagios Press (established in 1997, still operative). With an increase in small literary presses and chapbook presses — in literary diversity — more literary titles have been entering the literary marketplace and vying for the reader’s attention. More accessible computing and printing technologies have also given a boost to self-publishing, which has been on the rise in the last ten years and has further democratized the publishing process and increased title output. While several of the interviewees addressing this phenomenon emphasized that self-published titles frequently consist of local (e.g., family, company, town) histories and memoirs that cater to preordained niche audiences, they nonetheless acknowledged that a considerable amount of self-published poetry and fiction is entering the literary marketplace today. All of the booksellers I interviewed<sup>9</sup> stock self-published titles on consignment, and several of them pointed out that, due to improvements in digital print quality, self-published titles often look as professional as traditionally published books (i.e., books published using offset printing); some of these books, including literary titles, have become bestsellers.

At the same time, as more books are published today than ever before and compete for distribution and readers, enabled in many ways by technological developments, new technologies may also be diverting people from actually reading books. Even though there are no conclusive studies showing that Canadians today are reading less, or that the reading public for literary titles is diminishing in Canada,<sup>10</sup> books now compete with more entertainment choices than ever before, including the Internet, iPods, mobile phones, BlackBerries, DVDs, video games,

and satellite TV. Looking back to the 1990s, Greg Gerrard, owner of Calgary's bookstore Pages on Kensington at the time of our interview, remarked that "we now live in an electronic entertainment world more than we did, say, in 1995. Many households had no or little access to the Internet that year, didn't own cell phones, iPods, had fewer than 60 channels on TV, and so on. Books were a major source of entertainment along with movies, and both have lost ground overall." Gerrard further observes that books on the whole still received more media attention in Canada in the 1990s, especially with the advent of "The Oprah Book Club" in 1996 and the continuing influence of Peter Gzowski's "Morningside," which ran on CBC Radio from 1982 to 1997. Many interviewees concur with Gerrard that since the late 1990s CBC television and radio coverage of books has dropped, especially for small Canadian presses, and so has the attention given to books in print-review venues. Media concentration, and the resultant rationalization of operations, has resulted in a system in which books are often reviewed once only per newspaper chain, with the different newspapers that make up the chain sharing these reviews rather than assigning their own. Exposure and contrasting opinions are diminished in this system, and fewer books are being reviewed in print venues overall.

In English Canada, Canadian-published books produced with economies of small scale and small marketing budgets compete (and always have done so) with American and British books produced with economies of large scale that depress book prices and create a publishing environment focused on titles with broad appeal and selling power, on which large marketing budgets are expended. Imported titles, and especially those from big multinational publishers — most of which are now part of a handful of integrated multinational entertainment and information conglomerates (see Eva Hemmungs Wirtén) — make up the bulk of titles, including literary titles, stocked in most bookstores across Canada. While this situation is not new and has parallels in many other countries as well as in Quebec (see Turner-Riggs 48-55), it was exacerbated for independent publishers in English Canada with the consolidation of Chapters (and later of Indigo Books & Music) and the rise of the superstore in the mid-1990s. I will backtrack to contextualize how these developments have affected the way books are being distributed and sold in English Canada today. In "The World of Bookselling," Frédéric Brisson follows the emergence of bookstore chains as a leading

book retailing force in Canada in the second half of the twentieth century and the consolidation of three chains in particular: the Canadian-owned Classics and Coles chains and the British-owned W.H. Smith chain. The market share of the chains, Brisson records, increased from fourteen percent in 1961 to forty-three percent by 1981 (397). In 1987, the Department of Communications publication *Vital Links* expressed concern about this development and cautioned against the chains taking over the book retail market with their emphasis on bestsellers at the cost of “breadth and depth of selection,” their quick turnover of inventory, and their marginalization of Canadian titles, which remain “comparatively under-promoted” (17) in chain stores. *Vital Links* emphasized the importance of the independent bookstore to the public exposure and promotion of Canadian books on a nationwide scale.

