

# THE LONG HISTORY OF CANLIT'S NEW GLOBALITY, OR: WHEN *THE HISTORY OF EMILY MONTAGUE* BECAME CANADA'S FIRST NOVEL

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## ABSTRACT

This essay engages the “globality” of Frances Brooke’s 1769 novel *The History of Emily Montague* as a means of historicizing Canadian literature’s ostensibly recent emergence as a globalized body of writing. I argue that the complex temporalities at play in the construction of national literary traditions have worked to obscure the lines of continuity in the globality of two key periods in the field: the post-1960 institutionalization of English Canadian writing as “CanLit,” which has recently risen to some prominence in the international cultural sphere, and the first emergence of literature in Canada, which was always already international in form and practice. Brooke’s novel, published in England a century before Canadian Confederation yet routinely identified as “Canada’s First Novel,” holds a privileged position within both periods, and offers a compelling opportunity to explore the anachronistically long history of contemporary Canadian literature’s recent globality.

KEYWORDS: Canadian literature, CanLit, globality, Frances Brooke, literary history.

LA LARGA HISTORIA DE LA NUEVA GLOBALIDAD DE LA LITERATURA CANADIENSE,  
O CUANDO *THE HISTORY OF EMILY MONTAGUE* SE CONVIRTIÓ  
EN LA PRIMERA NOVELA DE CANADÁ

## RESUMEN

Este ensayo aborda la «globalidad» de la novela de Frances Brooke *The History of Emily Montague*, fechada en 1769, como un medio para historizar el surgimiento aparentemente reciente de la literatura canadiense como un corpus literario globalizado. Argumento que las temporalidades complejas que entran en juego en la construcción de las tradiciones literarias nacionales han servido para oscurecer las líneas de continuidad en la globalidad de dos períodos clave en el campo: la institucionalización de la escritura anglófona canadiense después de 1960 como «CanLit», que goza de una cierta prominencia reciente en el ámbito cultural internacional, y la primera aparición en Canadá de la literatura, que siempre fue internacional en su forma y práctica. La novela de Brooke, publicada en Inglaterra un siglo antes de la Confederación canadiense pero habitualmente identificada como «la primera novela de Canadá», ocupa una posición privilegiada en ambos períodos y ofrece una oportunidad convincente para explorar la historia anacrónicamente larga de la reciente globalidad de la literatura canadiense contemporánea.

PALABRAS CLAVE: literatura canadiense, CanLit, globalidad, Frances Brooke, historia literaria.



Frances Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague* is an epistolary romance written by an Englishwoman and published to modest success in London in 1769 before disappearing to history, only to resurface in print and scholarly interest 150 years later as "Canada's First Novel". The book begins by signalling a set of global linkages that will shape the narrative to come:

To John Temple, Esq; at Paris

COWES, April 10, 1766

After spending two or three very agreeable days here, with a party of friends, in exploring the beauties of the Island, and dropping a tender tear at Carisbrook Castle on the memory of the unfortunate Charles the First, I am just setting out for America, on a scheme I once hinted to you, of settling the lands to which I have a right as a lieutenant-colonel on half pay. (1)

Brooke immediately establishes the primary audience for her book and the homeland of its protagonist: the writer, Ed Rivers, is "setting out" from England, naturally. Importantly, she also underscores the economic "scheme" that Ed is following on route to "America," waiting just until the second letter to gesture to the "wealth of a Nabob" and thus the superior, trade-based wealth of British India upon which the conclusion of the novel will turn (2-3). She notes the rank and class of the protagonists, too, key within the colonial legal framework that enables Ed to confidently cross an ocean to take "the lands to which I have a right". Finally, the date of the letter allows us, reading centuries later, to appreciate the fleeting nature of its portrait of an expanded global politics, for in announcing his travel to "America," Ed refers to the momentarily enlarged British colonies of North America: the recently concluded Seven Years War had just granted much of New France to the British, and the American Revolution that would sever the British North American colonies in two was less than a decade in the future. Canadian Confederation, of course, was a dream yet to be had.

