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Résumé de l'article

Cet article traite du rapport entre le folklore et la littérature dans la culture canadienne, relation qui présente maintes caractéristiques qui sont étroitement reliées aux conceptions des identités culturelles de ce pays. Alors qu'au Québec les écrivains ont glorifié leur passé précolonial (ou ont fait preuve d'un folklorisme sentimental), les écrivains de l'Ontario et les autres anglophones ont tendu à renier la culture populaire anglophone, s'inspirant plutôt des Amérindiens, des Celtes et, plus récemment, du folklore « multiculturel ». Cependant, des écrivains comme Alice Munro comptent parmi les meilleurs collecteurs des traditions et des pratiques de leur groupe, offrant de vastes descriptions tant des modes de vie qui sont aujourd'hui disparus que des pratiques contemporaines. Dans la littérature canadienne actuelle, l'opposition binaire entre la littérature et le folklore a fortement diminuée et, dans plusieurs textes, l'imitation des caractéristiques du discours oral témoigne de la reconnaissance du folklore par delà la littérature.

Folklore and Literature: Canadian Contexts

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The interplay between folklore and literature is an on-going aspect of cultural processes in literate societies. Writers' borrowing of motifs, themes, and patterns from oral tradition is a legitimate aspect of creativity, for the oral is a significant aspect of a society's conceptual gene pool, even if not typically viewed as such by the makers of "high" culture. As well, the impact of "mediated" forms of culture on the living oral tradition is widespread and significant. In the last two centuries, folklore and literature have been both opposed and interdependent. Literature has enjoyed the greater cultural prestige, yet it has often drawn on folklore as one source of that prestige; and in recent decades, Canadian literature, the focus of our attention here, has drawn on folklore and folklore-like material with increasing frequency and with heightened respect for oral traditions.

We want to make the case for a particular, even peculiar, relation between folklore and literature in the Canadian context.[1] Canadian literature has examples of the sort of Romantic take on the folk and native people that is familiar from Sir Walter Scott or James Fenimore Cooper. Central Canadian examples include Ralph Connor's novels about the Ottawa Valley and Mazo de la Roche's about southern Ontario. Yet for several reasons Canada's relation to folk culture has unique characteristics: because Canada began as colonial possessions of France and Britain, and therefore has been plagued or blessed by tensions between French-speaking and English-speaking communities; because the bulk of its development took place after the Industrial Revolution; because it has had an ambiguous relation to the "folk" or "folks" that it was not sure it had; and because of its development, in recent decades, of an official multicultural policy. Canada's literature reflects and forms the Canadian

1. One book which promises to consider the subject (Feder and Schrank 1976), in fact contains many more articles on Irish than Canadian literature.

identity — or, better the Canadian search for identity — in complex ways. Here, we will concentrate on two of the characteristic ways in which Canadian culture, through its literature, has chosen to define its "self" by interaction with an "other." One way is by seeking a pre-European or extra-European identity through contact with aboriginal culture; another is by investigating the remnants of European folk cultures that have been brought to Canada by dominant groups such as the French, the English, and the Scots, or by smaller immigrant groups whose folk cultures are expected to add colour to the Canadian cultural "mosaic."

Before returning to Canadian examples, let us consider the relation between oral and written traditions in Western culture as a whole. Literature and folklore have usually been thought of as a binary opposition — paralleled by such oppositions as written-oral, historical-timeless, conscious-unconscious, individual-group, authored-anonymous. Such ancient works as *The Epic of Gilgamesh* are commonly assumed to be written records of stories that existed for centuries in oral tradition. With Homer, the individual author was "invented" and credited with control over the organization and final effect of the work. This association of literature with the individual author (a disputed point, of course, in structuralist and especially post-structuralist theory [see, for example Foucault 1991: 446-464]) is perhaps the most frequently isolated characteristic of literary as opposed to folklore texts. Archer Taylor, for example, asks, "What are the differences between folklore and literature?" and answers, "An obvious difference is that folklore uses conventional themes and stylistic devices and makes no effort to disguise their conventional quality while the literary artist either divests his work of conventional quality by avoiding cliches of either form or matter, or....charges them with new content (Taylor 1965:39-40)." Taylor's 1948 claim would be considerably modified today, partly because of post-structuralist claims about the limitations on the individual author's control over the text and partly because Taylor's definition draws the line between literature and folklore too sharply.

