E.D. Blodgett, Poet and Scholar:

An Introduction

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The dedication of this special issue to the memory and works of E.D. Blodgett is most befitting following his demise in 2018. A thorough and chronological survey of the multiple collections of Blodgett's poetry, his translations, and his vast scholarly contributions to the fields of literary studies, in general, and Canadian literature and comparative literature, in particular, warrants another dedicated volume. The current issue is a response to the call to bring together scholarship that is either entirely based on Blodgett's creative and scholarly works, or else on works that reference his contributions to Canadian and world literatures.

 Blodgett's scholarship spans more than four decades.[1] His publications, comprising more than 65 reviews, journal articles, book chapters, monographs, and translations, with only a few co-authored/edited/translated, reveal a wide range of interest in literary topics. Globally, from Dante's *Purgatorio*, Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*, Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, *The Love Songs of the Carmina Burana*, the mystical poetry of Rumi, the confessional poetry of Sylvia Plath, and the poetry of Polish Nobel laureate Czesław Miłosz, to list but a few, all the way to the poetry and fiction of Canadians D.G. Jones, Dennis Lee, Robert Kroetsch, Alice Munro, Frederick

Philip Grove, Antoine Gérin-Lajoie, Marie-Claire Blais, and Leonard Cohen, again to list just a few, Blodgett's critical work and translations reflect the working of a shrewd, curious, and passionate scholar of literary studies indiscriminate of geography and chronology.

Blodgett, of course, read in multiple languages, including Latin and Greek. His vast knowledge of other languages and his solid command of issues pertaining to the global literary scene not only enhanced his scholarship, but also made his critical responses to texts more authentic, regardless of the motifs they were tackling or the concepts they were problematizing. Without a doubt, what enriched Blodgett's analytical encounters with literary texts, from Dante's *Purgatorio* to Emily Dickinson's poetry and Alice Munro's fiction, was his training as a comparatist, which enabled him to see literatures of different cultures and periods drawing upon and in dialogue with one another about life and the human nature as reflected in art.

Taking a look at one of his earliest pieces of scholarship, "Dante's *Purgatorio* as Elegy," we encounter his deep engagement with the text for its elegiac characteristics—most notably, Vergil's departure (163). As he points out, purgatory is a place of transience (161), and while it responds "to the process of loss," it also presents us with various forms of absence "so that we learn to distinguish their values" (164). He then proceeds to demonstrate the elegiac character of several encounters that the pilgrim makes. Dante thus fools the reader into "enjoy[ing] the wrong thing," just like the pilgrim who mourns the departure of Vergil "rather than the loss of Eden," and the reader's experience might thus mimic that of the pilgrim as he approaches "the poet's wisdom" (172). Blodgett concludes his reading by offering ways in which "the didactic element of the *Purgatorio* not only recalls the early Greek elegy, but also […] the later elegy of lament" and thereby "unifies ethics and poetry" (175-76).

Similarly, in his critical examination of Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*, Blodgett argues that the central importance of the work lies in its representation of how "a great artist […] displays both his art and his awareness of himself as an artist" (322). The problem with fully grasping the meaning of the poem is that the form is a mere façade; the precepts put forth are often only weakly connected to the episodes that follow, and shifts in perspective regularly disrupt any assumptions about their formal purpose (323). What Blodgett's reading of the Minos and Ariadne episode reveals, however, is that the shifts in tone of the narrator and in perspective allow readers to form their own opinions, possibly even in direct contrast to those of the narrator (324). These and further readings, such as of Icarus and the Trojan material, bring Blodgett back to the point that what stands out about this particular poem in Ovid's corpus is that it examines style itself (331), and reveals that the way of an artist is "to persuade us repeatedly to believe in illusions" (322).