This essay will engage Brooke's novel as part of a larger effort to place critical pressure on the rhetoric of newness in discussions of Canadian literature's globality. I have argued elsewhere that the transnational turn in literary studies needs to be historicized within the particular contexts of its invocation, and that within Canadian literary studies it has often been mobilized internally to affirm the import of the national frame (see Zacharias). In this essay, however, I want to consider the recent success and scholarship that demonstrates the ways in which Canadian fiction has, indeed, gone global, and to begin thinking about how this recent globality may shift or extend the various internationalisms that have long attended the production and reception of Canadian writing. Historicizing Canadian literature's globality is complicated, however, by the paradoxical temporalities at play in the construction of national literary traditions, which have worked to obscure the lines of continuity between two key periods in the field: the post-1960 institutionalization of English Canadian writing as "CanLit," which has recently risen to some prominence in the international cultural sphere, and the first emergence of literary writing in English in what is now Canada, which was always already international. As



a novel that holds a privileged position within both traditions, Brooke's *History of Emily Montague* offers an intriguing place to explore the anachronistically long history of contemporary Canadian literature's new globality.

## 1. SOLVING THE PROBLEM OF CANADIAN LITERATURE

*The History of Emily Montague* is made up of 228 letters that detail the courtship of three couples, including two in Britain's newly acquired colony of Quebec: the sensible Ed Rivers and the unfailingly proper Emily Montague, along with the philosophizing and flirtatious Arabella (Bell) Fermore, and the somewhat underdeveloped character of Captain Fitzgerald. Ed's witty sister, Lucy Rivers, and his roguish friend John Temple, also letter-writers, remain in England. The letters offer detailed accounts of the landscape, culture, and (occasionally) the politics of British North America, but by the novel's end all six young lovers are happily married and in England. If some have seen Brooke's presentation of assertive English women as promisingly feminist, the novel's derogatory representations of the local French and First Nations populations have been justly critiqued.<sup>1</sup> Few have taken the novel to be great literature, and Brooke herself conceded that it is far too long, complaining she had been pressured to lengthen the novel to justify its cost and in doing so "ruin'd the work" (qtd. in McMullen 113). She also gave her massive sentimental novel what must be among the least inviting epigraphs in all of Canadian literature: "A kind indulgent sleep / O'er works of length allowably may creep". And yet nearly 250 years later, *Emily Montague* is in print and of scholarly interest, in large part due to its anachronistic title as Canada's first novel.

Exploring the various ways in which *Emily Montague* can be understood as both a Canadian *and* an international novel—in its authorship, its publication and reception, and, of course, in its plot—can help us better understand what is at stake in the rhetoric of newness that surrounds the globality of contemporary Canadian literature. The significance of what Paul Jay calls "global matters" in contemporary literary studies is widely acknowledged; Jay's declaration that over the past fifty years, "nothing has reshaped literary and cultural studies more than its embrace of transnationalism" (1) is likely the most-quoted claim to this effect. And yet, perhaps in part because of the enthusiasm of this embrace, the terminology that literary scholars use to discuss the economic, political, and cultural links that transcend national borders remains notoriously imprecise. Manfred B. Steger's work on globalization, invoked in the call for papers for this special issue, is helpful in this regard. Steger is careful to define his terms, including "globalization" as the "growing worldwide interconnectivity" (17); "global imaginary" as "people's growing consciousness of thickening globality" (11); and "globality" as "a social condition characterized by

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<sup>1</sup> On the novel's presentation of gender see Rogers, and McMullen (99-105); on the novel's postcolonial elements, see especially Moss.



tight global economic, political, cultural, and environmental interconnections and flows that make most of the currently existing borders and boundaries irrelevant” (emphases in original, 11). While Steger goes on to acknowledge that the “spatial expansion of social relations and the rise of the global imaginary are gradual processes with deep historical roots” (19), he does not take time to consider how these historical processes are often asynchronous, so that the international network of cultural, economic, and social ties that underpin our contemporary sense of the global may have a longer history than does our awareness of their effects—that is, that the global imaginary may be much newer than globality itself.