It is important to recall, as well, that the distinction between "folklore" and "literature" would hardly have been comprehensible until at least the Enlightenment. Although there may have been a time when small social groups made no distinction between high and low culture, and when the literary, the philosophical, and so forth were all merged in the mythical, we cannot think of "folklore" and "literature" as ancient genres and fields of cultural production, with folklore more ancient than literature. Nor can we support a

notion of literature slowly growing out of the oral lore of the folk, however differentiated the folk have become in preliterate/pre-industrial societies. Rather, "folklore" and "literature" were born in roughly the same period, the late eighteenth century, when Enlightenment and Romantic impulses combined both to isolate and glorify folklore as a body of cultural material separate from but worthy of attention by the mainstream intellectual culture. As Werner Sollors has noted, the processes of modernization and urbanization which weakened specific forms of *local* belonging "strengthened the commitment to more abstract forms of generalizing identifications such as ethnic and national ones." Important among these "generalizing identifications" was the creation of "the folk" as bearer of a nation's soul and the deliberate collection and use of folk material by the bourgeoisie.

At the very same time, as Sollors also notes, "literature" took on a new significance: "Bourgeois power was dependent upon a shared interest among people who might never meet but who could feel connected through literature: hence newspapers, broadsides, manifestoes, popular songs, as well as plays, poems, epics, and novels have played important roles in sustaining feelings of belonging (Sollors 1990: 289)." As Richard M. Dorson has written, "In the wake of the German poet Johann Gottfried von Herder, who identified national bodies of folk poetry, scholars in one country of Europe after another searched for the soul of the people revealed in the native dialects, the folktales and folksongs carried in those dialects, the literature developing the themes of the folklore, and the history glorifying the deeds of national heroes (Dorson 1972: 15)."

Seen from this perspective, "literature" and "folklore" were contemporaneous creations. Paradoxically, folklore became a field of intellectual and eventually academic study just at the moment when the peasantry was threatened by modern technology and emergent bourgeois culture, while literature became, as it were, the folklore of the bourgeoisie, essential to the nationalistic ethos of that class. Yet literature, no matter how often it reached out to folk material (as in the novels of Walter Scott, for example), rarely became the possession of peasants and workers, while a carefully selected, and sometimes severely edited, folklore flourished as the popular evidence of and rationale for group and national identities. The effort to think through and beyond literature-folklore as a binary opposition is essential to understanding how these sometimes artificially separated forms have interacted in Canadian literary tradition.

As we have suggested, Canada as a whole could not be expected to follow the model for the literary use of folk material that was dominant in Europe. Partly because Quebec had a true peasant culture for several centuries and partly because it could use a folk "consciousness" for political purposes, French-Canada's use of folk material, both in literature and generally, has been very different from the strategies adopted in a much more ethnically diverse English-speaking Canada. Nevertheless, in practical terms, the folk culture available to Canadian writers, both English and French, has fallen into three categories: (1) the cultural material provided, or thought to be, by native groups; (2) the cultural material of European peasant groups — perceived as the real folk — who immigrated to Canada and for a time at least kept up the rural agrarian way of life (these groups have come to Canada at many stages in its history, and even post-World War II groups, such as the Calabrians, have brought, as a major piece of their cultural baggage, remnants of peasant-based traditions); and (3) the forms in which the ethnic consciousness of "national" groups, especially of oppressed or formerly oppressed groups, like the Scots or Irish, have been preserved. The latter category, which includes folk tales and above all folk songs, such as those of the Gaels of Cape Breton, has also included written narratives heavily influenced by romantic nationalisms of the nineteenth century and the literary expressions of such nationalisms. The literary use of material in each of these three categories has varied over time, with changing circumstances in Canadian society and in the state of the nation's literature.