Whether it is the "I" in Sylvia Plath's poetry or the long dash in Emily Dickinson's work, Blodgett engages with the text in the most comprehensive manner. In his short meditation, "Sylvia Plath: Another View," he specifically grapples with the cult that was generated following *Ariel*. What interests him particularly are the reviews *Ariel*

received and the lack of substance in these reviews when it comes to talking about the actual poems (98). He suggests that some of this issue can be explained by Plath's style, as she "has abandoned the esthetics of humanism and become modern" (99). However, Blodgett disagrees with the masses: her poetry ultimately takes no risks to create a new esthetics. Using the "I" in her poems, he explains that her poems remain caught between two things: they are "without illusions" and "they also refuse the illusion necessary for a kind of release" (103), and so the "I" often functions as a way of "appealing to the reader to free her (the narrator) from the horror of imagery" (105). It is because of these observations that Blodgett cannot side with Plath's admirers for using art as a "pretext for things beyond […] art" is not the same as art (106).

Years later, Blodgett turns his attention to "words" in "Dickinson's Dash: An *Apologia* for Poetry." He begins with a meditation on words in the first part of his article. Words are what poets use to make things (21), but they are also burdened with "secret ideologies" (22), and they become signs that temporarily create metaphors (23). Blodgett demonstrates, with the help of Dickinson's dash, that words enable the reader to be "drawn to words precisely because of their failure to name accurately" (24). In the second part, he turns to the creation of things and the view that poetry "is the articulation of the making of things" (25). What he points out in this section is "that we can never hit upon the true name for anything" and, because of this, things possess "a radical instability" (26). Naming, therefore, provides "only the illusion of control" (31). Yet, "the act of poetry is not to name, but to articulate" and it is in poetry's form and Dickinson's dash that it "reaches the silence that it wishes to discover" (33). It is, Blodgett concludes, the making of poetry which "reminds us continually of what we are not, as well as of the significance of illusions. That we are no more fixed than word or thing" (34).

Blodgett's reviews and responses to Canadian texts are not any less engaged. In them, we see the working of a passionate mind, aware and on top of the critical theories of the time. An example is his review of Margot Nothey's monograph on the gothic and grotesque in Canadian literature in 1978. He begins with addressing the challenges of comparative literature in Canada, and uses this point of departure to highlight the achievements of the book, namely that "Canadian" only plays a "modest role" (97) and that it refuses to isolate a central Canadian theme. Though Blodgett emphasizes that Nothey's readings of *Wacousta* and *Kamouraska* are particularly apt, he notes that the book overall suffers from a certain brevity, particularly with regard to her treatment of the grotesque.

In "Cold Pastorals: A Prolegomenon," which will later form Chapter Six of *Configurations: Essays in the Canadian Literatures*, Blodgett examines the pastoral as "one of the dominant patterns of the Canadian novel" (154). His investigation focuses on the mill in Frederick Philip Grove's *The Master of the Mill*, which occupies the traditional location of the pastoral object: somewhere between civilization and nature (156). He derives the examples from the motifs in Gabrielle Roy's work, Charles G.D. Roberts's *The Heart of the Wood*, Gérin-Lajoie's *Jean Rivard*, Marie-Claire Blais's *Une*

Saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel, and Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*, and demonstrates that the pastoral uses "landscape emblematically as a *memento mori*" (180). "It is," Blodgett concludes, "the conscious fictionality of the pastoral […] that urges the reader to consider some of the unconscious truths of the human situation" (181).

Beyond his contributions to such a wide array of literary fields, Blodgett's most significant legacy can be found in comparative literary studies. For Blodgett, Canadian literature and comparative literature are inseparable because "Canadian Literature Is Comparative Literature," as he titled one of his articles from 1988. Throughout his prolific career, Blodgett returned to questions of Canada, its literatures—and languages—and their relationship to the rest of the world. Making use of literary history, ethnic writings, and translation, he opens up a dialogue between Canadian and comparative literatures. In his efforts, Canadian literature becomes the place of multiple voices, far beyond a single Canadian or even a bilingual literature. His work on translation both in his own creative endeavours and his scholarly engagements, in particular, is committed to highlighting its value as a tool not just within Canadian literature but comparative literature at large.

