

COMPARATIVE LITERATURE: READING THE CANADIAN NATION(S)

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- 172** Canada is a state in change. Evidence of this change is to be found in multiple contexts, not least in the persistent rumblings of discord regarding the country's current paradigm of national identity: multiculturalism. From across a spectrum of discourses extending from the institutional-intellectual to the popular, the critiques of multiculturalism have been many and varied: in the academy, the government, the media and, one assumes, around the kitchen table. Examples abound: for instance, the "unsettling" account(s) of multiculturalism in the 2011 collection *Home and Native Land: Unsettling Multiculturalism in Canada*; the editorial title in the *Globe and Mail*, "Strike Multiculturalism from the National Vocabulary;" in Québec, where multiculturalism has never been accepted by either the *class politique* or popular society, the positioning of *une charte des valeurs québécoises* as the principal issue in the provincial elections of 2014; or, finally, the following statement by Hayden King in the context of a debate in the *Globe and Mail* on the place of Sir John A. Macdonald in Canadian history: "[Canada] doesn't really exist. Certainly the idea of the country pervades the imaginations of millions of Canadians and there are internationally recognized borders, currency, and so on. But it is increasingly difficult to accept that Canada possesses a cohesive and honest narrative of itself." Less a *refus total* than an accumulation of disparately motivated critiques, collectively they suggest that a government policy intended to foster national unity in the face of social diversity is being openly challenged by the constituencies it was meant to serve. This challenge is a matter of some relevance, despite the abiding social and political stability of Canadian society. Collective dissatisfaction with multiculturalism *as a state policy* has not affected understanding of the role and functioning of the state in Canada, nor has it significantly diminished the country's collective acceptance of a pluralist society. The latter point, paradoxically, is taken by some as proof of the accomplishment

of multiculturalism, a policy that has contributed mightily to the “normalization” of cultural pluralism. Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka have suggested that multiculturalism has successfully promoted “integration and citizenship, both through its individual-level effects on attitudes, self-understandings and identities, and through its society-level effects on institutions” (62) and is thus, for all the critiques, more successful than its detractors suppose.¹ Nonetheless, and despite the optimism from some quarters, from Warsaw to Washington, the *Nation*—frequently in its more recalcitrant *Blut und Boden* forms—is experiencing an unmistakable, at times strident, resurgence. Given the apparent historical conjunction of an *international* return of the nation and a *national* sense of malaise within Canada, consideration of the state of the national imaginary seems appropriate.

It is against this backdrop of a resurgent and yet conflicted understanding of the nation that the following essay takes the country’s perceived multicultural fatigue as a pretext for examining facets of the Canadian national imaginary. The discussion is divided into two parts. The first section turns attention away from the specific policy of multiculturalism to focus on the theory of the nation. Although prompted by critiques of multiculturalism, this study does not seek to respond to them in an evaluation of the strengths, shortcomings, or historical transformations of multiculturalism as a policy.² Rather, it addresses current unease with multiculturalism indirectly via a review of selected theoretical considerations regarding the nation, in particular theoretical understandings concerning the nature and origins of the nation. I undertake this review not with the intention of arriving at an alternative paradigm of national unity, much less of the Canadian nation, but in the presumption that dissatisfaction with multiculturalism has its roots in conflicting conceptual understandings of the nation at work in Canada, and, in a related vein, that awareness of the competing paradigms of the nation and nationalism will illuminate some of the particular challenges faced by Canada in the formation of a cohesive national imaginary. Stated briefly here, various communities within multinational Canada adhere to different understandings of the nation, and, further, these same communities are at differing stages in their negotiation of an *ethnic* or *civic* form of nationalism. Multiculturalism emerged in the context of socially and historically determined paradigms of the nation and nationalism; these same forces must figure in its re-evaluation. The second portion of this paper identifies five “communities” in Canada as fields of comparative literary inquiry. The implicit assumption here is that recognition of the preoccupations of these collectives vis-à-vis the nation will precede any attempt to arrive at what Hayden King referred to as “a cohesive and honest narrative” about the Canadian nation.

In *Nationalism and Modernism*, Anthony Smith offers a useful summary of the two main paradigms of the nation while also charting a detailed account of the conceptual genealogies of the central theorists of each paradigm (27-28, ff.). Smith’s account is of great heuristic value in making visible the conflicting figures in the carpet of the Canadian nation. In Smith’s two-part conceptualization, the two broad

categories of the nation are *modernist* and *perennialist*. The *perennialist* nation is a politicized ethnocultural community founded on a perceived history of common ancestry amongst its members. Ancestral ties, shared culture, and rootedness in a defined territorial space assure the timeless, organic quality of the nation as a locus of “authentic” culture and as the source of legitimacy as an entity with a claim to cultural identity and political recognition. The *perennialist* nation is thus rooted in the primal soil of ethnicity. It stretches back over extended periods of time, all the while retaining the linguistic and mythic markers of a continuous, recognizable identity within an identified geographical space. It is this understanding of the ethnocultural nation that has provided conceptual legitimation for many of the political excesses of “vulgar” nationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is also the understanding that satisfies the oft-noted belief that nations are of ancient providence, the perception that nations are “as old as history” (Bagehot, qtd. in Hobsbawm 3). As Smith points out, this formulation describes an ideal type and thus does not entirely