Before proceeding to a brief discussion of examples, we should say a further word about the restraints that condition the presentation of folklore in Canadian literature. First, there is the fact that Canadian literature, in terms of its language and forms, has been British or French literature (or *a* British or French literature) in a new environment; it was set up in opposition to folklore. For the writers of this literature, the folk, in either romanticized or primitivized forms, were a prominent form of the other, and the very condition of literature, in the sense that literature defined itself against the folk culture while depending on it for many things, such as narrative material and the positioning of the protagonist as a member of the bourgeoisie or gentry. This is the case with both English and French novels set in Quebec, such as Frances Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague* (with its colourful peasants and native people) and Philippe Aubert de Gaspé's *Les Anciens Canadiens* (with its extensive and sympathetic use of "habitant" material). Canada's European populations, arriving to settle permanently in the sixteenth century first of all, and then in greater numbers

in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, brought with them narratives of all types, both oral and literary, fictional and factual. In the new social arena that developed in the Canadian colonies and eventually in the Canadian nation state, these narratives became, for all but the mainstream Anglo-Canadians, part of ongoing social and class struggles and intensely involved in aspects of group identity.

Second, as Canadian literature began, the folk, as a peasant class, was not "in place," except in Quebec, and so its place was taken by the native peoples, who have continued to occupy an extremely important position in Canadian literature down to the present. Third, English-Canadian writers mirror the typical English-Canadian view of their society as lacking folk culture of any great substance or much beyond local significance to make it worthy of interest (Carpenter 1979: chapter 1). Fourth, the importance of the literature of the immigrant within Canadian literature as a whole has brought the issue of folklore to the forefront, in the sense that it is the immigrant's culture (especially immigrants of non-British extraction) that is often characterized as folkloric.

Frances Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague* of 1769, referred to above, is usually considered the earliest "Canadian" novel. It presents the "givens" of the Canadian context in a strikingly direct way. Its passages describing both the French-Canadian *habitant* and the native people are all too typical of attitudes in many later works. In a letter to an Earl living back home, one of the soberer characters writes about Québécois customs: "The winter is passed in a mixture of festivity and inaction; dancing and feasting in their gayer hours; in their graver smoking, and drinking brandy, by the side of a warm stove" (Brooke n.d.: 167). A younger character's description of the "Indians", in a letter addressed to a female friend, shows the mixture of condescension and fascination that is typical of so much European writing about the aboriginal peoples: "The sex we have so unjustly excluded from power in Europe have a great share in the Huron government; the chief is chosen by the matrons from amongst the nearest male relations, by the female line, of him he is to succeed; and is generally an aunt's or sister's son; a custom which, if we examine strictly into the principle on which it is founded, seems a little to contradict what we are told of the extreme chastity of the married ladies (Brooke n.d.: 69)." This mixture of scorn for European peasant culture and ambiguous approval of native culture (whose recording here is surprisingly accurate about Iroquoian customs) persists in Canadian literary works even today, although many writers, such as Rudy Wiebe, continue to see the important connections and tensions between native and folk cultures.

There are, then, two particularly important areas of Canadian literature's involvement with folklore: its use of the lore of European peasant groups, and its attempt to connect itself with the lore of aboriginal groups. This is a huge subject, on which the exhaustive necessary research has not yet been done, but we can make a few general observations that would probably be borne out by such a program of research.

First the European material. In Quebec, the folk culture, which had a chance to establish itself in the period between the original French settlement in the sixteenth century and conquest by the English in 1759, has been seen as the core of Québécois identity and the foundation of a French-Canadian nation. Nevertheless, condescension has not been absent from certain writers' presentations of *habitant* culture, for instance, W. H. Drummond's "Li'l Baptiste" poems. Even the French Canadians (such as Philippe Aubert de Gaspé and Henri Beaugrand)[2] who wanted to preserve the memory of folk culture have used it in nostalgic remembrance of their past virtually as the childhood of their people, sometimes in literature intended for children. Especially during the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s, nationalist writers attacked the "habitant myth," which they saw as encouraging political quietism in Quebec.