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As he notes in his 1983 article "How Do You Say Gabrielle Roy?" one of the central problems of translation is the unwavering presence of the other in the text (17). Yet, this problem presents an opportunity for Blodgett, who proposes to think of the relationship between an original and its translation as that of a cooperation "in the search of possibility," where "the difference is not meant to be 'overcome' but shared" ("A Note on Self-Translation" 130).[2] Such a cooperation is invaluable for Canadian literature, specifically, as Blodgett points out in his 1984-85 article "After Pierre Berton What? In Search of a Canadian Literature."

In this article, but in many later ones as well, Blodgett stresses that it is not possible to speak of the Canadian literatures (plural) as a unified entity. Canada, though officially unified, possesses at least two literatures and any base for comparison is made highly unstable (*Configurations* 7) due to the political power imbalance that prohibits Québec from feeling co-equal (9). However, works on Canadian literature often insist on a unified tradition which, "embedded as it is in the ideology that runs from Arnold to Eliot, removes literature from history so that it may be perceived monumentally rather than as a process" ("Keith (W.J.)" 627). It is the process, therefore, to which Blodgett devotes many of his publications. In many ways, Blodgett's 2003 work *Five-Part Invention: A Literary History of Canada* is a culmination of his efforts to intervene in the highly unified perspectives offered by some literary histories of Canada, and to demonstrate instead that Canada's literary history is intimately bound up with its founding history (18).

Blodgett demonstrated this link in his work with ethnographic documents, such as the Jesuit text *Relations* and its intertextual connections—such as the Bible, but also Cicero, Virgil, and others ("Reports from la Nouvelle-France" 38)—to unpack the role of religion in Canada's founding history. He furthermore establishes that Canada's origin story is one of translation, as this is how Cartier gave the nation its

name, and it is thus translation that Blodgett uses to examine the Indigenous subject in the making of Canada in his 1994 article "Canada If Necessary…" (149). He thereby illustrates that the act of translating can point to subjects that are produced as well as to voices that are silenced, as is the case with "the voice of those North American natives" that Cartier silenced in his account (151). The mode of translation and its relationship between the origin and the target language furthermore enables Blodgett to demonstrate that all literature written by ethnic minorities not only presents "itself as other" but also interferes with the canon ("Ethnic Writing in Canadian Literature as Paratext" 15). Throughout his career, Blodgett, therefore, repeatedly turns to ethnic writings to make inquiries into the definitions of Canada and its literatures to emphasize that literary history is always also a means of "constructi[ng] the nation" (33).

Indeed, Blodgett changed the landscape of Canadian and comparative literary studies. Though he was sometimes perceived as a complex or difficult to read author, his *Configurations: Essays in the Canadian Literatures*, published in 1982, illustrates his lasting impact on the field, having been hailed both "a classic" and responsible for "usher[ing] in explorations in comparative Canadian literary criticism in the twenty-first century" (Vautier 136). Blodgett's later *Five-Part Invention: A Literary History of Canada* is no less groundbreaking, as it responds to a call from Clément Moisan to study not just literary works but literary institutions as well (Vautier 141-42)—and Blodgett did not only advance the study of literary institutions, he also played a prominent role in his local Albertan ones. Several of his publishers were local Albertan businesses, such as Longspoon Press (Melnyk 174), the periodical *White Pelican* (179), and the literary magazine *Dandelion* (180), and he was instrumental in forming the first board of the Writers Guild of Alberta in 1980 (187).

