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Writing in/on the Canadas

INTRODUCTION

WHEN EDITOR Douglas Archibald asked a year ago if I would be interested in guest editing an issue of the Colby Quarterly, I didn’t even give him the chance to tell me what he had in mind. I responded immediately and enthusiastically that I would love to put together a collection of essays on Canada. Since I began to study Canada in general and Quebec in particular fifteen years ago, I have been constantly astounded by Americans’ lack of interest in or knowledge about our northern neighbors. The U.S. and Canada share the longest unprotected border in the world and a trade relationship second to none, yet the U.S. media only seem to notice Canada when there is a major constitutional or Native land claim crisis. While the Canadian and Quebec Studies movements have grown tremendously over the last decade, the larger U.S. academic and intellectual community seems blithely unaware of the vibrant cultures to the north. This special issue on Writing in/on the Canadas is an attempt to open the borders, to turn what Margaret Atwood has called the one-way mirror of the Canadian-American border into a two-way mirror. It also examines how the Canadas—English and French—see each other.

The essays selected for this issue represent a balance of Canadian and U.S. scholars and a variety of subject matters, but they share a comparative approach and a penchant for theory. Whether analyzing literary institutions (Thacker), schools of painting (McGregor), postmodern poetry (Bowering), women writers (Irvine, Gilbert), or historiography (Little), they all seek to explain the relationships between geography (or the sense of place), history, national identity, and culture; in other words, they all strive to define the distinctive characteristics of Canadian cultural production. They are all two-way mirrors in that they make comparisons (U.S. vs. Canada or English-Canadian vs. Québécois) in search of similarities and differences. Read together, these essays offer a remarkable view of the cultural communities of Canada in a historical perspective.

Jane Moss
Guest Editor