

# Australian- Canadian Studies

A Journal for the Humanities and the Social Sciences

Northrop Frye • The Cultural Development of Canada  
• Phyllis Webb • Douglas Barbour • Michael Ondaatje's  
*the man with seven toes* • Paul Evans • A North  
American Perspective on the Pacific • Donald Rothwell  
• Canadian Sovereignty in the Arctic • Beryl Langer •  
Reading Class in Canadian Fiction • Jane Freebury •  
Review of *Black Robe* • Gillian Whitlock • Lois Foster  
• Ian Lowe • Lee Brotherson • Peter Kirkpatrick  
• Adam Shoemaker • Dennis Drummond •

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**Cover:**

Still from *Black Robe*



Vol.10, No.1, 1992

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## EDITORIAL

It is with a sense of trepidation and enthusiasm that we approach the writing of this "introduction", the first by the new editorial team from the University of Wollongong. We say trepidation, of course, because this issue marks the departure from *Australian-Canadian Studies* of the previous editors, Gillian Whitlock and Malcolm Alexander, a team which not only made the journal one of the most recognized in the field of comparative studies, but also which set a standard of excellence in editing and writing which will be very difficult to match. Perhaps the task of ACS's new editors must not be to seek to surpass its predecessors, but rather to maintain their high standard. Having said this, we would like, on behalf of ACSANZ, to thank both Gillian Whitlock and Malcolm Alexander for their years of excellent work.

Of course, inheriting a successful and respected journal is also cause for enthusiasm, and we hope that this first issue reflects this clearly. Other than a minor cosmetic change of face, Volume 10 brings the usual high quality collection of papers from writers both familiar and new to the journal. We are particularly pleased to publish Professor Northrop Frye's "The Cultural Development of Canada", his last paper before his death.

At a time when Canada's future is being fought in and out of the courts, by indigenous and non-indigenous peoples alike, Professor Frye's observations about Canada's cultural definition seem timely and sobering. He argues that there are three main aspects of the word culture — culture as life-style, culture as shared heritage and culture as that which is created by a society: "its literature, music, architecture, science, scholarship and applied arts". But this sense of culture, he argues, ultimately locates its value in expanding, rather than in limiting, the boundaries which define it. Culture and education are inextricably mixed; because we learn from each other it is critical that we not repeat

prejudices which parochialism inspires. Canada, one could argue, must welcome the questioning which assails it on so many fronts, because this questioning is a troubling of divisive boundaries. As Professor Frye puts it, "Society must have loyalty, but in a democracy there are no uncritical loyalties. There must always be a tension of loyalties, not in the sense of opposed forces pulling apart, but in the sense of one feeling of belonging attached to and complemented by another.... It is through some such process as this that the cultural development of Canada must make its way".

Central to any cultural development, of course, are the mythologies which inform and shape a particular community. No doubt one of the most pervasive myths of Australian culture is the Eliza Fraser story, one which has inspired scores of retellings, both by Australian artists and by writers around the world. In Australia, Sidney Nolan, Patrick White, Peter Sculthorpe, David Williamson and Kenneth Cook, are just some of the figures who have used the myth in their work; South African novelist André Brink transposed the Eliza Fraser story to his country in order to examine South African politics. His novel, *An Instant in the Wind*, appeared within the same week as White's *A Fringe of Leaves* and in the same year as the Eliza Fraser film and the novel based on the screenplay. There has even been a Noh drama of the story performed several years ago at the University of Sydney. One of the most fascinating reconstructions of the story, however, is Canadian poet and novelist Michael Ondaatje's *the man with seven toes*, and it is this poem sequence which is the subject of Douglas Barbour's article.

The poem is loosely based on Sidney Nolan's series of paintings of the Eliza Fraser myth, detailing her shipwreck and "kidnapping" by Aborigines off the Queensland coast in 1836. The gloss on Nolan's "Mrs Fraser" paintings was apparently the "only version of the story" Ondaatje ever learned. It is perhaps fitting that a story which has itself defied the capacity of historical records to convey a single authoritative version of itself, or to be tied down to any single, reductive account of "the facts" of the case, should provide the basis for Ondaatje's experimentation with parody and subversion. Barbour locates the poem at the nexus between Ondaatje's earlier poetic modernism and his emerging postmodernist tendencies; *the man with seven toes* is at once a "young writer's" poem and a mature change of poetic direction, marking both the poet's attachment to and skill with the lyric voice, as well as his "extension" of "the reach of conventional lyric through its implied narrative and through the use of more than a single voice".

Beryl Langer is not only a former editor of *Australia-Canadian Studies*, but also one of its most regular contributors. In "Reading Class in Canadian Fiction", Langer argues for "the relevance of a class reading of English-Canadian fiction", suggesting that the absence of "class issues" in the literature is not so much a condition of the texts but rather a reflection of critical lack of interest and attendant silence. "As has been amply demonstrated in relation to gender", Langer points out, silence "can be an ideological construct, as much a matter of who is listening as of what is said".