In *Reluctant Capitalists: Bookselling and the Culture of Consumption*, American critic Laura J. Miller argues that independent booksellers in the 1980s could still distinguish themselves quite clearly from the chains by the very fact of their offering the “breadth and depth of selection” that the chains did not. Whereas the coexistence of mall outlets and independents could still work on that level of distinction and on the basis that chain outlets were mostly located in suburban malls and independents in downtown areas, in the 1990s the introduction of the chain superstore changed this landscape. “A new format of chain bookstore, one with several times the number of titles and the amount of floor space found in the typical chain outlet” (Miller 50), the superstore offers considerable “breadth and depth of selection,” and with it, discounts that independents frequently cannot match.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, it is frequently located in close vicinity to independents, providing direct competition. While the first superstore in Canada actually opened in Toronto in 1980 — Coles’s World’s Biggest Bookstore — the 1995 merger of Coles and SmithBooks<sup>12</sup> into Chapters and subsequent opening of the first two Chapters superstores marked both a significant concentration in the Canadian book retail landscape and a strategic shift in chain retailing away from the small, standardized outlet. Michael Hare, owner of the Calgary-based Owl’s Nest Books and trade director on the board of directors of the Canadian Booksellers Association at the time of our interview, notes that since the Chapters merger, the Canadian Booksellers Association has lost a significant number of independent bookstores due to closures. Hare emphasizes that “in twelve years we

have moved from thousands of buyers purchasing books to just a few hundred independents and a handful of buyers who control the Indigo/Chapters, etc. empire.” This point was reiterated in many of the interviews I conducted. Publishers repeatedly pointed out that even though Coles and W.H.Smith/SmithBooks already had centralized ordering in place, the managers of individual stores still had more discretionary decision-making power about stocking local and regional titles than they did after the Chapters merger, and some were very supportive of local and regional writers.

This situation may be about to change. Even as Indigo, like Chapters, continues to follow a centralized purchasing policy, it more recently has made “a concerted effort to carry the majority of Canadian small-press offerings,” Hare acknowledges (interview). For Freehand Books, this concerted effort has materialized in a productive way. Editors Robyn Read and Sarah Ivany noted that “Chapters-Indigo, especially in western Canada, has been incredibly supportive of our imprint. Our titles have been featured in highly visible local-interest displays, and their staff does a great job of selling our titles” (interview). Concurring with Hare, Read, and Ivany, Red Deer Press founding member Dennis Johnson pointed out to me that Indigo has introduced regional consultants across Canada, with the result that the chain’s “biggest growth market last year was in regional books” (interview conducted in 2007); the Turner-Riggs study *The Book Retail Sector in Canada* (41) and MacSkimming’s *The Perilous Trade* (391) provide similar accounts.<sup>13</sup> Still, Indigo’s evidently increased support for small-press and/or regional titles notwithstanding, the interviews I conducted make clear that the majority of literary titles coming from the three Prairie provinces, for now, continue to be sold through independent booksellers rather than through Indigo, including local Indigo and Chapters stores. Situated within the context of interviews conducted, Freehand’s experience with Indigo is an exception more than the rule, with the successful Freehand-Indigo relationship, as Read and Ivany note in interview, directly related to the press’s inaugural achievement of critical and industry acclaim, national exposure, and commercial success. Notwithstanding Freehand’s positive Chapters-Indigo experience, the interviews confirm what the Turner-Riggs study *The Book Retail Sector in Canada* describes as “a correlation between the size of the publishing firm and the degree to which it relies on the independent bookstore channel” (35). On average, mass-market retail-

ers are not accessible to, or viable for, small- and mid-sized presses. Not only do these presses often not publish the kinds of fast-selling frontlist titles that the retailers rely on, investing in the mass production of a title that might not sell through in the short span given to it in a mass-market retailing chain is financially risky for a press that operates on small margins. Even for Freehand, independent booksellers remain “crucial . . . not just from a sales perspective, but because they often function as a hub for the literary community in any given city” (Read and Ivany, interview). However, Freehand is the only press I interviewed that stated that “there is no city or region that stands out in terms of sales”; that is, Freehand does not sell most of its titles on a local or regional scale. Similar to Calgary’s Bayeux Arts, which started operations in 1994 with the North American publication of Scottish writer George Mackay Brown’s Booker Prize nominated *Beside the Ocean of Time*, Freehand provides an exception to an experience frequently reiterated in interviews: a small press has to begin with a regional or local approach as a way to build credibility and strength.