174 correspond to either historical examples of the nation or to models of the nation as proposed by individual theorists. Nonetheless, and this caveat aside, the *perennialist* understanding of the nation has robust defenders. It is a conception of the nation that found application in earlier expressions of the Canadian national imaginary; it still responds to the nationalism of social constituencies in Canada. In *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion, and Nationalism*, Adrian Hastings adheres closely to the principles of the perennialist paradigm of the nation. Hastings, whose central argument is that “England presents the prototype of both a nation and a nation-state in the fullest sense” (4), prefaces his argument with six central theses, three of which relate to the defining relatedness of ethnicity and nation:

2. An ethnicity is a group of people with a shared cultural identity and spoken language. It constitutes the major distinguishing element in all pre-national societies, but may survive as a strong subdivision with a loyalty of its own within established nations.
3. A nation is a far more self-conscious community than an ethnicity. Formed from one or more ethnicities, and normally identified by a literature of its own, it possesses or claims the right to political identity and autonomy as a people, together with the control of specific territory, comparable to that of biblical Israel and of other independent entities in a world thought of as one of nation-states.
4. A nation-state is a state which identifies itself in terms of one specific nation whose people are not seen simply as “subjects” of the sovereign but as a horizontally bonded society to whom the state in a sense belongs. There is thus an identity of character between state and people. In some way the state’s sovereignty is inherent within the people, expressive of its historic identity. (3)

Hastings’s forceful argument is presented not simply to demonstrate the historical primacy and longevity of the English nation, but also to make a general contribution to the theory of the nation. In particular, Hastings is at pains to rectify what he perceives as the inaccuracies of the contrasting *modernist* paradigm of the nation, the second model in Smith’s conceptualization. The ascendant paradigm of nation theory, at least since the writings of Gellner, Anderson, and Hobsbawm, among

others, the *modernist* model of nation building holds that the nation is a modern phenomenon dating from the end of the eighteenth century.³ The *modernist* nation was made possible by social and technological innovations of the modern age, in particular the growth in the machineries of literacy, commerce, communication, industry, and state, which necessitated a unified, literate populace of workers and subjects, and which also granted élites the means by which to construct and galvanize such a populace as a nation. As a constructed, imagined entity, the nation is preceded by nationalism, the conceptual apparatus formulated by cultural and economic élites for the achievement of their social goals: “nationalism comes before nations. Nations do not make states and nationalisms but the other way round” (Hobsbawm 10). The inhabitants of a *modernist* nation are formally equal citizens constituting a civic community located within a territorialized political community. If social solidarity in the *perennialist*, ethnocultural nation is to be found in shared ancestry and a common ethnicity, national solidarity in the *modernist* nation is a matter of social communication and, above all, civic relation, with citizenship acting as the principle that allows unity across the nation’s social, ethnic, and religious subgroups.

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The categorization of the nation into two contrasting paradigms, the *perennialist* and the *modernist*, facilitates understanding of the concept, particularly with regard to its historicity and foundational characteristics. A further, related distinction based on the same binary opposition shifts focus from theories of the nation’s emergence to the characteristics of its expression as either *ethnic* or *civic* nationalism. *Ethnic* nationalism is an ideology that organizes the collective entity around an ethnicity and its markers of distinctiveness (shared ancestry, language, religion, repertoire of culture beliefs and practices). *Civic* nationalism orients the national collective around adherence to shared civic, legal, and economic parameters which have been constructed—imagined—as a means of obtaining cohesion across disparate social collectives within a given territory.⁴ As ideologies informed by the social and historical potentialities available to their time and place, both nationalisms—*ethnic* and *civic*—are subject to historical change. Neither is immutable; societies organized around one form of nationalism may gradually evolve into the other according to the exigencies of history and culture. Indeed, it is the malleability of nationalism that provides a convenient point of return to the Canadian context, as well as the question as to whether the fissures in multiculturalism are but the external signs of a deeper shifting of the tectonic plates of the Canadian nation.

In this regard, Raymond Breton has written convincingly (and for the purposes of this paper, suggestively) of the parallel, but historically staggered, processes of evolution from ethnic to civic nationalism in English Canada and Québec. In Breton’s analysis, the (English) Canadian imaginary began in an exclusionary form of ethnic nationalism, “Anglo-conformity.”⁵ Under this dispensation, all forms of cultural and ethnic difference within Canada were to be assimilated to conformity with Anglo-Saxon values. To this end, institutions of church and school, and also government, were instrumentalized as agents of assimilation. The imposition of restrictive,

English-only language policies was but one of the most transparent attempts to align the budding Canadian nation in its entirety with a defining cultural marker of the (English) *ethnie*. For a series of political and cultural reasons—including the opposition of Francophones across Canada, the Riel resistance and rebellion, and the introduction of mass immigration in western Canada, among others—this early experiment in ethnic nationalism was abandoned, to be superseded by two subsequent paradigms of national identity (Palmer 1976), each of which institutionalized evolution towards greater acceptance of civic principles of national identity. Throughout the mid-twentieth century, civic rather than ethnic determinants increasingly became the source of inclusion within the (dominant Anglophone) Canadian collectivity. As a result, in Anglophone Canada, “the basis of membership in the collectivity could be less and less defined in ethnocultural terms. Full membership and the accompanying rights had to be defined ‘irrespective of national origin, race, religion, ethnic origin’” (Breton 91).