The situation in English Canada has been quite different, even though there are examples of what might be called nostalgic folklore in English Canadian folklore. One of the pre-eminent Canadian folklorists, Edith Fowke, enumerating the appearance of folktales in Canadian literature for the *Literary History of Canada*, published in 1965, mentions only William Kirby, who uses French-Canadian folktales in *The Golden Dog* (1877), Marius Barbeau's *Mountain Cloud* (1944), which uses Indian material, the Maritimer Thomas Chandler Haliburton's use of Yankee tales in the early nineteenth century, and the poet Pauline Johnson's use of stories from her partly aboriginal background, along with several other minor examples. Fowke's own later article on Thomas R. Raddall (as well as one by Joyce-Ione Harrington Coldwell on L.M. Montgomery, in the same volume [Goldstein and Rosenberg 1980]) indicates that there are other examples of the common technique of including folkloristic elements in literary works. Nevertheless, the conclusion she draws in the *Literary History of Canada* still stands: "On the whole our poets tend to draw their mythology from classical rather than Canadian sources (Klinck 1965: 180)."

2. See Philippe Aubert de Gaspé (1974) and Henri Beaugrand's popular book on the goblins ("les lutins") of Quebec.

In English Canada, the cultural products of transplanted European peasantries (including English, Scottish, Irish and other settlers in various parts of Canada as well as the "conquered" French in Quebec and the Maritimes) and of native groups have been presented fondly but sometimes condescendingly in literary works as examples of either "local color" or of timeless, fundamental (and homespun) "wisdom." Whatever the attitude, the folk group in question is represented as having little to do with the important forces in modern history. Their role is to signify the past, as an undifferentiated period to be transcended or mourned.

Most striking about folklore in English-Canadian literature is its absence, at least as regards its use of British material. Because Ontario, in particular, was settled after the Industrial Revolution, immigrants from the British Isles, even if they came from peasant origins, had no intention of setting themselves up as peasants in North America. There were efforts to maintain Gaelic culture, especially in Nova Scotia, but the mainstream English and English-speaking culture of Canada tended to see folklore as cultural material distinctly belonging to the "other," whether that other was construed in terms of class, ethnic group, or historical distance. Only in the Maritimes, as we have suggested, is this tendency less marked. In recent decades, all of the Atlantic provinces have produced literature that is heavily dependent on the local folk culture.

It can be argued that English-Canadian writers have been most successful — both in their use of folklore as well as in their writing as a whole — when they avoid the folklore of groups other than their own (such as the native people) and write about the folkways of their own group. And one might go further to argue that Anglo-Saxon Canadian writers, in particular, are most successful when they write unconsciously, or semi-consciously, about what they would not consider folklore at all, but which nevertheless illustrate in particularly rich ways a paraphrase of William Graham Sumner's definition of "folkways:" "social conventions that are not considered to be of moral significance by members of the group (e.g. customary behaviour for use of the telephone). The folkways of groups, like the habits of individuals, originate in the frequent repetition of acts that prove successful for satisfying basic human needs (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*)." Literary expressions of such behavior are often "thick" and interesting because they criticize the folkways as they present them, and they relate the folkways both to individual characters and dilemmas and to the larger social context.

Alice Munro's collections of short stories provide excellent examples of such portraits of Anglo-Canadian folklore and folklife.[3] Writing from what she herself knows, Munro describes the essential nature of small-town Ontario in vignettes focused on typical types and scenes — the traveling salespeople, the isolation of those who are different, piano lessons with a spinster lady: that is, the everyday. To no insignificant degree, Munro's popularity and the success of her narratives lies in her ability to assist her readers to "re-member" the past of living memory by presenting them with the rhythms of common talk, descriptions of typical clothing vaguely remembered, and word pictures of characteristic streets figuratively if not actively traveled. It is because what she focuses on is not exceptional, but pervasive and indistinctly defined (there are no actual texts recording these things, after all) and unconsciously recognized that we can see it for what it is: the folkways of the predominant group in mainstream Canadian culture.

For many contemporary Canadian writers, such as Munro, the remembering, uncovering and presenting of folklore, whether in the past or the present, is a major impetus to literary expression, in large part because the public culture of the modern and the progressive so often denigrates, ignores or patronizes what it takes to be folk culture. Canadians tend to prefer that the world, and even they themselves, register a pasteurized version of Canadian feelings and attitudes. The literary works of our high culture have sought to give the raw milk of Canadian culture, and they do it by means of the difficult job of attending carefully to many different aspects of Canadian folk cultures.