Blodgett's criticism "embod[ies] a critical ethic that is textually engaged, culturally aware, and linguistically pluralist" (White 116). *Configurations* and *Five-Part Invention*, in particular, demonstrate these traits through Blodgett's commitment to distancing himself from a nationalistic and positivistic approach to Canadian literature (Kamboureli and Zacharias 21). Instead, Blodgett's vision for the field of comparative literature includes "ethnic, native, and Inuit components"—perspectives that, as critics have noted, published comparative studies "rarely involve" (Durnin 2). It is because of his refusal of a simplified, homogeneous Canada that Blodgett's model for comparative literature stands out as a continuing translation of perspectives that "thus registers alterity beyond dissent" (Siemerling 27). His analysis of key Canadian themes, such as the prairie, is therefore able to reveal that it "is more than a geographic location" (La Bossière 379), and that "the Canadian north is [likewise] not simply a geographical region" but "'a field of semiotic functions'" (Dickinson 117). Blodgett thus demonstrates in his scholarship that Canadian literatures eclipse the binary model of cultures and languages often associated with the field (Beaudoin 487).

Paying close attention to Blodgett's vast body of creative work—23 single-authored

poetry collections, one anthology, and poems published in various literary journals and reviews—we can easily see how the major themes and forms he favoured in poetry relate to his vision of literature itself. For him, literature is a polyvocal experience that explores gaps and silences within language, creating intimate conversations between the self and many forms of alterity, where meanings are never fixed but rather are a movement toward the elusive reality. In his *Canadian Encyclopedia* entry, Colin Boyd has summarized this aspect of Blodgett's literary work by calling his style "dense, allusive, [and] intertextual" and adding that he "attempts to create in his poetry something of the spatial character of music" (Boyd). Throughout the entirety of his poetic oeuvre, elegiac tonalities are omnipresent, and are seen as prominent literary tropes that the poet questions, as the poems in *Sounding* (1977), *Arché/Elegies* (1983), *Musical Offering* (1986), and *Elegy* (2005) demonstrate. Exploring the *topos* of music at many levels, the poet, indeed, uses melancholic and lyrical inflexions to express mourning themes, but he also suggests that poetry has to transcend the

10   now, as in *Practices of Eternity*, to name yet another title of his works, published in 2005. Nevertheless, Blodgett's poetics finds its rigour in the dialogue between contradictions, and in exploring the various spaces in between—the silences and asperities of languages and subjectivities, as shown for instance in *Apostrophes II: Through You I* (1997) and *Apostrophes V: Never Born Except Within the Other* (2003). Displaying a robust meta-discourse imbued with philosophical nuances, his poetry also investigates the semantic displacements within the analogical and comparative processes (*As If*, 2014), and between discourses or languages when specifically put into conversation.

Using the same approach, Blodgett also co-authored three bilingual poetry collections, two in collaboration with Jacques Brault and one with Réjean Beaudoin. Years later, he published three collections of poems he himself wrote in English and French: *Le poème invisible/The Invisible Poem* (2008), which is a collection of poems written in French and then translated into English (reversing the traditional translation process); *Phrases* (2012), which houses poems written in French and then translated into English; and *Horizons* (2016), in which the French and English poems are not translations of each other but in conversation with one another.

Landscape and natural phenomena, alongside and in conversation with lifeless objects and human beings feature prominently in Blodgett's work, and are captured in his poems as early as the publication of his first poetry collection, *Take away the Names*, in 1975. As Manijeh Mannani purports, "images of birds, clouds, and the wind, among other natural phenomena, are abundant in [Blodgett's] poetry and point to the transient nature of life and ever-changing cycle of nature" (536). Moreover, the "frequent appearance of the word *passage* in his work by and in itself illuminates this line of thinking […] and the 'passage' of life symbolized in the transition of apples and the apple tree from one state to the other" that appear in so many of his poems (536).