Before turning to the particular forms of globality inscribed in Brooke’s novel, it is worth pausing to note that the issue of Canadian literature’s global or international reception has long troubled Canadian critics. Writing in 1943, E.K. Brown suggested that “the problem of Canadian literature” was precisely that it remained a decidedly *national* phenomenon. Insisting that, yes, “[t]here is a Canadian literature,” Brown had to concede that it has, sadly, “stirred little interest outside of Canada” (3). Noting that Morley Callaghan, Thomas Chandler Haliburton, and a few others had been able to garner some acclaim in England and the United States, Brown acknowledges that such individualized appreciation does not make a tradition:

To the reader outside Canada such works as have been mentioned have not been important as reflections of phases in a national culture; the interest in the work has not spread to become an interest in the movements and the traditions in the national life from which the work emerged. Canadian books may occasionally have had a mild impact outside Canada; Canadian literature has had none. (4-5)

In defining Canadian literature’s “problem” in terms of a threshold that can be met only once the appreciation of individual Canadian books has coalesced into the international recognition of Canadian literature as a tradition, Brown is participating in what was already at this point a longstanding habit of looking for validation from “outside Canada” to affirm the significance of the arts within the country.

If the descriptions of Canadian literature’s recent successes beyond its borders are to be believed, however, it seems the “problem” Brown identified for Canadian literature has been solved. Not only is it “going global” (Brandt), with its “scene and the themes hav[ing] become international” (Kuester 8), but it has attained “immense international acclaim” (Sugars, “World” 81). “Literature in Canada [...] has arrived at the centre stage of world literature,” agrees Reingard M. Nischik (1). Pilar Somacarra Iñigo recounts this arrival with admirable enthusiasm: the “momentum of world-wide splendor began in 2000,” she writes, starting with Margaret Atwood’s Booker Prize win, which was quickly followed by Yann Martel’s Booker win in 2003 (a year in which three of the five books shortlisted were by Canadians) (140). UK-based Canadianist Gillian Roberts’s nuanced discussion of Canadian literature’s prize culture offers a list of additional “Canadian writers [who] have been internationally lauded” of late (4), adding Austin Clarke, Rawi Hage, Lawrence Hill, Michael Ignatieff, Ann-Marie MacDonald, Alistair



MacLeod, Anne Michaels, Rohinton Mistry, Michael Ondaatje, Mordecai Richler, and Carol Shields (140-41). Most recently, Madeleine Thien's *Do Not Say We Have Nothing* was shortlisted for the 2017 Booker, and of course, no scholar interested in Canadian literature's arrival can fail to note Alice Munro's winning of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2013.

Recent scholarship, moreover, suggests that the international appreciation of Canadian literature is not strictly a matter of bestselling individual books or awards ballots. Recent scholarly collections and special issues published in Canada have demonstrated the interest in the field exists beyond its borders by increasingly showcasing international scholarship on Canadian writing—including recent collections such as Marta Dvořák and W.H. New's *Tropes and Territories: Short Fiction, Postcolonial Readings, Canadian Writings in Context* (2007); Eva Darias-Beautell's *Unruly Penelopes and the Ghosts: Narratives of English Canada* (2012); Brydon and Dvořák's *Crosstalk: Canadian and Global Imaginaries in Dialogue* (2012), and Tanti *et al.* *Beyond 'Understanding Canada'* (2017);<sup>2</sup> as well as the upcoming special issue of *Canadian Literature*, entitled “Rescaling CanLit: Global Readings”, guest edited by Eva Darias-Beautell of University of La Laguna (Spain). Moreover, interest in the field in Europe continues through the efforts of the International Council for Canadian Studies, and is evinced through collections such as Antor *et al.*'s *Refractions of Canada in European Literature and Culture* (2005); Eugenia Sojka and Tomasz Sikora's *Embracing Otherness: Canadian Minority Discourses in Transcultural Perspective* (2010); Pilar Somacarrera's *Made in Canada, Read in Spain: Essays on the Translation and Circulation of English-Canadian Literature* (2013); and others, including this special issue of *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*. What is more, there is evidence that this appreciation of Canadian literature as a tradition abroad goes beyond the interest of dedicated scholars: the Autumn 2017 issue of *Granta*, one of the UK's leading literary magazines, was a special issue dedicated entirely to Canadian literature; and Canada has recently been announced as the “Guest of Honour” at the prestigious Frankfurt Book Fair in 2020. All this would seem to suggest, as Danielle Fuller and Susan Billingham claim, that Canadian literature has “achieved critical mass and is now an international phenomenon” (114).