This class blindness is attributed to a number of factors, one of which reminds us of Frye's earlier injunction against the danger and artifice of homogeneity. According to Langer, the Canadian obsession with preserving its cultural cohesiveness in the face of American pressure, to use one example, has shaped the way critics have read its culture. When the issue is cultural survival, the question of how class works may seem incidental: "cultural domination by the United States reproduces in Canada a public discourse in which class has no place". This, compounded with a range of competing discourses — bilingualism, regionalism, multiculturalism — which provide for a more immediate and concrete interaction with "identity politics", accounts in large part for the disappearance of class from the critical agenda. Langer's article, therefore, goes some way toward redressing the situation, both by theorizing on the very nature of the absence, as well as offering a brief reading of the manifestation of class in a range of Canadian novels.

Donald Rothwell's article returns to the lingering question of Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic, a timely matter, given recent initiatives by the Canadian Government to establish Inuit self-government in that region. Rothwell reviews the history of Canada's assertions of sovereignty, mounted principally in response to American activity in the region. However, his contribution focuses mainly on the phenomenon of the "internationalization" of the Arctic. Greater international cooperation in the north, prompted by environmental concerns, may affect the substance of the rights of sovereignty which Canada has endeavoured to protect in the past. This has been the experience in the Antarctic where, the author claims, the assumption of multilateral international obligations has rendered territorial claims unimportant. Rothwell compares and contrasts the situations in both polar areas and asks whether the growing multilateral involvement in the north will lead to the emergence of an Antarctic model. It is

perhaps too early to know, but Rothwell allows us to understand the dynamics at play.

Canada's position within a changing international community is also the theme of Paul Evans' analysis. While Rothwell is concerned with the internationalization in the Arctic, Evans addresses what he terms the process of "regionalization". While recognizing that a functional map of the world might be composed of an assortment of different regional groupings, for different purposes, his work concentrates on three: North America, Europe and Eastern Asia. His aim is to provide a consideration of economic integration, security and human rights issues, and to explore how changes in these spheres have affected, or may affect, the relationship between Canada (as a member of the North American region) and its Asian neighbours.

Developments in the realm of regional economic integration provide a useful point of departure, for while it is apparent that an economic reordering is under way, it becomes clear just how different has been the process in these regions. Asia, after all, has not developed as a trading bloc, as has occurred in North America and among members of the European Community. Instead, Eastern Asia has become a "production zone linked by trade and horizontally integrated manufacturing". Security relations have also changed, prompted by the end of the cold war. This has had obvious implications for the American military presence in Asia, and it has also prompted a Canadian military policy which now, more than ever, is marked by a concept of cooperative security for the region. Concurrently, there has been a shift in Canadian perspectives on the protection of human rights. This is reflected in an increased willingness to tie foreign aid to adherence by recipient states to standards of human rights and "good governance". A feature of the entire unfolding drama, we are told, is the manner in which multinational institutions may emerge, over the next decade or so, to resolve these issues in a new, regionalized, world.

In a review essay commissioned for *Australian-Canadian Studies*, Jane Freebury examines the "hidden agenda" of the first official co-production agreement between Australian and Canadian filmmakers. *Black Robe*, as many will know, had a fair measure of success both critically and popularly when it opened in Australia earlier this year. But many critics found that the film retreated to long-established stereotypes in its attempt to examine the role of Jesuit missionaries in the seventeenth century. Despite its lavish attention to accuracy of detail, the film falls "far short of the expectations one has of a film

about European incursion into the new world territories." *Black Robe*, Freebury argues, is "a text totally without reflexivity or irony".

Although it is impossible to comment on every detail of the journal, and to thank everyone who assisted us with this issue of *Australian-Canadian Studies*, we would like to thank Phyllis Webb for allowing us to reproduce an interview conducted for ABC Radio, and both the ABC and Coach House Press for granting us permission to use their material. We are also indebted to the Art Gallery of New South Wales — and in particular Kirsten Dunlop — for permission to reproduce one of Sidney Nolan's paintings, which accompanies Doug Barbour's article.

We would also like to acknowledge Carmel Pass, the Professional Officer of the Department of English, for her invaluable help with this first issue; Paulette Montaigne of the Canadian High Commission for her assistance with photographs; and Beryl Langer for her help and advice.

A note on the presentation of material is also called for here. It will be apparent that the contribution by Donald Rothwell (on Arctic sovereignty) departs from the format used elsewhere in this volume for the citation of references. As a matter of editorial policy, the references for those contributions which draw principally on legal primary and secondary materials will be presented in accordance with the *Canadian Guide to Uniform Legal Citation/ Manuel canadien de la Référence Juridique*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Carswell, 1988). To assist readers not familiar with some elements of legal citations, the names of journals and law reports have been cited in their full, rather than in their abbreviated, form.

Finally, we would like to express our thanks to both Malcolm Alexander and Gillian Whitlock for all their advice and support during the preparation of this issue. Although they were not involved directly in editing this edition, their guiding hand was still felt.

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