Together with independent bookstore sales and co-op<sup>14</sup> advertising, direct publisher sales and niche marketing are (or remain) significant for both emergent and established publishers in the Prairie provinces; as interviews make clear, they are a crucial co-players in the contract-based service of national sales representation and distribution many of the publishers enlist. To give an example, the national success of NeWest Press author Thomas Wharton’s *Icefields*, published in 1995, grew out of locally targeted niche marketing. NeWest started selling *Icefields*, a first novel by an Alberta author, in Jasper, the novel’s place of action, and also Banff. A person working in the movie industry in California picked it up while on vacation, liked it, spread the word, and American sales started going up. It was only then that Ontario and Chapters sales started happening and the book started getting national media attention, including (in 2008) a shortlist place on “Canada Reads” (interview with former general manager of NeWest Press). At the time of the 2008 “Canada Reads” competition, then-wired NeWest Press used its website to keep audiences up to date on all the events leading up to the competition; to interlink with the CBC website of “Canada Reads” and with



Wharton's blog; and to provide a direct online order option; that is, NeWest used its website as a marketing and direct sales channel.

### New Technological Spaces of Canadian Literature

While bricks-and-mortar independent booksellers remain a key sales channel for the publishers I interviewed, the 2007 study *The Book Retail Sector in Canada* and the publisher interviewees themselves indicate that this situation may be changing. *The Book Retail Sector in Canada* explains that Canada's traditional book retail market is flat rather than growing (a point confirmed in the majority of interviews I conducted with booksellers<sup>15</sup>). My interviews with publishers indicate that online book sales have gained in importance (while for now remaining small), and so has online marketing. The Internet promises new opportunities for both niche and large-scale exposure and distribution for literature as material and lived space reaching across and beyond the territorial expanse called Canada. All of the publishers I interviewed (see list in bibliography) have their own websites, which they use to market their books, and several of these publisher websites have a direct online order option. (The Saskatchewan Publishers Group, too, runs an online bookstore with a direct order option for all member titles.) At the time of the interviews, though, only a few had fully tapped into the Internet's potential to create a direct and interactive conversation between publishers, authors, and readers that could add to the outreach work done by means of more traditional media and marketing channels; that could address an audience that looks for most of its information online, as well as a more global or less place-based audience (see my interview with Monique Trottier). For instance, only a few of the publishers ran blogs on their websites or had interlinked their sites with other websites such as Facebook or Flickr, with author blogs, or with digital media such as podcasts and tweets. Frontenac House was the only publisher on YouTube and with a blip.tv channel, and Freehand Books was the only press that mentioned having advertised with Bookninja.com and Joyland.ca, two of Canada's top literary sites. The majority of industry players I interviewed grew up in a communications environment dominated by print, television, and radio; the shift to the Internet as an effective site of community and communication may be gradual for many since it is not only unfamiliar but also time-consuming and/or cost-intensive.

In terms of online sales, the interviews suggest that while selling books online is a good idea in principle, the present concentration in online book retailing (Amazon/AbeBooks and Indigo in English Canada), and Amazon's business approach in particular, does not provide an effective online retailing climate in Canada. Nor does it provide an effective climate for selling Canadian books in the United States. Frontenac House's Rose Scollard gives the following summary of Frontenac's Amazon experience, which many other publishers I interviewed share: "We list all our books with Amazon but kind of hope we won't sell much through them. They demand and take, you don't really have any say in the matter, a fifty-five percent discount. You also have to pay for shipping it to them, so, at the end of the day . . . you lose money. I consider it advertising" (interview). Erin Creasey, general manager of the Literary Press Group distribution arm, LitDistCo, at the point of our interview, adds that Amazon (like other big online retailers) has "'placement' that you usually pay for, just like endcaps in the stores. So the more money you have to spend on such marketing efforts, the better visibility for your title on the site (on topic pages or the homepage)" (see also Turner-Riggs 74). The Amazon.ca/.com reality presented by Scollard and Creasey forms a sharp contrast to Chris Anderson's jubilant idea, put forth in *The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business is Selling Less of More*, that on Amazon, blockbusters and other books compete on even footing in a market of multitudes. Neither Amazon.ca nor Indigo.com seem to have helped the publishers I interviewed build a network of improved title reach and circulation. There are, of course, alternative providers such as Northwest Passages, an online retailer established in 1996 and specializing in Canadian fiction, poetry, drama, and literary criticism. (At the point of this paper's final editing, Northwest Passages has announced that it is shutting down its operations.) However, only one of the publishers I interviewed was linking to the Northwest Passages website; most of the other publishers link to Amazon and/or Indigo.

