Introduction

In *Birds of Ontario*, a magisterial, beautifully written account of ornithological sightings in and around his neighborhood, the coal merchant Thomas McIlwraith of Hamilton, Ontario, lovingly remembers a stuffed bird that was given to him in the summer of 1890, a small species that he had never seen but that corresponded exactly to written accounts of Cory's Bittern, a "southern bird," which he believes "has not been found anywhere north of Florida." Yet there it was, and the Toronto taxidermist who had prepared the bird had told him that it had been killed in a marsh near Toronto. Since then, there had been at least one other sighting in the Ashbridge marsh. Why had these birds come here? Mr. McIlwraith knew the answer: "No doubt this species associates with our common little bitterns, many of which spend the winter in Florida, and it is just possible that some gallant *exilis* has in his own way painted the beauties of Ashbridge's marsh in such glowing colors that as to induce this little brown lady to accompany him to the north, when he started on his annual journey in spring. Pity she did not fare better…." (110). Alerted by this story, paging through the other descriptions in the book, the reader discovers that very few of McIlwraith's birds can truly be said to be "of Ontario." Instead they are from all over the place – coming and leaving as they choose. For the birds, north and south are matters of convenience, not categories of belonging, a notion that McIlwraith, an immigrant from Scotland anxious to establish himself here, finds disturbing but also strangely comforting, as his frequent comments on the subject attest. For the bitterns of North America, everything circulates: it's their way of life. When your home is everywhere, if at different times of the year, exile is nowhere.

In varying degrees, the essays collected in this volume explore the ramifications of this premise. What the birds know, writers seem to have known all along. The lively response to our invitation to submit papers related to the interconnections between Canada and the American South demonstrated to us that the cultural circulation between two huge parts of the North American continent is an under-researched topic. And papers we received quickly reinforced our sense of the multiple ties between the two cultures that extend far beyond the preference of Canadian golfers for the links near Myrtle Beach in South Carolina or the annual migration to Florida or the Carolinas of well-off Canadians tired of their cold winters. Readers have long been conscious of the inspiration major Southern authors have provided to authors writing north of the 49th Parallel, and pertinent demographic facts have become part

of the collective North American consciousness. One need think only of the enforced displacement of the 18th-century Acadians, who later reassembled in the Deep South, or the flight of thousands of fugitive slaves from Dixie who tried to make their escape to the safe haven in the north, at that time British North America. In addition, there have been several 20th-century authors (e.g., Elizabeth Spencer, Clark Blaise, Leon Rooke) who moved north from Dixie or who relocated several times during their writing lives, crossing and re-crossing the border between the two neighboring countries.

The essays in this volume were first delivered as talks at an international colloquium on "cultural circulation" held at Vienna University in September 2010. Experts on Southern and Canadian literature met for several days to discuss multiple aspects of cultural and literary exchanges between Canada and the American South. The essays that grew out of these talks and that are collected here shed new light on the many interconnections between North and South. Of course, they cannot, and don't attempt to, exhaust a topic the richness of which has become even more evident to us as we have tried to organize the volume according to thematic clusters.

Our opening salvo comes from the pen of a major Canadian writer, the self-defined "Alberta maverick" Aritha van Herk, who boldly continues one of William Faulkner's most enduring inventions – the life of deep-breathing Canadian Shreve McCannon, the Harvard roommate of high-strung Quentin Compson, now a pathologist in Edmonton. Expanding hints scattered over the course of Faulkner's great novel *Absalom, Absalom!*, Aritha van Herk imagines Shreve's life beyond Faulkner's novel, as told from the perspective of his Edmonton landlady. Van Herk's "ficto-critical" story explores the mystery of a man who, after all these years, still misses his friend from a region he never understood (Shreve's eyes turn bright when asked about Quentin) and who, walking around windswept Edmonton with his "sackful of stories," remains something of a stranger even though he is now supposedly "home."

Following the course of North American history, our first thematic cluster unites several essays related to "le grand dérangement" of the Acadians or to other wanderings by a Frenchman across North America. Berndt Ostendorf offers a socio-cultural survey of the challenges experienced by the descendants of Acadian settlers in Louisiana and shows how their resilience helped them to cope with the experience of deportation and later with the attempts of Anglo-American capitalists to marginalize them. Though they were, numerically speaking, a rather small minority, the "Cajuns" managed to absorb