It is perhaps ironic, then, that the intensity of the celebration of Canadian literature abroad is more than met by the condemnation of the institution that supports and shapes that literature in Canada. The full details of what a recent *Globe and Mail* article calls the current “epic CanLit war” (Lederman) are beyond the scope of this paper, but a few lowlights should be sufficient. In 2017, the Editor of The Writers' Union of Canada's magazine was forced to resign after he appended a piece entitled “Winning the Appropriation Prize” to a special issue of a magazine dedicated to Indigenous writers; the editor-in-chief of *The Walrus* resigned shortly later, following his expression of support for the prize. Celebrated author Joseph Boyden has faced

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<sup>2</sup> Precedent for this work includes Robert Kroetsch and Reingard M. Nischik's *Gaining Ground: European Critics on Canadian Literature*. Edmonton: NeWest, 1985.



a very public reckoning about his questionable claims to Indigenous identity, and a major Canadian literature conference saw one of its keynote speakers announce he was “breaking up” with the field due to its “anti-black white supremacy” – a move that was subsequently echoed by scholars lamenting the “unbearable whiteness of CanLit”.<sup>3</sup> There is a broad-based reckoning underway regarding sexual violence in Canadian literary culture, as well, prompted by high profile sexual assault cases under investigation in creative writing programs at Concordia and University of British Columbia. After a host of high profile authors (including Atwood, Martel, and Ondaatje) signed an open letter penned by Boyden protesting the firing of the UBC department chair, they were met with a public counter-letter in which more than 600 signatories declared themselves “shocked and appalled” that “no support was expressed for the female complainant or for the other female students” in the original letter. All this and more continues to play out in the pages of the country’s literary journals, as well as popular magazines and national newspapers.<sup>4</sup> Multiple critics have taken to referring to the “CanLit Dumpster Fire” in print, and a collection of essays entitled *Refuse: CanLit in Ruins* is forthcoming.<sup>5</sup> In an opening editorial to a recent issue of *Canadian Literature*, Laura Moss and Brendan McCormack sum up this mass of criticism by quoting a tweet by fellow academic David Gaertner: “If this is #CanLit,” Gaertner writes, “let it burn” (n.p.).

These startlingly different views of the current state of Canadian literature reflect the range of ways that the term “Canadian literature” signifies today, of course, but they are linked, I will argue, by the institutionalization of Canadian literature – or what is often called “CanLit”. It is clearly no longer the case, as Brown and others once suggested, that “Canadian books” are not recognized as belonging to a national literary tradition, or that “Canadian literature” as a tradition cannot claim even a “mild impact outside Canada” (Brown 5). But it is equally clear that celebration of Canadian literature abroad stands in rather jarring contrast to a new “problem” that the field is facing here at home. How, exactly, do these very different perspectives on the field signify? What is the relationship between individual texts circulating abroad under the title of “Canadian literature,” and the institutional frameworks that support CanLit scholarship? What might these differences tell us about the globality of national literatures today? And what could all this possibly have to do with Brooke’s novel, written two hundred years ago?

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<sup>3</sup> The speaker was Rinaldo Walcott; the conference, which I helped to organize, was *Miki-naakominis / TransCanadas: Literature, Justice, Relation*, held at the University of Toronto in 2017. See also Barrett *et al.*

<sup>4</sup> Julie Rak maintains a website with primary sources for context on much of these issues: <https://sites.google.com/ualberta.ca/counterletter/context-for-the-galloway-case>.

<sup>5</sup> See Elliott and Rak. *Refuse: CanLit in Ruins*, edited by Julie Rak, Hannah McGregor, and Erin Wunker, is forthcoming from Book\*hug in 2018.