In our interview conversation, Creasey also emphasized that "the physical piece of distribution needs to happen regardless of the type of sale (online, direct, bricks and mortar)." While new technologies have helped with the dissemination of book data, consolidation of orders, and shipping processes, the physical barriers of distribution remain unchanged with direct and retailer online sales of print books. As Bill

Cope and Angus Phillips put it in the introduction to *The Future of the Book in the Digital Age*, online book retailing may be “but a thin modern veneer on an old economy; an economy of large inventories, of moving products from printer to distribution warehouse to bookstore dispatch. It is a business that discounts to compete but which has created few efficiencies in the supply chain” (13). In light of the geographic challenges of distribution in Canada — and especially in the Prairie provinces where distribution costs are higher than they are in southern Ontario — I pursued the question of whether digital technologies such as print on demand and electronic publishing can create efficiencies in the supply chain, with the supply chain being a crucial component of the physical space of Canadian-national literature. The sense I got from interview responses is that, for now, digitization remains a costly investment small independent publishers (unlike big corporate and institutional publishers) have only limited means to make, and e-books play but a minor role in today’s book trade for these publishers;<sup>16</sup> however, the delivery platform is shifting.

This shift becomes obvious in some instances in Prairie publishing, of which Spotted Cow Press, an Edmonton-based micro-sized press that since 1997 has been publishing both literary and non-literary titles, provides the most pioneering example. To date, this press has offered three of its non-literary titles as free digital downloads. In our interview conversation, publisher Jerome Martin mentioned that his freely downloadable title *Capucchino U*, a text that explores the potential of digitization for educational publishing, has had hits from various parts of Canada and the world and has made money for Spotted Cow Press (in the sense that Martin has been hired to give presentations and to do consultancy work). While most other Spotted Cow Press titles, including the literary titles, are available as e-books, also they are for-sale e-books, on offer alongside the traditional print format and do not sell as well as the print books, in spite of being cheaper than the print versions. Martin notes that this may be because the e-books (at this point) are in simple PDF, replication-of-print format, rather than in hypertext or some other complementary innovative format, and/or because of the still dominant perception that “if it’s online, it’s free” (interview). In November 2007, Spotted Cow Press also launched the first book — Alberta poet Joyce Harries’s collection *Twice in a Blue Moon* — to come off the University of Alberta Bookstore’s newly acquired “Espresso

Book Machine,” a print-on-demand machine that publishes books from digital files at high speed. Of the publishers I interviewed between 2007 and 2009, Spotted Cow Press was the only one that had started experimenting with print on demand in the publication of frontlist titles (print on demand is currently used by a number of the publishers to keep almost out-of-print backlist titles in print). We may read the operations of Spotted Cow Press as a microcosm of how electronic technologies are creating new spaces of writing, publishing, and distribution in Canada — and of the book itself — and of how the space of national literature in Canada will continue changing along with the role of — and the relations between — the literary text, the publisher, the bookseller, the author, the distributor, the reader, and the cultural funder.

### Concluding Remarks

In *Globalization: A Critical Introduction*, Jan Aart Scholte accentuates that “urban centers have on the whole accumulated more global connections than rural areas. Global relations have also tended to fall unevenly across different classes and age groups” (18). I would add to Scholte’s observation that some industries and players within specific industries have accumulated more global connections than others. In the cultural industry of book publishing, multinational publishing conglomerates — whose subsidiaries in English Canada are concentrated in Toronto — have accumulated more (powerful, pervasive) global connections than independent publishers, which in English Canada are spread out over all provinces. Although globalization as a process of complex global interconnection is not “the only, or always the most significant, trend in today’s society,” it nonetheless is, as Scholte puts it, “closely interlinked with other major social forces, like shifts in structures of production, governance, community and knowledge” (18). The interviews I have discussed in this paper speak to the reconstituted spatial realities independent book industry players in Canada face as they operate within the larger structural confines of a neo-liberalized and globalized mode of capitalism — which for them concretely materialize in processes of consolidation in traditional media and bookselling channels; simultaneous concentration and fragmentation of global and national markets; diversification in publishing and entertainment; change from a print-technology-anchored society into an electronic-technology-anchored society; spatial reconstitution of literary community; and attenuation in

cultural objectives in policy and funding. Having their own dynamics in the specific spatial contexts of my study, these processes reflect major challenges shared by book industry players in many countries around the world with developed book industries (for comparisons, see Greco et al., Miller, Turner-Riggs). Moreover, they reflect larger societal and market trends of which they are an integral part.