other ethnic groups in the same area and, in spite of powerful trends to Americanize them, retained their language until, ironically, the Codofil initiatives to revive French threatened to eliminate their linguistic culture. Ostendorf singles out the strikingly successful film *Bélisaire, le Cajun*, directed by rebellious sons of genteel Acadians, which gained great popular appeal and helped revitalize Cajun culture. From a more literary perspective, Jutta Ernst stresses writer Kate Chopin's double perspective as both an outsider and insider in Louisiana society. Her ambivalent attitude to the "local color" tradition allowed her to criticize biased, stereotypical representations of indigent Cajuns, whose inherent dignity she evoked in stories such as "A Gentleman of Bayou Têche." Chopin's subversion of social hierarchy contrasts with continued attempts to discriminate against Cajuns, such as the effort to ban the use of the French language the Cajuns had inherited from their Acadian forbears. The iconic identification figure of displaced Acadians everywhere became a woman who never existed in the first place, Longfellow's epic heroine Evangeline. In his essay, Jacques Pothier traces the links between Faulkner's response to Longfellow's intercultural fantasy, the uncollected story "Evangeline," and Acadian writer Antonine Maillet's complex narrative rewriting of Acadian history in *Pélagie-la-Charrette*, the first novel written by a non-French citizen to win the coveted Prix Goncourt in 1979. Borrowing from both Rabelais as well as Faulkner, Maillet spectacularly returns Evangeline (re-christened "Pélagie Leblanc") to her homeland, as the leader of a trek of deported Acadians that assumes mythic dimensions. Pélagie has been dubbed the "Mother Courage" of Canadian literature, and her dogged persistence has indeed brought a measure of redemption to Acadian culture: "I have avenged my ancestors," Antonine Maillet declared.

The first cluster is brought to a conclusion with another displaced Frenchman's trek, this time north, recreated from the traveler's diary entries by Christoph Irmscher. The ornithological artist and writer John James Audubon, though born in Haiti, would have liked for his contemporaries to believe that he was in fact born in Louisiana. His allegiance to all things southern was certainly undisputed. Nevertheless, Audubon, deep into his work on the spectacular *Birds of America* (1827-1838), which would become the world's most expensive printed book, was haunted by the sobering realization that he knew nothing about his favorite birds' breeding grounds way up north. Audubon's Labrador journey in the winter and spring of 1833 was supposed to take him to the origins of avian life. But instead it became a trek into the seventh circle of hell, to a place where birds were killed en masse by human greed. Audubon's disenchantment and conversion experience (though short-

lived) from killer to savior of birds is memorably invoked in *Creation*, the 1999 novel about Audubon's Labrador experience by contemporary Canadian writer Katherine Govier.

The volume's second cluster comprises essays that address the historic flight of fugitive slaves from the U.S. to the imagined and all too often imaginary safe haven Canada and the diverse ways in which this traumatic collective experience has been rendered in different media and literary genres. In his new reading of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), Richard Ellis examines the novel's hopelessly intertwined geography, in which, at least from the slave's perspective, the differences between North and South are matters of degree only. Ellis highlights the basic irony inherent in the notion of the slaves seeking freedom in a colony of Britain, with its own history of repression. According to Ellis, the astounding success of Stowe's novel was not just due to the potency of her sentimentalist writing but reflected the deep undercurrents of sadism and masochism in her narrative, which traverse all distinctions between southern and northern, black and white in the novel, appealing to, as well as implicating, contemporary readers everywhere. Jutta Zimmermann, in her contribution to this cluster, contrasts Alex Haley's blockbuster success *Roots* – both the novel (1976) and the TV series (1977) that grew out of it – with the award-winning novel *The Book of Negroes* (2007), by the Canadian mixed-race writer Lawrence Hill, the son of American immigrants to Canada. Haley's particular brand of cultural nationalism led him to gloss over the ethnic diversity of the slaves deported from Africa, whereas Hill, influenced by studies of the black diaspora such as Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*, seeks to regain precisely a sense of the hybridization the slave trade caused. In the process, he also challenges the cherished myth of Canada's clean record concerning slavery. That myth is still alive and well in the narrative series of paintings produced, as a tribute to Harriet Tubman, by African-American artist Jacob Lawrence during the Civil Rights Movement. Hans Bak, who begins his essay with a discussion of Lawrence's art, contrasts this evocation of Canada as the Shangri-La of black pride with Ishmael Reed's irreverent riff on the black exodus to the alleged promised land in *Flight to Canada* (1976), written at a time when American draft dodgers indeed found shelter there. And he turns again to *The Book of Negroes*, this time with a focus on the departure of Hill's frustrated protagonist Aminata from racist Nova Scotia to a colonizing venture in Sierra Leone.