- 176** According to Breton, Francophone Canada has gone through a structurally similar process of passage from ethnic to increasingly civic nationalism. As in Anglophone Canada, the Francophone imaginary originated in ethnic nationalism, with ethnocultural traits serving as defining determinants of membership in the collective. And if Franco-Canadian nationalism was unable to appeal to the ideology and civilizational ideals of empire claimed by English Canada, it was nonetheless buttressed by a messianic imperative of its own: *la survivance*. Since the Quiet Revolution and the progressive territorialization of Francophone nationalism within the context of the province’s accruing prerogatives of state power, Québec has been compelled to adopt an increasingly civic form of nationalism, thereby replicating the experience of Anglophone nationalism at an historically earlier stage. The reasons for this transition are multiple (Breton 94-100) with roots in a range of political, demographic, economic, and cultural forces which necessitate that the *nation québécoise* incorporate people of all origins as politically equal citizens and not as members of an *ethnie* shared only by some. In marked difference to English Canada, however, the dominant Francophone community of Québec is being required to undergo the transition from ethnic to increasingly civic nationalism over a comparatively short span of time, in a process that seems likely to provoke social stress.⁶

Apart from the perspicacity of Breton’s analysis of the transitions of Anglophone and Francophone nationalisms from ethnic to civic, his concretization of the historical dimension of the process is a further value of his study. In effect, Breton reveals that conceptions of national identity evolve in tandem with conceptions of the nation and nationalism, which are themselves subject to historical change. In Anglophone Canada, at the level of the nation and nationalism, this historical change has found reification in three paradigms of national identity. The transition from an ideology of Anglo-conformity, through the mid-century experiments with a Canadian melting pot, and, since the early 1970s, the paradigm of multiculturalism (Palmer) are thus expressions of changing understandings of the nation and nationalism, themselves

shaped by the exigencies of evolving national and global forces. In Québec, the shift from “Franco-conformity” to more recent articulations of *interculturalisme*, as well as such specific policy options as the imposition of *une charte des valeurs québécoises*, suggest that Francophone nationalism is a similar process of adaptation to changing demographic, economic, political, and cultural forces.⁷ Viewed from the perspective of these separate but parallel experiences of nationalism, Canada’s current spate of “multiculturalism fatigue” seems evidence for a need to recalibrate the national paradigm of nationalism in accordance with the changing claims of the country’s various national and sub-national constituencies. Multiculturalism is being transformed by the same process of historical change that provoked its rise. Given the historically determined dynamic of this process, it is to be anticipated that the Canadian national imaginary will experience further adjustment, not least in terms of the inclusion of national minorities previously excluded from the country’s myths of identity.

Thus, one turns to a recent publication by Gerhard Ens and Joe Sawchuk, *From New Peoples to New Nations*, intrigued by the possibility of observing how the nationalism of one of Canada’s Indigenous peoples, the Métis, may be expected to inform and influence the shaping of the Canadian national imaginary. In their history of the Métis from the eighteenth to the twenty-first centuries, Ens and Sawchuk reject what they describe as past, *primordialist* understandings of Métis ethnicity and nationalism to adopt what is, in effect, a *modernist* view of the nation.⁸ In this understanding, the transition from Métis *ethnie* to Métis nation occurred over a span of historical time in a process of social construction managed by élites who, in Smith’s words, “design symbols, mythologies, rituals, and histories specifically to meet modern mass needs” (Smith 53; qtd. in Ens and Sawchuk 7). The account provided of the Métis “invention of tradition” is scrupulous in acknowledging the depth and reality of the traditions and shared historical experiences of the Métis as they intersected with the other national and transnational economic, political, legal-administrative, and cultural forces that collectively shaped Métis ethnogenesis. In charting the Métis’ rise out of complex and indeterminant conceptions of race (“mixed bloods,” “half-breeds”) to their emergence as an ethnicity positioned to “imagine” a community-cum-nation, Ens and Sawchuk also, in effect, suggest the ongoing, unfinished nature of Métis ethnogenesis. *From New Peoples to New Nations* concludes with a prediction of ongoing evolution which, given the trajectory suggested throughout the book, may also be read to portend a continuation of a process of transition from ethnic to civic nationalism:

It might be assumed that after the constitutional recognition of the Métis as Aboriginal people in 1982 and the various court decisions that have naturalized and defined the rights of the Métis, the reformulation of Métis identities and ethnicities would coalesce into a more stable essence. Our analysis above suggests the opposite: an ongoing Métis ethnogenesis, fueled by national and global economic and political forces. (514)

The achievement of a stable, accepted *ethnie*, while critical to the emergence of the Métis nation, has not meant the cessation of Métis evolution as a nation. Nations and

nationalism emerge in history, just as they remain subject to its exigencies.