Creating unusual constellations in which words seem to refuse to be pinned down

to a single referent, several poems muse upon the passing of time by referring to historical and mythical figures—all elements that we will find, in turn, in his subsequent creative works. In reviewing *Take away the Names*, Joseph Pivato asserts that Blodgett "has reached a profound sense of history, a sense of our place in time and space—most unusual in English Canadian letters" (108), and he adds that "[t]he verse shows us a mind with a breadth of knowledge uncommon in our world of specialists" (109). In *Arché/Elegies*, which won the Writers Guild of Alberta poetry award, we observe the same erudite inclination toward historical intermingling, where the questions of ontology and origins (*Arché*) interweave with an elegiac vision (*Elegy*) of Canada, a space of wintery "white nostalgias" ("Invisible Country" 44), "where the past is ruined shaped" ("Sculptor" 19). "Who would place a country here?" ("Arché! Arché!" 8), the poet asks, traveling through Canadian provinces and visiting historical figures, frequently addressing them in the form of apostrophe. In the poem "Fall of Patriots," we encounter Papineau and Hubert Aquin through "topographies / of countries slipping into wakes" (22). From Mackenzie King, Louis Riel, and various Métis and Indigenous figures, to Québécois poets, Saint-Denys Garneau and Anne Hébert, Blodgett, therefore, reshaped Canadian history with lyrical tones and critical distance, and sought to render the present as an open symbolic territory—an *ossuary-territory* as portrayed in "O Canada," "Regina, Sask." and "Prairie Museum"—including its silences, cavities, stones, and bones, all motifs which will recur in his later poetry as well. Certainly, this conceptualization needs to be taken into account alongside the vast intertextuality of global literary and historical references that Blodgett always convenes in his creative writings.

In *Musical Offering*, which also won the Writers Guild of Alberta poetry award, Blodgett more overtly focuses on language, its dangers and its interactions, or even better, its entanglements, with the world. In each poem, dual images of life and death, language and silence, and the positive forces and the dangers of words intermingle. In the poem "Song of Silences," the speaker offers a humble and modest response to Adorno's challenging assertion "after Auschwitz, to write a poem is barbaric," which serves as the poem's epigraph (54). "How to speak," the speaker asks, in a world of bones and "dust / where all solitude has gone" (55)—by questioning our common defeats, creating new conversations, and welcoming solidary voices, Blodgett seems to suggest. Again, the poet draws upon various cultures, both mythical and historical figures, and events to put in conversation the sorrows of the lyrical *I* and the many fragilities and losses of humanity. These figures and events include, but are not limited to, Marx, Descartes, Mussolini, Goya, Nietzsche, the Second World War, Glenn Gould, Debussy, Mozart, Neruda, and Orpheus. The depiction of the enunciator and the poem itself appears quite contemporary, if we bear in mind *lyrical subjectivity*, defined by Rabaté et al. in 1996 and by Watteyne et al. in 2006 as interlacing shifting positions of enunciation, and figurative points of view where the subjectivity is porous to the world and to various evolving experiences and intersubjectivities. Or, as Blodgett describes it, this mosaic is interweaving the many "provenance uncertain,

momentary meanings" of the poetic enunciation (73). Moreover, the art of the Fugue is highlighted in this collection as it informs the poetics of digression, deflections and movements, within a musical arrangement of silences and words, prose and verse—where contradictions are once again in constant dialogue.

In this connection, one cannot help but notice the collections in which the poet and a space are in dialogue. One example is *Poems for a Small Park*, published in 2008 in AU Press's *Mingling Voices* series, and written for the Louise McKinney Riverfront Park in Edmonton. The poems are mostly in English, though some have been translated into a variety of languages to "speak to the unique multicultural ambience cultivated in Edmonton" (1). *Praha* is another example. Published in 2011 in the same *Mingling Voices* series, this collection is an homage to the city of Prague, in which English poems are accompanied by their counterparts rendered into Czech by Marzia Paton. This volume is yet another one of Blodgett's pluricultural collaborations that speaks to the dialogue between languages and cultures by putting the originals in conversation with their translations.