## 2. THE LONG HISTORY OF CANADIAN LITERATURE'S NEW GLOBALITY

Even if book sales and cultural capital were our only guides for assessing Canadian fiction's global stature, works such as Lucy Maud Montgomery's phenomenally successful 1908 novel, *Anne of Green Gables*, would be ample reason to insist upon its longevity.<sup>6</sup> And yet if the specific terminology of "globality" is new, concern with the social, economic, and cultural implications of connections between Canadian literary production and "the world" is certainly not. Indeed, as Carole Gerson argues in a valuable 2009 article entitled "Writers Without Borders: The Global Framework of Canada's Early Literary History," one useful way of testing the "newness" of Canadian literature's recent globality is to remind ourselves of the conceptual and material links that connected the earliest Canadian texts across borders and oceans. Gerson demonstrates that "Canadian participation in the international culture of best sellers and blockbusters is less an innovation of the late twentieth century than a continuous feature of our national cultural experience" (17), and convincingly lays out the various ways in which seventeenth through nineteenth century "Canadian" texts—from the poetry of Robert Hayman to the exploration narratives of Samuel Hearne and James Cook, from the travel writings of Anna Jameson to the poetry of Oliver Goldsmith and onwards—were clearly informed by the international and imperial contexts in which they were written and through which they circulated.<sup>7</sup>

The arrival of Confederation in 1867 might tempt us to leap to the Canadian modernists' invocation of cosmopolitanism for the field's next global linkages, but there is no need. Between Nick Mount's account of the "expatriate origins of Canadian literature", in which many writers moved to New York in the Confederation period in order to work with "a transnational and in some cases transatlantic membership and audience" ("Expatriate" 248), and Tracy Ware's discussion of such writers' "cosmopolitan nationalism" (296), it is clear that even the most committed of Canada's literary nationalists were self-consciously working across the new country's borders. With recent work in postcolonial, diaspora, and hemispheric studies working to position a wider swath of early Canadian writing within an expanded international framework—including, perhaps most prominently, positioning black Canadian writing within a larger and longer black Atlantic—<sup>8</sup> it is difficult to disagree with Gerson's conclusion that "from the earliest colonial times to the present, Canadian culture has always been situated within the complexities of larger international contexts" ("Canadian" 76).

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<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of how fame—both within and beyond Canada—impacted early Canadian authors including Montgomery, see York, 32-98.

<sup>7</sup> Noting *The History of Emily Montague* in passing, Gerson describes Brooke's novel as "the product of a seasoned London author who cannily exploited the exotic setting she encountered when she accompanied her husband to British North America" ("Writers" 18).

<sup>8</sup> Key scholars here include Rinaldo Walcott, George Elliott Clarke, and David Chariandy.



It will not be new, of course, to suggest that pre-1867 literature in Canada was a thoroughly colonial affair, or that this early history continues to inform the present. Still, it is important to link this colonial past within an elongated history of English Canadian literature's contemporary globality. Indeed, if "globalization" is to be understood as the "growing worldwide interconnectivity," as Steger suggests, it is necessary to acknowledge the contact zones of colonialism as fundamental in our efforts to historicize the "social conditions" of our current globality. Calling globalization a "new word for an old process in dire need of a careful historical interpretation" (6), for example, Anthony Hall insists the "date 1492 marks the moment when our current era of globalization began" (4), for it is "the beginning of an era when four continents—Europe, Africa, and the Americas— began to merge into a transatlantic cultural complex" (5). If we understand colonialism as central rather than secondary to the "current era of globalization," it is clear, as Gerson argues, that the "[g]lobalization of Canadian writing began centuries ago" ("Writers" 29).

Consider just how thoroughly this merging is reflected in both the context and content of the very first English-language novel written in British North America: *Emily Montague* was written and set in the decade between the Seven Years War—its global arena included Europe, North America, and India—and the American War of Independence, when Britain temporarily occupied the vast majority of North America. Brooke's own tenure in North America was a direct consequence of this colonial moment, for she arrived and departed in Quebec as the wife of a chaplain to an English garrison. It was written in the latest fashion of British letters for an international audience, drawing on the popularity of epistolary novels and travel narratives in this period. As Gordon Bölling writes, it was "[w]ritten specifically for England's literary market," and offers "narratives of distant Canada [that] catered to the expectations of a European public" (19). The fact that the earliest novel in North America was written in English is itself a consequence of imperial history—as is the fact that it was later translated into both French and Dutch. The novel's "enthusiastic imperialism" (Merrett 95) has been widely noted, too,<sup>9</sup> with Brooke's rendering of the Indigenous population as "noble savages" and the French as "indolent" croquets, all secondary characters in dire need of British civility, and the "sublime" Canadian landscape thoroughly domesticated as a site for British romance. As Laura Moss writes, the "love story is inseparable from the story of colonial expansion" (454). And of course, the major protagonists each cross the ocean twice—first to explore the "new world", and then to return home— transatlantic lines that are retraced by many of the letters themselves, emphasized by a time lag Brooke uses for dramatic irony (McMullen 94).

