Studies in Canadian Literature / Études en littérature canadienne

Introduction
Digital Textualities/Canadian Contexts

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Some of the essays that appear in this issue of *Studies in Canadian Literature/Études en littérature canadienne* were presented at the conference Digital Textualities/Canadian Contexts, which took place 19-23 September 2016 at the University of Alberta.[1] Bringing together scholars, students, readers, and researchers, the conference provided an occasion to take stock of current approaches to digital literary studies in Canada broadly conceived, whether that meant the analysis of digital artifacts from Canada or by Canadians, the use of digital tools in interpreting Canadian literary texts, or the application of digital humanities methods to literature and culture in the Canadian context. How, scholars were asked to consider, have the particulars of Canadian culture, infrastructure, and academic structures affected digital literary and cultural studies? Which local, regional, organizational, institutional, or national factors have inflected the relationship between culture and technology in Canada? Are our diverse identities, histories, politics, and infrastructures reflected in how we read, write, and research digitally? What have digital approaches contributed to our understanding of Canadian literature, culture, and identity categories?

As these essays affirm, responses to those questions were richly variegated across the conference presentations, discussions, and workshops. Moreover, as might be anticipated at any gathering oriented toward a better understanding of the conditions for studying and learning in any place, the responses generated new questions. What is specifically "Canadian" in digital humanities research and scholarship now? How do we conceive of digital "identity" in relation not only to national "identity" but also to settler colonial histories and legacies? What is at stake in the consideration of the national in the digital? What is to be gained? And where, in effect, to make a turn yet again on Northrop Frye's infamous question, is the digital "here"?[2] Is it in materials generated from within the geopolitical space of Canada or about that space or by bodies with some originary or intimate relation to it? Is it in tools

and systems developed in Canada to engage in the first instance with Canadian scholarship, research, and creative production? Is it in the interrelationships of any digital objects anywhere with bodies maintaining an identificatory connection with Canada? Or in the interrelationships of any bodies anywhere with digital objects maintaining an identificatory connection with Canada?

These essays undertake, as Susan Brown puts it in her essay in this issue, "to elucidate the relevance of that elusive field of inquiry called the 'digital humanities' to the landscape of literary studies in Canada." Canada has a long-standing tradition of engaging computers in literary production, starting with what might have been the first book of poetry to be produced electronically: the algorithmically generated *La machine à écrire*, whose programmer Jean Baudot credited the computer rather than himself as the author in 1964 (Eichhorn 513). The first networked literary magazine, *SwiftCurrent*, emerged from Toronto's Coach House Press in 1984. Caitlin Fisher established herself at the forefront of digital writing with the hypertext fiction *These Waves of Girls* (2001) and the augmented reality poem *Andromeda* (2008), both of which won significant e-literature awards. These highlights underscore the close relationship between academia and digital writing in Canada: Baudot coded *La machine à écrire* on a computer at the Université de Montréal; *SwiftCurrent*'s software ran on a VAX 750 at York University; Fisher cut her teeth as an author of interactive fiction and poetry writing one of the first hypertextual dissertations in the country, also at York, in 2000. This is hardly surprising since the infrastructure for creating digital texts is more complicated and costly than pen and paper, although the difficulty of defining digital literature stems from the fact that virtually all writers now use computers at some stage of composition.

Despite this close relationship between digital writing and academia, and a vigorous tradition of critical engagement with this work in literary and media studies, there has been less than one would expect of "algorithmic criticism" (Ramsay) or the use of digital tools as part of the hermeneutical process. This is particularly so given Canada's strength in the interdisciplinary field of computational humanities research, which now goes by the name of digital humanities. Canada was a pioneer in the production of digitized historical literature: the immense and multilingual *Early Canadiana Online* project changed how scholars and

students engage with historical literature in Canada, with reference not only to what they read but also how they read and analyze this material. Early resources such as Tom Vincent's CD ROM-based *Early Canadian Cultural Journals Index* anticipated the production of web-based repositories of early periodical writing. Carole Gerson's *Canada's Early Women Writers Project* recognized the importance of aggregating information about marginal groups of writers in order to better trace their intricate and important connections across social and cultural contexts. The massive bilingual *History of the Book in Canada* project developed practices of communicating knowledge across print and digital platforms. Canada made important contributions to early digital tool development for the humanities through tools such as TACT, a tradition continued through the present in the widely used Voyant Tool suite. Digital platforms such as the Canadian Writing Research Collaboratory (CWRC) enable new ways to organize, analyze, and circulate research on Canadian literary and cultural texts.