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If Blodgett's poems explore the many interstices within language and meanings, they also relate to his conception of poetry and translation as a constant *motion toward* the Other. In this regard, the series of *Apostrophes* he developed from 1996 to 2010 in eight volumes illustrates the importance of that dialogical movement orienting the lyrical *I*'s many uses of interpellation. Through elegiac tones, the speaker expresses the very movement of desire *to approach* a loved one, a reality, a concept, or an experience, but without ever reaching unity, osmosis, or synthesis—which perpetuates the desire and the enunciative motion. Notably, the first of the *Apostrophes* series, *Woman at a Piano* (1996), won the Governor-General's award and the Canadian Authors Association poetry prize. The form of the poems in this collection, almost like small stories, structured in distinct stanzas of seven or eight lines, is noticeably different from the form in the poet's previous collections. The poems are a sensual meditation and a sensory experience when the woman's "feet [are] barely caressing the water" ("Gift" 11), hands are forever reaching in "Late Fall" (13), and colours "—what colours!—[are] dripping from the rain, the wet of blue against [her] face" (14). The rose, the moon, and the colour blue all make repeated appearances in this almost tangible exploration of sensuality, desire, and love.

For Blodgett, poetry is a form of translation. Moreover, Blodgett's interpretation of Canadian literature as plural is crucial, and appears to be more pertinent than ever before to understanding the Canadian literary landscapes as a dialogue of forces and precarities; in this regard, his promotion of Québécois texts paved the way for important transnational conversations that would follow.[3] Commenting on Blodgett's *Speaking Flowers* (2000), his translation of Québécois poet and scholar Jacques Brault's poetry collection *Ce que disent les fleurs*, Richard Stevenson examines *nontraduction*, a concept Blodgett borrowed from Jacques Brault, as a process that is "all about reaching beyond the quotidian; [widening] the area of reference and [making] the new poem work on its own terms in its own language" (n.pag.). He

describes Blodgett's current *nontraduction* as "more metaphoric and suggestive" and favoring the "lexical and syntactic ambiguities to occur, while maximizing the suggestive capacity of the imagery" (n.pag.).

What Stevenson stresses can also be applied to the practice Blodgett had previously put into effect in his collaborative poetry collection *Transfiguration* (1998), co-written and co-translated with Brault—a collection in which the two poets use the *renga* dance metaphor, building on continuing conversations and evolving meanings.[4] In this context, "each dancer, while remaining himself, is drawn into the figure that possesses both dancers" in a space Blodgett describes as "unknown to ourselves as me and you, but something other and more complete" (Prefatory Notes). Indeed, Blodgett's last co-translation with Manijeh Mannani of the selected poetry of the twelfth-century Persian Sufi poet, Jalal al-Din Muhammad Ibn Baha al-Din Muhammad, known as Rumi in the West, is yet another testament to the continuous dialogue between two realms, not the least between the source and target languages in an almost mystic trance. Translated from the original Persian, the poems in *Speak Only of the Moon: A New Translation of Rumi* tactfully remain faithful to the source language, yet reflect a remarkable thematic affinity with both *Apostrophes* and *Transfiguration*.

Closely related to the renga is the musical movement of the Fugue, which seems to represent, in turn, a central *topos* in Blodgett's conception of poetry and translation. Circling around and toward the desired Object, without ever reaching it completely, and then leaping forward constitutes a semantic motion Blodgett evidently favoured. In describing their collaborative translation method, Mannani explains how she "provided a literal line-by-line translation with notes on versification and arcane expressions," while Blodgett condensed this extensive prose "into rhymed couplets that corresponded as much as possible to the original" ("Amorous Pilgrimage" 12). This method of semantic *expansion-condensation*, generating leaps between languages and realms, evokes, once again, a form of dance, creating ultimately "something other" (Blodgett, *Transfiguration* Prefatory Notes).

Mannani notes that Rumi's poems in particular, and Sufi texts in general, are "highly allusive and multilayered" ("Reflections on the Work of E.D. Blodgett" 535). The movements of the Fugue might also express this semantic circulation around the same themes and arcane expressions in Rumi's original poems, and in the co-translation Mannani and Blodgett have produced. In these conceptions of poetry and translation, we never reach the Object entirely, but we try to approach it from different angles, while the significations are circling around and then leaping forward and toward, as Blodgett puts it, "something other and more complete" (*Transfiguration* Prefatory Notes).