Less obvious but equally significant is the novel's portrayal of a growing global economy powered by a fundamental shift toward a credit economy underway in this period—the very shift which, as Steger notes, was laying the foundation for what would become the "capitalist world system" (30-31). The British econ-

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<sup>9</sup> Most recently, see Moss and Devereux.







omy underwent a massive readjustment with the increasingly complex demands of imperial trade, including the creation of the Bank of England, the country's first standardized banknotes and the introduction of paper money, the evolution of a system of public credit, and an explosion of growth in joint-stock companies set up to finance the risky, but often fantastically rewarding, trade in imperial goods.<sup>10</sup> Like other texts from this time –this is the period in which Jonathan Swift coined the term the stock “bubble,” and novels were being published with titles like *The Adventures of a Banknote* (1770)– *The History of Emily Montague* directly engages this fast-changing imperial economy. Indeed, Brooke's novel turns explicitly on these economic shifts and emerging global financial systems: when the book opens, Ed boasts of his “four thousand dollars in the funds” (i.e. stocks in the national debt, 47), but he travels to Quebec specifically in search of a more tangible wealth. The colony, he believes, is “a rich mine yet unopen'd. [...] I do not mean of gold and silver, but of what are of much more real value, corn and cattle” (20). By the novel's end, however, Ed's Lockean efforts to enrich himself via British North American land have failed outright, and he returns to England to win new riches in an outrageous *deus ex machina*. Years earlier, we discover, a Colonel Willmott had left his pregnant wife in Paris and ventured to India, where he “acquired very rapidly a considerable fortune” (335). At the novel's close, the colonel returns home to England determined marry his daughter (whom he has never met) to the son of an old friend to whom he is indebted. This, of course, is the very marriage that has already taken place, so that while Emily and Ed thought themselves “poor” when they married, they now find themselves having –as Ed wrote in the novel's second letter– “procur[ed] the wealth of a Nabob” (2-3).<sup>11</sup> After hundreds of pages detailing an English love story on one side of the planet, Brooke resolves her novel by bringing her protagonists home to London and pointing to the massive joint-stock company that was busy remaking the global economy on the other.

If it is true to the point of being obvious that the “new” globality of Canadian fiction has a long history stretching back into this colonial period, it is also true that critical frames emphasizing the newness of contemporary globalization make it disconcertingly easy to downplay or ignore this fact. There is, however, another perspective from which this long history can itself be understood as being surprisingly recent. Such historicizing, valuable as it is, can be seen as the product of the relatively new institution of Canadian literary studies –the very institution that we are being told is now on fire– which has its origins, we are told, a century after Confederation.

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<sup>10</sup> On the repercussions of the “financial revolution,” see Pocock, and Laura Brown.

<sup>11</sup> The OED helpfully defines “nabob” as “a British person who acquired a large fortune in India during the period of British rule”. See also Merrett's discussion of the novel's staging of a “conflict between romance and money” (100), and Binhammer's argument that Brooke “tries to narrate a plot of infinite wealth accumulation”, but “ends up laying bare the contradictions at the heart of this emerging liberal economic theory” (298).

### 3. THE SHORT HISTORY OF CANLIT'S OLD GLOBALITY

Historicizing English Canadian literature's globality is complicated by the fact that it has had to begin several times over its short life. I have been following one strain of critical convention in framing pre-1867 texts, including Brooke's novel, as "early Canadian literature", but of course this is a deeply contested chronology that requires scholars to reach back past the creation of the Dominion of Canada to teleologically claim pre-Confederation writing as part of the later nation's history. Some have sought to position early English, French, and Indigenous narratives from North America as "colonial literatures" antecedent to a Canadian literature that properly begins with the creation of the Dominion of Canada in 1867, but such an approach clearly continues to rely on the borders of the Canadian state for its engagement with such work. Unsurprisingly, scholars of French-language literature in Canada have been suspicious of *any* critical positioning within the English-dominated framework of Canadian literary studies, while Indigenous scholars such as Thomas King have outright rejected the inclusion of traditional "Native" stories as part of the cultural lineage of historically hostile nation-states, rightly noting that frameworks clearly "assume that the starting point for [...] discussion is the advent of Europeans in North America" (40).