Henighan's globalized TorLit/marginalized literary regions spatialization, while pinpointing an important geometry of literary power in contemporary English Canada, ignores other geometries of power that tie in closely with it. Henighan's account distracts from the fact that just as the global effects of neo-liberal capitalism need to be understood spatially in terms of networks rather than even surfaces (see Saskia Sassen, Manuel Castells), so do its effects on the space of Canadian literature need to be understood as differentiated (and even divisive) but nonetheless pervasive. As cultural businesses not primarily driven by the profit motive, the independent publishers and booksellers I interviewed give evidence that contemporary cultural markets are made up of diverse economic forms rather than constituting one singular neo-liberal-capitalist economy. They do so, however, in their embeddedness in specific multi-scalar networks of capitalist, neo-liberal market activity and in a market-reach- and reputation-based stratification of literary power descending from international to national, regional, provincial, and local. Being thus part of a terrain of conflicting encounters and uneven forces, the workings of literary agents and infrastructures discussed in this paper show that the turn to an understanding of national literature by market reach rather than by cultural nationalist idea(l)s — coupled with a “cultural industries” and subsequent neo-liberal turn in cultural policy and with technological developments that have vastly diversified the cultural entertainment and publishing landscapes — has resulted in a considerably commercialized and complexified space of national literature that has complicated the very idea of producing and living in a market- and reach-based space of grassroots national literature. Thus, many of the industry players I interviewed live somewhat warily and discontentedly in the reconstituted space of contemporary Canadian literature, and/or look for (digital, special interest, local, etc.) niches and networks that circumvent the material realities of this space, and can create new spaces of literary community that materialize on and across various local, regional, national, and global scales.

Obviously, only a few niche-marketed books will have the same fate of large-scale national exposure and circulation as Thomas Wharton’s *Icefields*; only a few books each season take off like Marina Endicott’s *Good to a Fault*. If *Icefields* and *Good to a Fault* belong to the space of national literature because of their countrywide market reach and exposure, where do NeWest Press and Freehand Books (and Thistle-down, Turnstone, Coteau, Hagios, Frontenac, Spotted Cow, etc.) titles belong that have only local, regional, and/or special interest reach and exposure? It may be argued that, rather than falling outside the space of national literature, they fall outside the prevalently conceived market- and reach-based space of national literature; this placement does not preclude that they may (potentially) constitute and be conceived as different spaces of national literature, with “national literature” being a multiple and shifting space that works at and across local, regional, national, and global scales — or, as Davey puts it in *Canadian Literary Power*, that works as a “polylogue” of perceived, conceived, and lived spaces that coexist, overlap, are in conflict, etc. To give an example, in conversations with the Metis publishers Gabriel Dumont Institute and Pemmican Publications, interviewees described their operations and titles as contributing to Canadian culture and literature — as operations and titles that make heard the voices of the Metis, a founding people of Canada — without equating this contribution to national-territorial market reach. Indeed, as community-based publishers, Gabriel Dumont Institute and Pemmican promote and sell most of their literary and non-literary titles locally to people in the Metis community, to schools, and to libraries. Tying into this is a comment Edmonton poet Alice Major made in interview: if we look at national literature as that literature which gets into school curricula and university courses, then national literature certainly and always will have regional or provincial inflections depending on the location of the school/university, the curriculum board and course instructor, and other political, cultural, and social influences.

This is not to deny the very real asymmetries of power that underlie the current conditions and spatializations of literary production, distribution, and promotion in Canada. Neither does it deny that wide distribution and exposure play a role in the creation of a shared sense of national literature, or that a literary title widely distributed and talked about across Canada will influence what people think of as national

literature. Still, the space of national literature is more than that. It is, as this paper illustrates, a socio-cultural and historical space and, as such, multiple, multi-scalar, and subject to contestation and change. Situated (however tenuously) within a market- and consumer-driven cultural, political, and economic landscape conceptually shaped by localism and globalism more than by the kind of nationalism that ran high in the 1970s, the space of Canadian national literature today is simultaneously centralized and decentralized (rather than eroded); it is produced and reproduced at the intersection of a variety of shifting local, regional, national, and global forces.

### AUTHOR'S NOTE

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### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> As a publishing centre, Toronto (or, rather, the Greater Toronto Area) has a high concentration of book industry players such as distributors, wholesalers, literary and marketing agents, publishers, booksellers (both independent and chain), and consumers.

<sup>2</sup> Henighan's provocative style of writing on matters of Canadian literature, both in *When Words Deny the World* and in subsequent work, has drawn a considerable amount of criticism (see Dobson, chapter 10, for an overview).