His creative work, furthermore, included collaborations with visual artists, such as his three Lucie Lambert editions *In the Heart of the Woods/Au Cœur du bois* (2005), which included Lambert's wood cuttings, *Alphabets* (2012), for which he wrote "a series of poems on the letters of the alphabet" ("How I Came to Alphabets"), and

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Illuminations (2013), in which the poems accompany a series of postcards.[5] Many of his own poetry collections are likewise visually enhanced through artistic imagery: *Ark of Koans* (2003), *Elegy* (2005), and *Praha* (2011), to name just a few, are all supported by various forms of visual media, ranging from drawings, to photographs, to reproductions of paintings.

The articles in this volume tackle one or more aspects of Blodgett's poetry and scholarship, on their own, or as they related to the larger body of Canadian literature. In her essay, Patricia Godbout explores the translation practices as theorized by Blodgett in his groundbreaking article "Translated Literature and the Literary Polysystem: The Case of Le May's *Évangéline*," published in 1989 in *Meta*. The focus of Godbout's analysis is Blodgett's use of the literary polysystem theory to underline the crucial link between creative writing and translation practices, and his development of this approach of *nontraduction*. Following her interview with Jacques Brault, Godbout explains how Blodgett redefined *nontraduction* as a form of translation as an in-between semantic landscape, which sheds light on the dialogue between (or absence thereof in) the many Canadian literatures. In her translation of Blodgett's *Five-Part Invention* monograph on Canadian literatures, Godbout has used a similar collaborative approach alongside continuous correspondence with Blodgett.

In "E.D. Blodgett, fin lecteur de la première femme de lettres du Far Ouest franco-canadien," Pamela Sing further contextualizes how Blodgett familiarized himself with Francophone Canadian writings to promote the richness of Franco-Canadian publications in the Prairies. She underscores Blodgett's profound understanding of the linguistic challenges minorities face in the Canadian literary scene. To this end, she also assesses Blodgett's unique perspective in studying the works of Franco-Albertan writer Marguerite Primeau, thus underlining the importance of Blodgett's contribution to Canadian literary studies at large.

Leslie Savath remains in the Francophone context, but turns more fully to the concept of translation. In her contribution, she examines the traditional tale of La Corriveau as an "act of origination" à la Blodgett's article "Is a History of the Literatures of Canada Possible," in which he stresses that "every act of origination that is somehow aware of being such is a bordering gesture" (9). "Bordering," according to Blodgett, articulates a "zone of negotiation" or "site of discursive contestation" (5), which could be conceptualized through translation itself. By studying many iterations and translations of La Corriveau's narrative, Savath explains how this famous French-Canadian figure incarnates evolving political or cultural significations in various contexts. Her analysis focuses more specifically on the literary version of Anne Hébert, who gave an insubordinate feminist aura to this character.

Matthew Cormier's essay "'I Admit to a Slight Ambiguity': Reflecting upon Canada's Creative and Critical Literary Inquisitors" underscores the ambiguity at the heart of Canadian history and identity, as reflected in Canadian literature and critiqued by Blodgett and a host of other scholars and creative writers in Canada including Margaret Atwood, Nicole Brossard, Robert Kroetsch, and Thomas King,

although not all convey the exact same stance in their writings. Cormier quotes Blodgett as prescribing how a Canadian comparatist critic ought to be "contingent, fragile, unwilling to accept, finally, the illusion of the universal solution, self-absorbed, unguided by the enigmas" related to the presence of others (*Configurations* 35; qtd. in Cormier 59). He tackles the question of potentiality as critiqued by Blodgett in Canadian literary narratives and portrayed in his own creative work. In this important essay, Cormier juxtaposes Blodgett's position with that of other prominent Canadian critics and writers with respect to the nature and function of Canadian literature.