From this reading of the nation and nationalism—and from this very superficial review of the evolving nationalisms of Anglophone, Francophone, and Métis Canada—the tribulations of multiculturalism may be conceived as the fractures of a policy incapable of accommodating the demands of various social constituencies within a single conceptual vessel or, as Hayden King expresses it, “a cohesive and honest narrative.” It is here that the discipline of Comparative Literature and its capacity to “engage communities comparatively” may play a fruitful role, not, certainly, in shaping an alternate sense of nation or nationalism, but in applying the particular insights of literature to better elucidate the preoccupations of the various social collectivities in Canada and their relation to the national whole. In short, Comparative Literature will not *write* the national text, but *read* it in its communal contexts. Such a project is proposed not with the intention of suggesting that the discipline of Comparative Literature, “literature,” or even Canadian literature is reducible to the study of the nation and nationalism. It is to suggest that the complex representational capabilities of literature render it unusually, perhaps uniquely, useful in reading the nation. At least since the Romantic era, literature, with its capacity to survey and shape understanding of the cultural order in which it is lodged (Kertzer 104), has been accorded a privileged role in forming perceptions of—perhaps even creating—the nation. Especially since the publication in 1983 of *Imagined Communities*, literary scholars have been quick to utilize portions of Anderson’s thought—namely, that nations are necessarily invented, imagined communities—to advance arguments about the ability of literature to assist in the creation of social and political cohesion across communities of humans otherwise unknown to one another. Literature, it is suggested, is uniquely positioned to provide the cultural grammar which allows for the interpretation of experience and the imaginative creation of communal meaning. Thus, literary scholars have argued the contribution of individual authors and texts in “writing the nation.” While the attribution of such qualities has the value of validating the formative power of literature, the case is easily overstated, if for no other reason that it suggests that nation-building is reducible to the efforts of writers, that the nation is the product of little more than the exercise of authorial will in aesthetic form.

Indeed, it seems that the theoretical, explanatory strengths of Comparative Literature might usefully begin in exploring the foundational issue of how, precisely, literature—as an institution and as the expression of a particular text and author—contributes to the imagining of the nation. To what extent and in what ways does one believe that, for example, Susanna Moodie or Margaret Atwood contributed to an imagining of the (Anglophone) nation? Did Moodie become an “author” of the Canadian nation as an English woman enlisting the cultural virtues and traditions of her *ethnie* in the shaping of a nascent national culture, or as a vulnerable immigrant woman whose representations of her colonial experience reveal (expose) the limitations of Englishness while roughing it in the bush? Is Moodie a canonic

national writer due to nineteenth-century reader reception of her works or as a result of Atwood's influential discursive reading—and artistic re-articulation—of Moodie a century after her death? Was Atwood's contribution to the shaping of the national consciousness as equally strong in *Survival* as in *Surfacing*? Have these two texts retained the explanatory relevance and power they once had? If not, what has changed: our understanding of Atwood's writing, or the nation it purports to shape and illuminate?⁹ Related to these questions regarding individual works and authors is a parallel set of questions concerning what changing perceptions of the national canon reveal about the nation's understanding of itself. In a gesture that mirrors the suspended, non-definitive quality of literature in representing the external world, comparative study of this sort will have to content itself with never arriving at a final analysis of what individual texts in particular—or how multiple texts in the aggregate—contribute to the creation of a national narrative. The nation is too amorphous, too complex a construct for pat, causal explanations. What seems certain, however, is that the cultural understanding that emerges from critical analysis of literary texts and cultural trends is essential to understanding, if not necessarily writing, the nation.

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The issue, then, is to theorize literature's relation to the nation in a manner which accepts literature's capacity to intervene directly in shaping the social world, but which does not insist upon it, thereby making of literature a mere vessel of ideology. In his *The Idea of Canada: And the Crisis of Community*, Leslie Armour identifies two states of mind associated with consideration of "national consciousness" or "national identity," one of which is consciously contemplated as an individual and the other unconsciously experienced in the collective:

We may be referring to the states of mind of those who think of themselves as Canadians at those times when they are thinking about what it is to be a Canadian. Or we may be thinking of those ideas which, whether anyone consciously attends to them or not, are dispositional states which large numbers of Canadians have in common and which shape, to one degree or another, our communal life. (107)

Insofar as Armour's "ideas" and "dispositional states" are phenomena suggesting the representation of abstractions, they may be substituted with "texts" and "narrative" for the purposes of application in the literary realm. For the manner in which literature depicts and creates the nation may likewise unfold in two related, but qualitatively different manners. Certain texts may be shown to consciously represent themes and issues of overt relevance to an understanding of the national collective (Hugh MacLennan's *Two Solitudes*, for example). Others, more indirectly, create narratives that do not impose themselves directly into the affairs of the nation and nationalism, but nonetheless suggest the dispositional state of the nation by providing an indication of the diverse preoccupations of the collectivity and its members. Whether directly or indirectly, both are potential literary conduits for the reflection and creation of the sociopolitical reality of the nation.

Apart from these and other theoretical issues that relate to the age-old issue of lit-

erature's representation of social reality, Comparative Literature, with its particular sensitivities to the linguistic and cultural particularities of individual cultures and their spaces, seems unusually well-placed to examine the communities which make up the Canadian nation. It is here that Comparative Literature may most directly "engage communities comparatively." The remainder of this article thus identifies, and comments upon, the five core collectives which, although different in terms of their histories and social composition, may justly claim indispensability in the re-shaping of any "coherent and honest narrative" of Canada. These communities are the national cultural majority, mainstream Anglophone Canada; the first of Canada's two national minorities, Francophone Canada with its two separate groupings in Québec and across Canada as *la francophonie canadienne*; the second of Canada's national minorities, the country's Indigenous peoples; Canada's allophones; and those Canadians whose understanding of identity are not framed in terms of ethno-cultural belonging but who nonetheless claim recognition as citizens of the nation.