By immigrant literature, we mean novels, in particular, which deal with the pain of emigration, with the problems of adaptation in Canada, and with the nature of particular ethnic communities. One of the classic texts of Canadian studies, Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush*, is a non-fictional (for the most part) story of immigration from England, but the kind of work we have in mind is typical of writers from ethnically-defined groups which see themselves as outside the mainstream of Canadian culture. Some of these works, the novels of Mordecai Richler, Rudy Wiebe and Joy Kagawa, for example, show, often in an ironic mode, how the experience of their ethnic group becomes entwined with and influences Anglo-Canadian culture, but few of them are primarily

3. Munro has published nine volumes of short stories. All of them are of exceptional ethnographic interest. Our favourite is *Who Do You Think You Are?* (1991). Later collections, such as *Open Secrets* (1994) concentrate on historical re-creations of small-town and rural Ontario.

interested in preserving the folklore of a particular ethnic group, perhaps because the experience of immigration is still felt as too painful to be treated as colourfully folkloristic.

A 1982 novel by F. G. Paci, *Black Madonna*, is characteristic. It deals with an Italian family which immigrated to Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, after World War II, and suffered greatly from the difficulties of acculturation. Paci quotes the folksongs of southern Italy, and in his account of the mother of the family (the "black madonna" of the title) he describes in some detail the folk customs and attitudes of the Italian peasantry of the early twentieth century. But he is much more interested in elucidating the ways in which various "levels" of culture — folk, the popular culture of Ontario small towns, the mass culture of television and professional sport, and the "high" culture of the university that is embraced by the daughter of the family — conflict with each other and open up spaces between the various family members, who are almost destroyed in their attempts to bridge the resultant cultural gaps.

A novel like *Black Madonna* reminds us of a very important force in the field of Canadian culture, or cultures. Since 1971, the Canadian government has promoted an official policy of "multiculturalism," very different from the unofficial multiculturalism that became popular in the United States during the 1980s. The government's policy involved not only an emphasis on French-English bilingualism (which would seem to, and indeed does, contradict an effort to encourage all ethnic cultures equally) and a rather vague commitment to "preserving and enhancing the many cultural traditions which exist within our country," but undertook to provide the funding "to assist all Canadian cultural groups that have demonstrated a desire and effort to continue to develop a capacity to grow and contribute to Canada, and a clear need for assistance, the small and weak groups no less than the strong and highly organized (Palmer 1975: 136-137)." There is no doubt that many writers have benefited from such government funding, and that they have perhaps been encouraged to write about their ethnic group, and indirectly to extend knowledge of their group's folklore, by this official support. The effects of Canada's multiculturalism policy are hotly debated, as is the efficacy of the policy itself, but there is no doubt that it affects cultural production, as well as standing as a symbol of the preservative bent of Canadian culture as a whole.

One of the most common resorts of Canadian writers who want to connect their works to either archetypal, mythic or folklore elements, all of which have been thought to increase the universality and resonance of literature, is to

what used to be called "Indian tales." In most cases, the "Indian" tale or reference is concocted by the writer and indicates no knowledge of native folkways.[4] In a poem like "The Dark Stag," Isabella Valancy Crawford describes the "conquest" of night by day in terms of a hunt: the dark stag of night destroyed by the arrows of the hunter-sun, whose "moccasins are stain'd with red." The poem makes no allusions to actual aboriginal folklore, but instead allows a generalized appeal to "the primitive" to provide the Romantic and mythic aura that Crawford seeks to create. In spite of the supposedly greater sensitivity of modern writers to aboriginal cultures, such famous mid-twentieth century works as Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* are still guilty, if that is the word, of positing in native cultures (and in the land) the values that "white" Canada lacks.