In alignment with Savath's analysis, Srilata Ravi further explores borders by examining comparative literature as a way of making connections and imagining unexpected "non-national" contexts that give creative meanings to literary works. To this effect, she reads Canadian writer Lawrence Hill's *Illegal* (2015) through the lens of the narratives of illegal displacements in the Indian ocean, more specifically in the novel *Tropique de la Violence* by Francophone Mauritian writer Nathacha Appanah. Ravi, therefore, addresses what such a comparative analysis tells us about the literary documentation of the undocumented and what it means to read transnationally. She argues that the relevance of comparative literature as a reading practice lies in the empathy it can engender towards others—a concept, we must add, to which Blodgett devoted his career.

In his essay "Island as a Figure of the Unconscious: Toward a Metaphorical Relation between Human and Place in Michael Crummey's *Sweetland*," Sergiy Yakovenko focuses on the tools of literary analysis rather than the landscape of Canadian literature. He specifically looks at Crummey's novel *Sweetland*, using the metonymy-metaphor dialectic as an analytical tool used by Gerard Genette and Jacques Lacan, introduced by Roman Jakobson, and elaborated on by Blodgett in the Canadian context. He particularly argues for a metaphorical relationship that exists between the human and the place using Blodgett's position that a metaphorical figure contains "the image of its own dissolution" (*Configurations* 54; qtd. in Yakovenko 89). He goes on to critique Sweetland based on Blodgett's take on the notion of "figure" as borrowed from Genette, and the differentiation that exists in the Canadian critic's mind between the metonymic (contiguous) and metaphoric (analogous) relations of tropes to character.

In "Singing *Louis Riel*: The Centennial Quest for Representative Canadian Heroes," Albert Braz tackles the question of Canadian identity and culture in a multination state by focusing on Louis Riel and his metamorphosis, as Braz puts it, "from an enemy of Canada into the quintessential Canadian hero" (107). His argument focuses on the 1967 opera *Louis Riel*, composed by Harry Somers with a libretto by Mavor Moore in collaboration with Jacques Languirand, and references Blodgett's notion of the limitations of Canadian bilingualism that Moore and Languirand had applied in the treatment of the aria "Kuyas" in the opera. Braz quotes Blodgett as pointing out that it is no longer possible "to construct a notion of Canadian culture without bear-

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ing in mind that it is not two, but many, cultures" (*Five-Part Invention* 207; qtd. in Braz 117). Building on this perspective, Braz goes on to conclude that "In particular, it is no longer possible to fashion a Canada that does not foreground the contributions of Indigenous peoples" (Braz 117).

This introduction is by no means conclusive in capturing E.D. Blodgett's vast contribution to the Canadian literary scene and scholarship, nor has it done much justice in covering Blodgett's at times unique and everlasting impact on Canadian literary theory and studies. To state that Blodgett was a forerunner in his visualization of Canadian society and literary terrain as inclusive of Indigenous literatures and ethnic voices, and as diverse, polyvocal, tolerant, and sensitive, is no exaggeration. There were not too many other Canadian scholars writing at the time that he was who could think beyond the formulaic notion of either a unified or else a bilingual Canada. Blodgett's scholarship, no less than his poetry, is "une apologie," a plea for an inclusive and multifaceted literary scene to mirror Canada's multicultural reality.

Notes

1. Blodgett's creative work has the same wide chronological range, and is discussed later in this introduction.

2. Blodgett has tackled this concept in his creative work as well; we will turn our attention to it in the coming pages. Indeed, this matter is also the focus of Patricia Godbout's article in this volume.

3. Blodgett produced a translation of Jacques Brault's pivotal collections of essays (*At the Bottom of the Garden: Accompaniments*, 2001), addressing the creative writing process and the particularities of Québécois literature.

4. In these creative processes, one poet writes a poem; the other "translates" it and offers another poem in response. Nonetheless, the "translated text" is always conceived as a *nontraduction*; it is never *an equivalent*, nor does it aim to find equivalence, but is rather a semantic leap forward.

5. All three works are also bilingual, including French poetry by Jacques Brault, Robert Melançon, and Réjean Beaudoin, respectively.

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