<sup>3</sup> I interviewed representatives from presses publishing trade fiction, poetry, drama, and literary non-fiction (the bibliography contains a list of publisher interviews conducted). Texts and journal issues that have discussed the beginnings and development of the small press movement in Canada include MacSkimming's *The Perilous Trade*; Davey's *Canadian Literary Power*; the special *Studies in Canadian Literature* issue "Canadian Literature and the Business of Publishing" (edited by Jennifer Andrews and John Clement Ball); the special *Canadian Literature* issue "Publish Canadian" (edited by George Woodcock); and, in the context of Alberta, the second volume of George Melnyk's *The Literary History of Alberta*.

<sup>4</sup> Standing out in this surge of regional literary publishing activity in the Prairie provinces was Edmonton’s Hurtig Publishing, which, founded in 1972, became an outspokenly nationalist publisher.

<sup>5</sup> Along with *NeWest Review* (Edmonton, 1975), literary journals such as *Grain* (Saskatoon, 1973), *Prairie Fire* (Winnipeg, 1978), *CV2* (Winnipeg, 1975), *Wascana Review* (Regina, 1966), *Whetstone* (Lethbridge, 1971), and *Dandelion* (Calgary, 1975) — both independent and university affiliated — contributed a variety of new Prairie voices to the hodgepodge of cultural-nationalist literary activity.

<sup>6</sup> While it is difficult to define the adjectival “independent” in the noun phrase “independent bookstore,” the term is usually meant to relate to size (local, small-scale), to a particular philosophy of bookselling (not exclusively profit driven), and/or to business structure (part of a local economy). This also applies to the phrase “independent publisher.”

<sup>7</sup> The ERDA included four sectors: communications/information technologies; cultural enterprises infrastructure development; cultural enterprises program development; and management, public information evaluation. Within the framework of the third sector, a publishing development program was established. A 1989 review of this program emphasized its positive impact on and inclusive support for book publishers (see Paul Audley & Associates).

<sup>8</sup> The session advanced an area of investigation hitherto largely ignored in policy studies on neo-liberalism: the provincial dimensions of the effects and articulations of neo-liberalism in Canada’s cultural policy domain. A publication of session proceedings — with papers by M. Sharon Jeannotte, Monica Gattinger and Diane Saint-Pierre, and Catherine Murray and Jan Marontate, and an introduction by Sabine Milz — can be found in 35.2 issue of the *Canadian Journal of Communication*.

<sup>9</sup> I interviewed independent general trade booksellers in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba who operate websites (the bibliography contains a list of bookseller interviews conducted).

<sup>10</sup> Recent studies of Canadian reading and book buying habits concur that reading remains popular among Canadians. A useful overview of studies is provided in the first chapter of *The Book Retail Sector in Canada* (Turner-Riggs), a market study commissioned by the Department of Canadian Heritage and published in September 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Historically, trade discounts have been around 50% for wholesalers and 40-44% for retailers (Turner-Riggs 31). High-volume retail accounts (e.g., Indigo, Costco) now commonly receive trade discounts of 44-48%. In the case of Indigo, discounts to consumers are often underwritten by the publisher in the form of increased trade discounts or co-op investment (43).

<sup>12</sup> In 1989, W.H. Smith changed to Canadian ownership, and the company name was changed to SmithBooks.

<sup>13</sup> MacSkimming refers to a *Quill & Quire* survey of Chapters-Indigo superstores done in 2006. The Turner-Riggs study refers to a *Quill & Quire* report from June 2007 that says that Indigo intends to increase the profile of its individual stores as community stores by more closely matching inventory in individual stores with the communities in which the stores are located.

<sup>14</sup> Co-op refers to cooperative advertising dollars — to the costs booksellers share with publishers for title promotions. In Canada, co-op advertising was introduced during the holiday season of 1960 (Brisson 396). The term now commonly refers to “placement fees that a retailer receives to secure a prominent in-store position for the publisher’s title(s); for example, a display table, a featured title wall, or an end-cap display” (Turner-Riggs 32).

<sup>15</sup> A most recent indicator of this trend (at least to some extent) is McNally Robinson’s filing for bankruptcy in December 2009 and the closing of its newly opened stores in Winnipeg and Toronto. McNally Robinson’s Calgary store closed in August 2008.



<sup>16</sup> While offerings of Canadian titles, and especially titles by independent, Canadian publishers, are currently sparse when it comes to e-books and e-readers, the development of readers such as Amazon's Kindle and the Sony e-reader, and the creation of download programs for a variety of mobile devices have been rapidly increasing the popularity of e-books.

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