This is not to suggest, however, that Crawford's poem should be dismissed, because it can in fact tell us a great deal about how a writer creates her version of the folkways of her group or her own meaning. This poem can be better understood if one situates it in Crawford's particular cultural context — a Canadian woman writing in the 1870s and 1880s — rather than accepting the poem's overt appeal to what the mythographer Mircea Eliade calls "in illo tempore."[5]

Crawford's poem was written in a period when the comparative scholarly and academic study of world mythologies was being fully established. Although she may not have known the work of such proponents of this study as Max Muller in any detail, she clearly reflects his interest in primary natural dramas as a source of the power and meaning of myth. "The Dark Stag" might well be a poetical re-enactment of Muller's comment of 1869: "I look upon the sunrise and sunset, on the daily return of day and night, on the battle between light and darkness, on the whole solar drama in all its details that is acted every day, every month, every year, in heaven and earth, as the principal subject of early mythology (*Encyclopedia of the History of Ideas*)." As a poet in an age of science, Crawford seeks to capture and present in poems such as this one a mythic quality that religion itself, in its nineteenth century manifestations, can rarely provide. Even more important, by the re-personification of natural phenomena, such as dawn, she goes back to the metaphorical foundations of both myth

4. There is an established pattern in Anglo-Canadian folklore of creating pseudo-Indian lore, evident particularly in regard to place-name legends (Carpenter 1979b: chapter 6).

5. *In illo tempore* — "in those days" — is a phrase used frequently by the philosopher of religion Mircea Eliade. It refers to the sacred time at the beginning of time when the cosmos and important human institutions were established (Eliade 1959:4).

and poetry (night is a stag, day a hunter) and creates anew what contemporary mythologists and folklorists thought of as mankind's early and potent identification with the natural world. The romantic poet's purpose is to re-animate nature, and metaphor, which is strictly nonlogical, is his or her primary tool. It is for this very reason, indeed, that metaphor and symbolism have come to be thought the essence of poetry. The "Indian" machinery of the poem provides this "primal" context in which the identification of humanity and nature can work.

Crawford's poem is, then, an important example of work which can offer significant insight into a period, a poet's creative process, a human experience, if it is situated and viewed non-judgmentally, even though political correctness would reject the poem as imperialist misappropriation of the Amerindian voice.

A striking aspect of Canadian literature, especially in recent decades, is its bringing together of considerations of the European and the aboriginal folk. Writers have not only gone to native traditions in order to work out an identity that they can think of as uniquely Canadian, but they have seen the relationship between European and native as a moral test case for a responsible Canadian society. In such novels as Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* (1974), both European romantic folk ethnicism and native traditions are evoked as core elements of identity. In the case of the orphaned heroine, Morag, a Scottish Manitoban, her initial identity comes from romanticized retellings of her heritage group's history, but her understanding of the Metis traditions of Western Canada (through her lover and their daughter) makes her more compassionate and humane. Rudy Wiebe's *Peace Shall Destroy Many* (1962), about a Mennonite community in Saskatchewan, also links folk and native cultures. Wiebe makes clear that "the folk" are capable of great antagonism to native groups but suggests that only Mennonite sympathy for native sufferings can fulfill the Mennonites' own deepest values.

Thus, the relation between European "folk" and the aboriginals of Canada, which as these writers make clear has tended historically to be antagonistic in the extreme, has been presented in much recent fiction so as to suggest that the survival of folk and native traditions are mutually dependent. These works even suggest that without a return to some of the basic values of aboriginal culture in particular, the "modern" world and, more directly, Canadian culture, are doomed.[6] As both Laurence and Wiebe make clear, the concern for one's

6. Since the 1970s, more and more autobiographies and memoirs by people of native

own — in these cases Scottish and Mennonite — originally European roots is intimately connected to the acceptance of responsibility for the historical conflict between native and invading cultures. The "modern" offers its own forms of identity, no doubt, but Canadian identity has not drawn as forcefully as the American on a cult of the new. Rather, Canadian culture has either tried to conserve its British heritage, in particular, or has developed sophisticated theories of communication, like those of Innis and McLuhan, that while theorizing the modern, stand outside it to some degree.