180 Though all of these constituencies are united as constituent parties to the national polity, each exhibits real differences with regard to their understanding and acceptance of multiculturalism as a paradigm of national identity. These differences with regard to multiculturalism may themselves be seen to rest upon differing understandings of the nation and nationalism. It is the differences, preoccupations, and projections specific to each community regarding the nation that may be made to emerge in comparative literary analysis.

As the dominant constituency in Canada, the country's Anglophone mainstream majority is in a unique position vis-à-vis the other constituencies that make up the Canadian nation. As the ascendant cultural collective, Anglophone Canada has historically exercised majoritarian cultural and political power in the formation of past understandings of the nation. Those paradigms are now deemed inadequate, even repressive, in part because they were deemed to rest in (English) ethnic nationalism. This community has also overseen transformations to the national narrative which have relativized the primacy of its position and role in the transition to an increasingly civic nationalism, first in the launching of a vision of a bicultural, bilingual state and, more recently, in the institutionalization of multiculturalism. Whether out of a desire to protect the privileges of established cultural dominance, or out of concern for the political and social dangers of social fracturing, mainstream Anglophone Canada seems torn by a desire to maintain a greater sense of national unity and by a tentative willingness to cede relative power to the revisionist claims of Canada's minority communities. It is a position which acknowledges in principle the communitarian specificity of Canada's national minorities, as has been historically demonstrated, but which is wary of the possible danger to social cohesion posed by "excessive" recognition of ethnocultural diversity. In its literary representations—insofar as they may be perceived to relate to the nation—Anglophone literature may also be understood to be preoccupied by the effect of difference on the national whole. In his 2002 work *Speculative Fictions: Contemporary Canadian*

Novelists and the Writing of History, Herb Wyile has studied the recent preponderance of interest in the history of the nation demonstrated by Anglophone Canadian literature in texts that offer re-evaluation of the complexities of the historical past as an assumed prelude to a reconfiguration of the national present: Guy Vanderhaeghe's *The Englishman's Boy*, Alistair McLeod's *No Great Mischief*, Anne Michaels's *Fugitive Pieces*, and Jane Urquhart's *Away*. The understanding that the nation, like past ways of being—indeed, like History—is a discursive construct in need of, and amenable to, re-writing, is implicit here. These are literary representations which, as a revisionist project, validate forms of difference (ethnic, class, gender, culture) previously elided out of narratives of the nation. Wyile makes the key observation that while these texts implicitly endorse a *modernist* understanding of the nation—the nation as an imagined community—their effect is to challenge rather than affirm the dominant nationalist narrative (6-7). As counter narratives, as validations of the telling exception and *différence*, they are—at least for the present—less focussed on shaping a new narrative totality than in complicating the established one.

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Due to its complex position within and without the national narrative of Canadian unity, the literature of Canada's Francophone national minority is particularly rich as a source of study awaiting the attentions of comparatist study.¹⁰ This literature, or perhaps literatures, is the expression of two separate but at times conflictually related communities: Francophone minority writing within Canada, and the writing of the cultural majority within Québec. Both are communities defined, at least in part, by their proximity to, and difference from, Anglophone Canada and their complicated, contested place within the Canadian imaginary. Francophone literature within Canada but outside of Québec reflects a tension between the impulses of ethnic and civic nationalisms as the cultural product of an *ethnie*, but one negotiating the increasing gravitational pull of the civic nationalism of majoritarian (Anglophone) Canada. In her account of the cultural identity of *la francophonie de l'Ouest canadien*, Jane Moss notes the contrast to both Québec and Anglophone Canada of a Francophone community attempting to shape its identity in civic as well as ethnic terms:

Whereas the old *Canada français* was characterized by its fidelity to the French language, the Catholic Church, and French cultural heritage, *les communautés francophones* are more likely to be bilingual and secular. While Quebec could become officially unilingual and enforce laws to insure the primacy of French, francophones living in the rest of Canada cannot be authoritarian and exclusivist about language usage since they have to function in a majority anglophone environment. (83)

Literary productions emerging from *les espaces francophones canadiens* offer to the Canadian nation the model of a community seeking to affirm its ethnic specificity while negotiating—resisting *and* accommodating—the civic nationalism of the surrounding Anglophone society.

The nationalist project of Québec over the course of at least the past half-century has been to revindicate and consolidate an ethnic paradigm of nationalism, a project

that has at least in part been defined in terms of differentiation from Anglophone Canada. Thus, not surprisingly, Québécois literature affords little cultural energy to an imagining of a re-articulated paradigm of the Canadian nation. Paradoxically, as already anticipated by Breton, Québécois nationalism faces a set of challenges around nation-building which are similar to those of Anglophone Canada. Like Canada as a whole, the Québécois nation is faced with the difficulty of creating a national identity out of disparate internal communities, including national minorities. As in Canada, the efforts to establish an ethnocultural sense of identity based on inherited cultural traits face resistance from various sub-collectives more supportive of individualist, civic conceptions of identity and communities of affiliation. Jocelyn Maclure has offered a nuanced account of the complexities of identity and nationalism in Québec, positing, in effect, the dialectic emergence of a contemporary Québécois identity from out of competing ethnic and civic paradigms of nationalism.¹¹ This contemporary identity refuses the limitations and strictures of *ethnic* nationalism (which is resistant to heterogeneity) and *civic* nationalism (which disregards the importance of inherited cultural attachments) in favour of an identity that is creative, dynamic, and plural:¹²