A 20th-century version of the escape to the illusory Eden of Canada hovers in the background of Pearl Cleage's powerfully disturbing play *Bourbon at*

the Border (1997), the subject of Sharon Monteith's essay in the volume. But Cleage's protagonist Charlie, an African American Civil Rights volunteer severely traumatized by the torture he suffered at the hands of racist southern lawmen, never gets to cross the aptly named Ambassador Bridge that connects Detroit with Windsor, Canada. Instead, he is arrested for murdering, thirty years after his Civil Rights ordeal, three white men who had nothing to do with what had happened to him. Across the river still waits the fantastical Canadian garden where the sun always shines, the garden of hope where Charlie and his wife will never be.

A third thematic cluster – the largest in the volume – collects essays which uncover intertextual links (often directly acknowledged) between Southern writers and their Canadian counterparts. Applying the postmodern juggling of center and periphery to two family chronicles set in Dixie and in Eastern, David Williams compares Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) with Nova Scotia writer Alistair MacLeod's first novel *No Great Mischief* (1999). Drawing on Glenn Willmott's sociocultural diagnosis of narrative "disfigurements" in Canadian fiction of the first half of the 20th century, Williams finds the progression of the forces of modernity reflected in both Faulkner's and MacLeod's elegiac rendition of inevitable historical change. In her essay on the use of the Grimm fairy tale "The Robber Bridegroom" by writers as different as Margaret Atwood and Eudora Welty, Rosella Mamoli Zorzi uncovers shared subversive tendencies: Welty's eponymous novel is set in the planter society of the Deep South and features a heroic outlaw groom as well as a reckless bride, while Atwood locates her *The Robber Bride* right in urban Canada, inverting not only the title but also the plot, making the woman the culprit who steals the partners of her female friends. Eudora Welty's fiction is the subject also of a detailed reading by Pearl McHaney, who this time puts the Mississippi-born and -bred Welty in conversation with Ontario writer Alice Munro, who has in fact acknowledged her southern colleague's deep influence on her work. The Great Depression equally affected Mississippi and rural Ontario, but it appears differently in each writer's work: displaced into disciplined reflection in Welty's work and rendered autobiographically direct and searingly in Munro's writing. But such differences don't separate Munro from the world of southern literature. *Au contraire*: As Charles Reagan Wilson argues in his analysis of Munro's short story cycle *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971), religious matters are of crucial importance in Munro's fictional work. Through her central character Del Jordan, Munro evokes the need for spiritual meaning in a small, provincial society. Munro's

Jubilee, Ontario, has more in common with Faulkner's Jefferson or O'Connor's dusty Georgia than critics have so far acknowledged, and the rituals accompanying baptisms or funerals contribute to the Gothic aura familiar to southern writers that also pervades Munro's narrative art.

The haunting character of both Canadian and American writing of the Deep South is picked up again in Danièle Pitavy's wide-ranging, provocative meditation on the two traditions. Pitavy sees writers from both regions deeply concerned with the borderland between two Arcadias, one "dark" (associated with chaos but also with vitality and creativity) and the other "light" (and therefore indicative of order, restraint and possibly death). Such borderlands are well familiar, she contends, to Welty as well as to Atwood, and they appear prefigured in earlier works such as "Désirée's Baby" by Kate Chopin or the short story "Extradited," by the prolific Irish-born Canadian poet Isabella Valancy Crawford.

Ian McRae proceeds to lend a truly hemispheric dimension to the concept of intertextuality, detailing the connections between *The Invention of the World* (1977), the first novel by the Vancouver Island writer Jack Hodgins, and southern precursor novels from Brazil (Euclides da Cunha's *Os Sertões*) and Colombia (García Márquez's *Cien Años de Soledad*). Against agonistic models of literary influence, McRae highlights Hodgins' willing embrace of this alternative literary tradition, which serves to debunk the great foundational fictions of western civilization and questions the very possibility of coherent historical narratives (as evidenced in the "Scrapbook" section of Hodgins' novel).

The "intertextuality" cluster concludes with a focus on a genre often neglected in such studies. William Davis furnishes a detailed analysis of the close relationship between the experimental poetry practiced by Charles Olson and his disciples at North Carolina's Black Mountain College, Robert Duncan and Robert Creeley, and the *Tish* group at the University of British Columbia, notably George Bowering, whose poetic life-writing illustrates the influence of the American avant-garde.