The relative lack of a digital literary studies involving analyses of large corpora has less to do with lack of tools or expertise, then, than it has to do with copyright. The high proportion of the Canadian literary record that remains locked down has been an impediment to establishing substantial sets of digitized Canadian texts for analysis and to sharing such datasets for the purposes of being able to evaluate claims, replicate results, and build upon prior work. Yet hopefully this situation will soon change, given the advances made toward establishing the right of researchers to employ large sets of digitized materials for "non-consumptive use," for there are fascinating and important lines of inquiry to pursue in Canadian literature using algorithmic methods (Christenson; HathiTrust). There has developed of late a persistent call within the digital humanities for substantial attention to diversity — in connection with race, sexuality, indigeneity, ecology, spatiality, and nationality, for instance — at the level not only of content but also of methods and tools, since they are increasingly understood to embed particular categories and epistemologies: that is, ways of understanding and interacting with the world. Difference as an abiding concern in Canadian literature and literary criticism could contribute significantly to this process. The exploration of diversity of form, identity, content, and medium within what we might consider not simply CanLit but CanDigLit itself, in the work of Jordan Abel, J.R. Carpenter, Sachiko

Murakami, and Kate Pullinger, to name but a few, can help to push digital literary studies in the direction of cultural critique.

The seven essays included in this issue do this work of pushing in the direction of cultural critique, engaging as they do with the digital "here" and doing so with compelling reference to the complicated relationship of "the digital" to bodies that are already vexed and contested sites for the definition and performance of problematic concepts such as national identity. That is, they investigate not only the intimate relations among "traditional" research practices (archival, print based, textual) and digital research in the Canadian context that constitute an urgent and ongoing question for digital humanities but also the intimate relations between "the digital" and the embodied experience of the political, social, and spatial "nation." These essays moreover demonstrate a particular interest in the reader and embodied experiences of digital reading. At one level, those experiences might be understood to engage the always already nationally constituted body, at another the situatedness of the body, again always or almost always in national or significantly extranational terms (within the borders of the nation, outside them, in exile, in transit). These investigations thus have less to do with what is happening in terms of technological development in Canada with regard to the digitization of archives, the production of digital texts, the development of tools, or the state of the digital per se (as if such an extraction is ever possible). Rather, they foreground specific questions of how to understand the complexities of nationally situated digital archives, texts, tools, and applications as they become embodied in the practices and not only the affect but also the *sensation* of reading and other forms of engagement with digital interfaces.

Jordan Bolay's "From Hay Fever to Archive Fever: A Metacognitive Reflection on the University of Calgary's Canadian Literary Archive" begins as a personal account of the experience of working in a contemporary Canadian archive between, at this time, print and digital records and thus, as Bolay puts it, at the "boundary between 'real' and cyber space." He recounts reading drafts of writing by English Canadian author Guy Vanderhaeghe in the University of Calgary Library, looking out at the Bow River while reading Vanderhaeghe writing about the South Saskatchewan River. How, Bolay asks, would the experience of reading the records of an author's development of a creative print text in which place is central and affectively salient in the archive's location

change in a digital-only archive? "If a scholar were to access digital versions of these drafts online, what kind of inscription would their space and place have on their reading?" A question pertinent to the operation of archives as nationally situated repositories, it is also one of feeling: the body in the archive responds to the visual outside the archive and brings the reader to a sense of contiguity in place. What is the body's response to the records in the digital — and seemingly non-spatial, seemingly not-placed — but still "Canadian" archive?

Bolay's consideration of the metacognitive experience of reading the Vanderhaeghe *fonds* as it emphasizes the body in place operates at one level to affirm Susan Brown's statement in "Survival: Canadian Cultural Scholarship in a Digital Age" that, "Far from taking us away from materiality, digital studies invite us to probe the relationships of media to context and content." Brown channels *Survival*, Margaret Atwood's 1972 study of Canadian literature, to draw attention to the ways in which "the challenges now facing Canadian literary culture and scholarship are intimately intertwined with modes of digital production" and are thus challenges precisely of the archive as a site of future national "history" — what Arjun Appadurai characterizes as "a social tool for the work of collective memory" (14). Brown makes an urgent case for the preservation of the digital, a work of producing cultural memories that creates the conditions of possibility for future readings even as it requires certain infrastructural commitments.

Jessica McDonald's "Reading Text and Paratext in the Digital Era: Douglas Coupland's *JPod*" turns from the archival experience of reading to questions of textual analysis and critical practice after the digital. Focusing on Coupland's 2006 novel *JPod*, McDonald suggests that this text "orchestrates readers to employ 'critical *digital* reading practices' in addition to marshalling the practices they might typically use for print novels." In her analysis, *JPod* operates as "a kind of digital text itself," including material that, "for example, recalls the features of a YouTube video page ('332 of 438 comments' and bolded text that resembles hyperlinks [5]), explicitly names itself a digital text ('if you like being small (or average), then delete this email' [43]), or mimics a pop-up prompt directing the user to perform certain actions ('All new company passwords must contain at least one character, integer and symbol' [101])." This material, however, she astutely observes, operates to further engage the reader in the physical work of reading, reminding

us that "All reading — even screen reading — involves the body" and that the consideration of that dynamic engagement is central to the study of "the digital."