As we have suggested, the relation between literature and folklore in Canadian culture is extensive, complicated and more important to an understanding of the country than would at first appear. Besides offering a clue to the vexed question of identity, this relationship illuminates other significant aspects of the Canadian cultural position. First, Canada's position as both a colonized and an imperialistic country (reflected in its attitudes to the European and native folk) has given its literature, and its culture as a whole, a characteristically conservative tinge. Anglo-Canadian politicians and intellectuals have seen the country as a colonial possession, anxious to break away from the imperial motherland, and as a glorious extension of the imperial centre. In being an extension of European culture, Canada effectively — if unconsciously — asserts its continuity with the progress of Western civilization through the ages rather than seeing itself as separated and starting anew.

Yet Canada has also been an imperial country itself, both internally in regard to its domination of many groups, and externally in regard to its commercial interests and its cooperation with American imperialism. The result is a split in the Canadian psyche between admiration for the imperial centre of which Canada is to some degree the victim and extension, and an anxious desire for an identity that will mark Canada off from France, England and the United States. Canadian writers and other cultural symbolists have used various forms of folk culture, whether European (preserved or adapted) or native Amerindian, as a means of defining themselves against the imperial centre and its forms of high culture. To understand their space, Canadian writers have turned to nature, to the soil, and to sympathetic depictions of those who were closest to the land: natives and "nature," peasants and soil. Thus, sympathy with folk culture became not only a marker of disenchantment

heritage have been published. This suggests that what it means and feels like to be native is of great interest to those outside native culture.

with industrial society (as with Louis Hémon, author of *Maria Chapdelaine*), but also a means of developing a noticeably Canadian identity.

A second point involves the particular relation between the artist and the folk in Canadian culture. In bourgeois societies, like those of Britain, France, the United States, and Canada, high culture has often had an antagonistic relationship with the dominant culture of business, industry and technology. Its paradigmatic texts have told of the individual crushed by philistine power and mediocrity. Folk culture, if not the folk themselves — who are often drawn to the attractions of the modern — is also antagonistic to the dominant culture, which it feels as oppressive, even if the expressions of its antagonism are often more bemused and amusing than the laments of the literary culture. High culture and folk culture are similar in their resistance to the hundred arms and eyes of the prevailing consumer culture, but there is an essential difference: high culture is *individualistically* antagonistic, while folk culture is *communally* antagonistic.

Canadian culture as a whole, however, has often been said to place greater emphasis on the group than the individual (see, for example Lipset 1987). One result of this emphasis is that folklore has a special appeal to Canadian writers, who see in folk culture a reflection of the communal orientation of Canadian culture as a whole. In spite of the fact that Canadians are often unconscious of having an identifiable folklore, and in spite of the fact that Canada is, for the most part, a society that was created after the industrial revolution, the dependence of Canadian literature on folklore has been particularly strong because the appeal to folk traditions of various types has been the most obvious way to claim a special Canadian identity. Herder's claim that a people's identity is based on their folk traditions still echoes, in however attenuated a fashion. Canadian history and social development have provided the conditions for an unusually close bonding between the culture of the folk, variously defined, and literary "high" culture, both of which frequently resist the homogenizing and totalizing aspects of mainstream popular culture. In spite of the size of their grants, which writers from other countries often envy, Canadian writers and artists often feel as marginalized as any folk group and reach out to "ethnic" groups for grounding and strength. The isolation of the Canadian artist is certainly a frequent theme of Canadian art, but, characteristically, when that isolation is overcome it is because the artist makes some of kind of connection with folk culture.

A third important point, not unique to Canadian culture by any means, is that the separation between literature and folklore has gradually been undermined in recent texts by Canadian writers. In the past, even when literature saw itself as deriving from folklore, or as preserving and perfecting it, the literary assumed the advantage of permanence, complexity and historical development. In the postmodern period (and even in texts that might not be so categorized on technical grounds), the opposition between folklore and literature has been deconstructed and/or overturned, so that the supposed opposites are seen to be more similar and connected than previously presumed. As Fredric Jameson says about postmodernism in general: "One fundamental feature of all the postmodernisms [is] the effacement in them of the older (essentially high-modernist) frontier between high culture and so-called mass or commercial culture (Jameson 1991:2)." Such aspects of high culture as its self-consciousness have been called into question by theorists who demonstrate its ideological elements (and therefore its *class* rather than individual constructedness) and its functionality in terms of social power. "Folklore" has been redefined to include the taken-for-granted "ways" (folkways, part of the folklife) of all groups, including those most enmeshed in the technological world, such as computer hackers. From such a perspective, "literature" not only has its own folklore, which includes such beliefs as the power of writing and the originality of the author, but the writer becomes perforce a kind of folklorist, recording the folkways of any number of groups. When recounting the lore of his/her own group, the writer *is* the folk, but distinct in the sense that his/her published creations are personal property not subject to the same communal re-creation as oral-based artifacts, which every member can access and manipulate within bounds understood by the group.