The notion of genre provides the focus of the fourth and final cluster of essays in *Cultural Circulation,* which looks at parallel developments in the Canadian and U.S. American short story and the emergence of a shared U.S. American and Canadian category of the "postmodern." Reingard Nischik compares the beginnings of the short story in the USA and Canada by focusing on the fictional work of Sherwood Anderson and the early stories of Raymond Knister. The latter's untimely death in 1932 deprived Canadian literature of a high talent that might have accelerated the evolution of Canadian

short fiction. Instead, the absence of periodicals and other suitable publication venues in Canada delayed the emergence of accomplished modernist stories until the 1960s. Nischik discusses the rejection of plot-oriented stories by Anderson before juxtaposing his classic tale of initiation "I Want to Know Why" with Knister's accomplished early fiction in *The First Day of Spring*. By contrast, Dieter Meindl pursues a more epistemological angle, illustrating the shared passage from literary modernism via postmodernism to postcolonialism in southern and Canadian writing by offering close readings of three stories by Flannery O'Connor, Jack Hodgins and, finally, Leon Rooke. The latter's fantastic, satiric rendition of the musings of a belated imperialist demonstrates both the effects of a decades-long intercultural dialogue between the two traditions but also marks the full flowering of contemporary Canadian literature.

Canadian novelist Rooke was in fact born in Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina, in a small mill town not far from the Virginia border, where his mother worked in one of the last mills in the South to defy unionization. Rooke's struggle to shed those roots and become a writer not defined by narrow regionalisms led, after a few successes and even more setbacks (one of his stories was rejected 45 times before it won the O. Henry award), to an appointment as writer in residence at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. There, one of his colleagues was Tom McHaney, whose essay in this volume recalls Rooke's early career before the momentous move to British Columbia. Reflecting on the ostensible orientation of Southern authors towards "place," McHaney claims that Rooke's versatile narrative art was, from the outset, based on "voice," a category that defies locale and region and helps explain the eccentricity as well as the deliberate extravagance of Rooke's characters.

If Rooke embraced his new Canadian home, the Mississippi-born Elizabeth Spencer viewed her twenty years in Montreal with considerably more ambivalence. Marcel Arbeit examines the hesitant use of Canadian themes in Spencer's fiction, including her late novel *Night Travellers* (1991). He points out her continuing use of favorite motifs of the tradition of southern fiction and reflects on the recurrent solitude of female characters experiencing alienation in the affluent world of Montreal. Spencer's exiled draft dodgers and political dissenters remind us of another aspect of the cultural traffic across the border, as does Nahem Yousaf's look at Michael Ondaatje's foray into the world of New Orleans jazz as exemplified by the cornetist Buddy Bolden, also known as "King Bolden," whose band helped create what we know as "jazz" today. Ondaatje, in the absence of conclusive biographical

evidence or, for that matter, recordings, weaves an intertextual collage of tall tales and oral history, pervaded by a sense of the uncanny and the strange. In Bolden, a figure that would go on to stimulate other Canadian artists and writers, Ondaatje had found a model for the co-existence of creative and destructive forces inside the human mind.

In 1826, the famous epicure Anthelme Brillat-Savarin wrote, “Dis-moi çe que tu manges, je te dirai çe que tu es.” Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are. The final essay in this cluster, contributed by Caroline Rosenthal, offers a new take on this old saw. Tell me where you eat and I will help you become who you want to be. Comparing two novels set, respectively, in the Deep South and in British Columbia, Rosenthal shows how female characters learn to use traditional food practices as strategies to defend their individual identities against patriarchal violence. The novels illustrate how mutual support, be it in a café catering to the needs of a Southern community (Fannie Flagg’s *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistlestop Café*, 1988) or in a kitchen on a farm in rural British Columbia (in Gail Anderson-Dargatz’s *The Cure for Death by Lightning*, 1996), can help women develop their identities, subvert the prescribed gender roles, and endure even extremely painful, protracted challenges. Rosenthal’s essay also contrasts in the two texts the use of conventions of local color and of tall tales common in the Deep South with the transgressive narrative strategies associated with the tradition of magic realism that is a hallmark of writing on the Pacific Rim.

Last but not least, Laurie Ricou’s essay with its jocular search for traditions shared by the American South and Canada provides the unconventional coda for our volume. Framed as an attempt at understanding the *49th Parallel Psalm* (1997), a set of poems documenting the migration of African-Americans to Canada by the black Canadian writer Wayde Compton, Ricou’s essay meditates more generally on the global significance and reach of what once used to be southern music. But then Ricou goes on to anchor Compton’s transgeneric, border-crossing volume firmly not within North American or even Canadian culture as a whole but more specifically in a Vancouver pub, the Yale Hotel on Granville Street, where the author has gone to listen to a duo called Mud Dog (Christopher Allen and Steve Sainas) playing the blues: “As we get up to leave, we shout thank yous. And the guitarist calls us to more blues. ‘We’ll be back here October 1st and 2nd – with a full band.’” Surely, we have come a long way from amateur ornithologist Thomas McIlwraith of Hamilton, Ontario, lying awake in his bed at night in the 1880s, listening anxiously and enviously as flocks of geese – “Canadian” in name

only – honk as they pass over his house, hurrying to places southern and warm that Mr. McIlwraith can only dream about.

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