Amanda Montague considers this dynamic from another perspective in "Augmented Nationalism: Mobile Apps and National Narratives at Material Sites of Memory in Canada's Capital Region." Focusing on locative media that work to provide users with an immersive experience of historical sites and monuments, Montague emphasizes questions of the body in place. She asks "how does the body *differently* experience monumental space/place when mediated through technological immersion?" and suggests that the "affective experiences of place [thus mediated] are enhanced by the formal aspects of mobile narrative that extend the definition of reading as an embodied activity to incorporate aspects of performance and play."

In her consideration of transmedial or born-digital Canadian literature in "Toward a Theory of Canadian Digital Poetics," Dani Spinosa suggests, like McDonald, that digital reading is not "distant" but profoundly embodied, and she draws attention, like Montague, to "the radical potential of digital and transmedial works to engage with readers." This potential, Spinosa shows, pertains not only to individuals but also to communities of readers in the national context: "reader engagement," she observes, "is not only a political decision but also the key element of why we must continue to consider the role of the nation in building a community not just of authors . . . but also of readers who become, through the digital technology, more interconnected than ever."

Hannah McGregor takes up questions of an interconnected and national community of readers in "Digitizing the Banal: The Politics of Recovery in Periodical Studies." McGregor focuses on the problems attendant on digitizing periodical material with regard to choice, value, and the work of reading the "banal" — the domestic and local quotidian after its immediate relevance has diminished. Like the other essays in this issue, McGregor's is attuned to questions of reading and the ways that "different readings: surface, distant, historical, material," can be productive for early-twentieth-century magazines "like *The Western Home Monthly* [that] aren't always amenable to close readings."

Jessica MacEachern returns to the embodied activity of reading, focusing, like Spinosa, on contemporary poetic works in a digital format — in this case ambient soundscapes produced by poets Lisa Robertson

and Rachel Zolf. Like Montague and McGregor, MacEachern is concerned with how history is *incorporated* into the digital and experienced by the body in the act of reading or sensory and affective engagement. "Both Robertson's and Zolf's sound recordings," she notes, "are insistently moored to the body." Indeed, "Robertson's soundscapes insist . . . as Merleau-Ponty does . . . that in the body of the individual reader is implicated the embodiedness of a multitude."

The important questions posed in these essays are not unique to the Canadian context. The materiality of the digital text is a persistent theme in digital literary studies ranging from Julia Flanders and Matthew Kirschenbaum to Lori Emerson and Jessica Pressman and in turn reflects back on print literature to suggest new approaches to bibliography and book history (Mandell; McGann). The embodiedness of digital reading has spawned a rich body of theory and criticism going back to Donna Haraway, and Anne Balsamo, Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, and Lisa Nakamura, among many others, have elucidated the complex situatedness of digital subjects, whether readers, creators, or critics. The relevance and importance of spatiality register repeatedly, whether in *Mapping the Republic of Letters* or in the complex layered mapping interface of *Hypercities*, in reminders that Cartesian mapping is only part of the story (Drucker; Nowviskie), or in the use of space to convey social, cultural, and affective connections (*Kindred*; *Linked Jazz*; *Six Degrees of Francis Bacon*).

Yet, as these essays demonstrate, we find in the particular digital texts, the specific embodied readers, and the differently situated archives, projects, and sites explored here new ways to question what Canadian literature and culture are and can become in the digital age. Just as the range of what might qualify as digital writing or e-literature — from machine-generated texts that end up in print through screen-based texts to multimedia, games, and augmented reality — makes this a very heterogeneous and contested category (Eichhorn; Hammond), so too this cluster of articles works against any sense of an easy boundary between the non-/pre-digital and the digital or of clear parameters that define the areas of Canadian culture affected by the digital turn. Canadian literature can no longer be understood to operate as an exclusively or even primarily print-based category. Largely thanks to the digital, it is now virtually impossible to study writing in Canada without attending at some level to media of communication, the oper-

ation of media in the ways that texts can be read and interpreted, the relationship of print to digital and born-digital texts, the relationship of texts to the devices on which they are read, and the function of web-based exchange in the development and circulation of scholarly ideas and in the formation of communities of readers and writers. Moreover, a focus on the digital, as these articles attest, raises questions fundamental to scholars and students not only of Canadian literature and digital humanities but also of literature at this moment as we seek to make sense of the profound impact of the digital turn on culture and those who produce and consume it. It is clear that the digital is "here" and that it both commands and repays our attention.

Notes

[1] Organized by Susan Brown and Cecily Devereux in the first instance to coordinate with the official launch of the Alberta-based Canadian Writing and Research Collaboratory (CWRC), an online environment for scholarly research developed at the Universities of Alberta and Guelph, Digital Textualities/Canadian Contexts provided an opportunity for university scholars and students and the broader community of interested readers and researchers who work online to be introduced to CWRC and its features for supporting the creation, uploading, sharing, enhancing, and curating of research materials in individual projects and team-based collaborations.

[2] In 1965, in his "Conclusion to [the First Edition of] *Literary History of Canada*," edited by Carl F. Klinck, Frye observed that "the Canadian sensibility . . . is less perplexed by the question 'Who am I?' than by some such riddle as 'Where is here?'" (346).

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