Within contemporary Canadian literature there is a noticeable trend to subvert the binary opposition between literature and folklore by giving folklore the privileged position. In such instances, the author often tries to give the written text the sound and "feel" of an oral one. Such a method has been common enough in poetry (think of the "ballads" of such romantic poets as Keats), but less so in the novel, in which folk tellings have usually been framed by novelistic narrators. The novel has of course imitated all other forms of narrative, from letters to popular romances to epics, but Canadian literature includes some outstanding examples of "literary" texts cast in the form of folk narratives. An outstanding recent example is Antonine Maillet's *Pélagie*, which tells the epic tale of the return of a representative group of expelled

Acadians to their home on the Bay of Fundy. Maillet presents her narrative as a collective story told throughout the centuries by a series of distinct but indistinguishable voices. The writers of texts such as Maillet's assume that the folk material deserves equality with or, more often, primacy over the non-oral levels of culture. In some cases, there is no author present, and the text seems to unfold as itself an example of the folk texts that it evokes or imitates; in other cases, there is a provocative and carefree mixing of genres, tones, forms, and narratives that suggest the equal value or reality of formerly differentiated levels. Tomson Highway's successful 1980 play, *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*, is an excellent example of the latter approach.

In fact, the prevalent demand in today's post-colonial society is for a writer, like Maillet, to operate as a "participant observer" within her own culture in order to find and to explore her own voice rather than appropriating that of another. To an extent, then, the writer is called upon to function as a self-reflexive ethnographer, describing a group for its members and expressing their identity, thereby serving to bound it as well as to bind it together. Folklore, in its manifold senses, is invaluable for this task; indeed, its function as boundary maintenance device is inherent in the very nature of the process and products of oral tradition, and it is this quality that the written texts often seek to acquire by their absorption of folk material. When folk material is drawn into the literary realm, it becomes accessible to other groups and can bridge the spaces between cultures, so that a local identity becomes part of a larger composite culture. From this aspect, literature, while it is just one of the forms of communication available to technologically advanced societies like our own, is nevertheless essential as a facilitator of interaction between groups that in "primitive" conditions would have remained unknown to each other.

In Canada, as in other countries, the lore of ethnic groups, particularly the aboriginal folk, who deserve to be placed in a special category, has become especially attractive in the postmodern situation of dissolving, threatened or (in some parts of the world) hyperinflated national identities. During the classic period of nationalism, the folk were acted upon by contradictory and antagonistic forces: the "modernity" that considered their lore backward and childish and the nationalism that often sought in it some mystical and mystified foundation. In our period the folk are still, clearly, threatened by the power of ravenous economic and state systems, and ethnic consciousness is often developed in an attempt to thwart the power of those systems. Perhaps the sentimentality and condescension of contemporary popular culture (the film *Dances with Wolves* springs to mind, but there are Canadian examples as well,

such as the cultural industry based on *Anne of Green Gables*) are no less than in analogous productions of the nineteenth century. But in Canadian literature as a whole one can observe a blurring of the boundaries between "folk" and literary culture, not just in an author's inclusion of traditional folk material but in the mixing of voices, discourses, and cultural fields. This new practice may not be an unmixed blessing, but it has fundamentally changed the very notion of a folklore-literature opposition. In this brief examination of folklore and literature in Canada, we have left unmentioned many key texts. Rather we have attempted to lay out a framework for a consideration of the many significant links between the two and their changing relationship over the last two centuries.

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