L'identité québécoise contemporaine est composée d'éléments mémoriels et civiques, historiques et constitutionnels, temporels et spatiaux, imaginaires et matériels, locaux et mondiaux et toute tentative d'homogénéisation ou de purification de ladite identité —dans un sens ou dans l'autre—heurte de plein fouet la possibilité pour le Québécois de décliner son identité au pluriel. (Maclure, "Authenticités" 33)

In drawing his conclusions concerning "l'identité Québécoise contemporaine," Maclure is attentive to the formative role played by the literatures of the various cultural communities internal to Québec. Tellingly, Maclure does not envision the possibility of Québec playing a formative role in the imagining of a unified Canadian nation, particularly under the current conditions of Canadian federalism. Interestingly, however, his characterization of the demands made by Québécois society on the Québécois nation nonetheless provides an indirect indication of what a hypothetical Canadian nation would have to offer the Québécois: a national imaginary that functions in the first instance as a reservoir of support in the individual's efforts to shape an identity:

on doit aussi la [la nation québécoise] considérer comme productrice de lucidité et d'originalité (puisque les capacités de résistance du sujet n'émergent pas d'un vacuum). L'identification et l'appartenance à une communauté nationale peuvent être une condition de possibilité pour la résistance du sujet contemporain. (Maclure, "Authenticité" 31)

Given Maclure's analysis, any future Canadian nationalism that includes Québec will have to shape a national imaginary that sustains and nourishes the individual subject in a dynamic project of identity formation.

The Indigenous writing of Canada is perhaps the richest space for the engagement of comparatist literary study with regard to the (possible) emergence of a renewed

narrative of national identity. Historically all but excluded from the Canadian social imaginary, Indigenous peoples are at the forefront of critiques of the current national narrative of multiculturalism, and of demands to re-imagine a more equitable and inclusive sense of the nation, as implicit in Hayden King's comment quoted above. Efforts to re-position Indigenous peoples within the Canadian national imaginary are fraught with difficulties that extend deeper than a critique of multiculturalism to an acknowledgement of alternate understandings of the nation. The *modernist*, constructivist paradigm of the nation that serves as the foundation of Canadian multiculturalism is at odds with *perennialist* conceptions of "traditional Aboriginal nationhood." Richard Day and Tonio Sadik refer directly to the contradictions implicit in the attempt to reconcile competing visions of the nation in a single nationalism. In their assessment, the failure to address this acute difference in foundational understandings of the nation can lead only to an exacerbation of the problem of recognition and inclusion:

we claim that liberal multiculturalism still depends to a significant extent upon the deep structures of colonial discourse and, therefore, tends to exacerbate the very problem it attempts to solve. In order to support this thesis, we appeal to the emerging body of work on "traditional Aboriginal nationhood," where certain liberal assumptions—for example, regarding the centrality of individual rights, the bureaucratic nation-state, and free-market capitalism—are clearly problematized and contested. Of particular concern here is the apparent incommensurability of two competing views on the possibilities for Aboriginal "self-determination" as "nations within" or "nations alongside" the Canadian state. In an attempt to explain this clash of discourses, we offer up the thesis that Canadian multiculturalism—despite its professed commitment to "accommodating diversity"—has yet to traverse the fantasy of "reconciliation" within the liberal-capitalist nation-state. Until it does so it will continue to find itself in the self-contradictory situation of having to ignore or actively discourage dissenting voices that emanate from some of its partners in dialogue. (6-7)

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Day and Sadik do not describe in detail the features of Indigenous nationhood, or indeed indicate whether such a paradigm would apply equally to all Indigenous nations across Canada.¹³ Framed at once as "an attempt to further a holistic reevaluation of Aboriginal social, cultural, and political forms" and as a "distinct and relevant option to both self-government and sovereignty on the European model" (28-29), traditional nationhood is presented as both a project in the making and as an existent alternative to the dominant model. In the context of comparative literary analysis, both dimensions would nourish the expectation that Indigenous literature in Canada—whether in French or English—will furnish representations which contribute to a re-appropriation and re-articulation of Indigenous life and culture from a position of subjectivity, and which challenge past narratives of the Canadian nation, particularly as they relate to Indigenous experience. Narratives of retrospective examination of individual life experiences, which suggest the synecdochal identification of protagonists with the historical collective, are to be anticipated. Reassessment of past individual and collective trauma and the demand for recognition of the historical

and contemporary sources of that deep trauma will be a necessary portion of any new narrative of Canadian national self-understanding. As Day and Sadik, among others, have suggested, differences of understandings regarding the source and nature of the nation will pose obstacles. However, the experience of the Métis, as recounted by Ens and Sawchuk, provides an example of an Indigenous nation whose nationalism suggests at least the possibility of alignment with a re-imagined Canadian imaginary.

The literature of Canada's allophone ethnic communities—those whose claim to recognition and inclusion prompted the institutionalization of multiculturalism as public policy—is perhaps the subtlest in its challenge to multiculturalism and to the emergence of a renewed sense of national identity. Although not constitutive of a national minority, allophone Canadians have nonetheless influenced the historical transition of the nationalisms of Anglophone Canada and Québec. Allophone Canadians advanced the evolution of the Canadian nation by demanding recognition of the importance of the *ethnie* as an important *potential* locus of individual and communal identity, but also simultaneously advanced the *civic* trajectory of Canadian nationalism by resisting exclusive identification of the national identity with either the English or French *ethnie*. Comparative literary study of allophone writing in Canada may be expected to encounter texts that are advancing Canada's evolution in the direction of progressively *civic* nationalism. The writings of many allophone writers indicate a "dispositional state" with regard to ambient conceptions of the nation and of identity, namely, that individual individuals are dynamic and plural. They do not derive exclusively from a sense of belonging to communities of descent (an *ethnie*), but as a function of individual choice and identification with communities of affiliation (Sollers; Hollinger). As in Québec,¹⁴ Anglophone Canada includes a (predominantly younger) generation of allophone citizens whose allegiances are not per force to the cultural practices and identities of their *ethnie* as inherited from previous generations, but to cosmopolitan communities of affiliation that respond to their interests and concerns as individuals first, and as members of an ethnocultural collective second.

The final "community" amenable to comparative literary engagement in the interests of speculation about the transformations of the Canadian national imaginary is neither an ethnic group nor a nation. It is, nonetheless, a collective, a social constituency, subject to literary representation and at least potentially suggestive of features of Canada's evolving national imaginary. This community is made up of social groups that are organized, not around the kinship ties of ethnicity or nation, but according to shared social identities. Groups representing people with disabilities, religious minorities, and specific identities of gender and sexual preference, among others, share a "politics of identity" that finds expression in cultural terms; as such, many seek recognition and participation within the life of the national collective and, by extension, the national imaginary. In *Finding Our Way*, Will Kymlicka raises the issue of the relation of such social groups to multiculturalism in the title of his sixth chapter: "Can Multiculturalism Be Extended to Non-Ethnic Groups?" (90-

103). Ultimately, Kymlicka answers in the negative, even while ceding certain formal similarities between ethnocultural and social groups and affirming the right of such groups to recognition within society. As with the postethnic, postnational tendencies visible in portions of each of the above communities—and, in particular, among allophone writers—the issues at stake for the national imaginary are not so much that of the formal status of such movements within multiculturalism, but what their presence and their demands signal with regard to ambient cultural expectations concerning identity and the nation. Whatever their formal legal-administrative status, these social groups are indicative of cultural “dispositional states.” They implicitly presume a delegitimization of ethnic forms of nationalism while invoking an extension of formal civic rights to a broader assembly of social groups. Any national imaginary attempting to accommodate such groups and identities will require an understanding of the nation and nationalism that is more plural and egalitarian—modernist and civic—than what is on offer in most nation-states. Whether achieved or not, the literary texts that “imagine” such a nation and society will contribute to a recalibration of the Canadian national imaginary.

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The tribulations of multiculturalism are but one sign of the changes being experienced by Canadian society. I have suggested that an understanding of the sources of, and responses to, these tribulations is not to be found in the minutiae of the individual policy options that give shape to multiculturalism, but rather in the historically determined conceptions of the nation and nationalism that gave rise to multiculturalism itself. The notion that the fissures and cracks in the social edifice of multiculturalism is not primarily the fault of its construction, but as a result of the shifting of its foundations in the idea of the nation, is implicit. The issue is of relevance to the discipline of Comparative Literature. Multiculturalism is not simply a policy designed to ensure the equal recognition and inclusion of all citizens within the national polity; it is also a central feature of the national imaginary, an identity that, at least notionally, has the potential to rally citizens to a sentiment of solidarity and collective identity and engagement for the good of all. Multiculturalism is, in this sense, a matter of culture and politics. One of the various ways Comparative Literature may contribute to the life of the national culture is in “engaging communities comparatively” by reading literary testimony of each of the constituent collectivities of the Canadian nation.

NOTES

1. For a further overview and defence of multiculturalism, see David Ley, who summarizes the goals and achievement of multiculturalism as follows: “While providing individual rights, this legislation moves beyond assimilation by recognizing group rights nested within a larger commitment to Canada and its values. Anti-racism, employment equity, equal treatment before the law in such sectors as policing, education and immigration policy, and redress for group discrimination in the past, are all part of the multicultural agenda” (16).

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2. For an excellent overview of the inception and transformation of multiculturalism in recent history, see Winter, "Multiculturalism in the 1990s" and "Rethinking Multiculturalism." See also "The Merits of Multiculturalism" in Kymlicka. For an account of the historical emergence of multiculturalism, see Day, *Multiculturalism and the History of Canadian Diversity*. Finally, for a discussion of the transnational "backlash" against multiculturalism, see the contributions by Steven Vertovec and Susanne Wessendorf, Will Kymlicka, and David Ley in *The Multiculturalism Backlash: European Discourses, Policies and Practices*.
 3. The title of Hobsbawm's book, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, provides immediate indication of his dating of the phenomenon. Anderson, in essential confirmation of the modernity of the nation, claims that "the large cluster of new political entities that sprang up in the Western hemisphere between 1776 and 1838 [...] [were] historically the first such states to emerge on the world stage, and therefore inevitably provided the first real models of what such states should 'look like'" (46).
 4. Jaroslav Krejčí and Vítězslav Velimský note C.A. Macartney's use of the terms "personal nationality" and "political nationality" to designate a distinction similar to that of ethnic and civic nationalism (33-34).
 5. See Palmer for an account of the dominant shifts in models of national identity in Canada throughout the twentieth century, beginning with Anglo-conformity: "Throughout the entire period of this large-scale immigration, indeed until World War II, Anglo-conformity was the predominant ideology of assimilation in English-speaking Canada.... Supporters of Anglo-conformity argued that it was the obligation of new arrivals to conform to the institutions of Canadian society—which were already fixed. If the immigrant could not conform, he should be excluded" (493-94).
 6. This transition has been confirmed in more granular discussions of the individual structural forces in question. As an individual example, see Bélanger and Perrella, who study identarian issues along generational lines as expressed in the political process in Québec. The study concludes, "L'intégration à la société et à la culture québécoises des jeunes de langue maternelle autre que le français ou l'anglais ne semble pas empêcher ceux-ci d'accorder un poids très important à leur attachement au Canada et à la protection des intérêts du Québec au sein de la fédération canadienne dans leur choix constitutionnel," which would suggest that among the young allophones of Québec, a sense of civic nationalism is more pertinent than that of ethnic nationalism (40). See Caron for further perspectives on the balancing of the ethnic and civic dimensions of Francophone nationalism.
 7. For reasons of space, this article will not provide further discussion of *interculturalisme*, the preferred policy response of *l'état québécois* for managing the acknowledged realities of cultural pluralism while ensuring the primacy and survivance of Québec's francophone cultural heritage; in short, the attempt to shape a national imaginary which accommodates the demands of civic nationalism with those of ethnic nationalism. For a full discussion of *interculturalisme*, see Bouchard, *L'interculturalisme*. Bouchard's "Qu'est-ce que l'interculturalisme?" offers a convenient, contrastive comparison of *interculturalisme* with multiculturalism.
 8. Ens and Sawchuk explicitly note their theoretical indebtedness to such *modernist* theorists of the nation as Gellner, Hobsbawm, and Anderson (517, n. 8).
 9. In the present context, these somewhat jejune questions are intended for purposes of general illustration only. It goes without saying that they would necessarily be multiplied and complicated in consideration of the literatures of Canada's national minorities, and in consideration of the relations—*aesthetic and institutional*—between these literatures.
 10. The "comparatist" capacity and willingness to acknowledge and engage cultural difference is perhaps nowhere more called upon than in the study of French Canadian/Québécois literature. The theoretical difficulties and pragmatic linguistic challenges of accommodating the French/English linguistic divide in the study of the Canadian nation are apparent. The contradictions implicit in any comprehensive examination of the national imaginary that suspends consideration of one the country's founding nations are also implicit.

11. It is important to note that Maclure himself, in “Authenticités québécoises: Le Québec et la fragmentation contemporaine de l’identité,” does not accept the characterisation of Québec nationalism as *ethnic*: “A contrario de ce que laissent croire ses plus fervents critiques, cette faction importante du nationalisme québécois n’est pas fondée—dans sa majorité—sur des critères ethniques qui feraient du sang et de la ‘souche’ la base de l’identité québécoise, mais plutôt sur une éthique d’authenticité construite socialement et culturellement, et à laquelle le Québécois de toute origine doit adhérer afin d’éviter la facticité” (13). In rejecting the designation of *ethnic*, Maclure seems to be doing so in terms of a *modernist*, constructivist understanding of the nation.
12. Maclure is not the only commentator to resist identifying contemporary Québécois nationalism in terms of a rigid ethnic/civic binary. In “Penser une nation ou comment vivre ensemble,” Michel Venne introduces a section of his essay with a subheading that reads, “Faux débat: Nation civique, nation ethnique,” wherein he identifies “une fausse dichotomie opposant nationalismes ethnique et civique” (22). In the same collection of articles, Charles Taylor goes further, suggesting that whatever its value in the past, the distinction has little application in modern democratic societies: “C’est la base de la fameuse distinction que l’on invoque inlassablement dans nos discussions actuelles, entre les régimes ‘ethnique’ et ‘civique.’ Mais elle ne cadre pas bien avec notre situation, car en fait la majorité des sociétés démocratiques de nos jours sont des créations hybrides” (38).
13. In “(Never) Coming Out To Be Met? Liberal Multiculturalism and Its Radical Others,” Day emphasises the importance of acknowledging the possibility of difference across Indigenous people: “where liberal multiculturalists often talk about ‘Aboriginal people,’ I am using the term ‘Indigenous peoples.’ The plural, or its lack, here is very important since to view all of those people who have been living on Turtle Island since the beginning of time as one ‘people’ is to ignore vast differences among the many discrete, self-ascribed, and other-accepted nations that are being referenced” (136). Although not a description of the Indigenous nation(s), in the same article, Day suggests that “Indigenism is [...] inherently non-capitalist, non-statist, and against the attempted domination of nature” (137).
14. For parallels to the situation in Anglophone Canada, see Jocelyn Létourneau’s discussion of the difficulties of developing a modern sense of national identity in Québec, in part because of the pressures of modernity and internationalization that preclude facile reliance on (ethnic) models from the past.

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