A third and increasingly common strain of critical convention, however, has been to recognize as antecedent the early writing and stories in the northernmost half of North America, to acknowledge as aspirational the romantic nationalism that led writers and critics to repeatedly declare the arrival of a Canadian literary tradition throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, but to insist that something called "Canadian literature" cannot be said to have been established until after the latter half of the twentieth century. Smaro Kamboureli's opening passage in her introduction to *Trans.Can.Lit: Resituating the Study of Canadian Literature*, is exemplary of such an approach:

Canadian literature: a construct bounded by the nation, a cultural by product of the Cold War era, a nationalist discourse with its roots in colonialist legacies, a literature that has assumed transnational and global currency, a tradition often marked by uncertainty about its value and relevance, a corpus of texts in which, albeit not without anxiety and resistance, spaces have been made for First Nations and diasporic voices. (vii)

Here, the key historical moment is neither colonial contact nor Confederation but the Cold War. This is, as Richard Cavell writes later in the volume, "a vantage that understands 'Canadian literature' not as embodying a particular canon of texts but as an institutionalist (statist) and thus economic (cultural/industrial) phenomenon" (85).

This is Canadian literature as "CanLit". These are terms that have a complex relationship to each other, and if they cannot be fully equated, it is not quite clear exactly where they differ. Writing in answer to the question "What is CanLit?" in the *New York Times*, Douglas Coupland suggests, "CanLit is when the Cana-



dian government pays you to write about life in small towns and / or the immigration experience". He's not entirely wrong, but others have been more helpful. "CanLit, as we have come to call it for the sake of brevity, but also affectionately, and often ironically [...] has been subject to a relentless process of institutionalization" (1), reports Kamboureli, adding that it "has, more or less, always functioned as a referent to Canadian literature in English" (ix). "CanLit," writes Diana Brydon, is the "informal shorthand for Canadian literature that names it as an established formation" (2); "CanLit," suggests Nischik, is the "institutionalized canon of Canadian literature" (1).

The study of English Canadian literature as "CanLit" is now one of the major critical avenues for engaging writing in Canada, as scholars have shown an interest not only in individual literary works but, as E.K. Brown anticipated, "[...] in the movements and the traditions in the national life from which the work emerged" (5). Such scholarship has focussed on the material, cultural, economic, and political histories of literary studies, emphasizing the role of the government policies and programs, as well as universities, awards culture, and critical methodologies in promoting and shaping national literary studies. It has been fostered through productive clusters of research –Cynthia Sugars singles out Smaro Kamboureli's TransCanada Institute as being "central in consolidating this field of inquiry" (8), and Frank Davey emphasizes Milan Dimić's earlier conference series "Towards a History of the Literary Institution in Canada"<sup>12</sup>– but, as the recent *Oxford Handbook of Canadian Literature* notes, "the institutionalization of Canadian literature as a category or discipline" has become one of the field's primary critical interests (Sugars, "Introduction" 8).

While both a full theorization and survey of research into the institution of Canadian literature is clearly beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth taking note of its temporal and spatial assumptions.<sup>13</sup> There is, for example, widespread agreement as to the period Canadian literature emerged as an institution. When Margaret Atwood describes the 1960s as "a hinge moment" for writing in Canada (39), for instance, it is no coincidence she offers as evidence the fact that "CanLit" became a term" (42); Nick Mount's hagiographic account of what he calls the "CanLit boom of the 1960s", in *Arrival: The Story of CanLit*, barely bothers to venture before 1959. Richard Cavell names Canadian literature a "Cold War literature" (85), but Barry Cameron is even more specific: "the full institutionalization of Canadian literature as a recognizable and relatively autonomous discourse did not take place until the mid- to late 1960s", he writes, "when it became thoroughly inscribed in

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<sup>12</sup> Though its self-conscious engagement with French-language writing is an important difference, HOLIC's approach to the field clearly anticipates the TransCanada project by several decades. In the interest of full disclosure, I should note I completed my PhD under Kamboureli's supervision in the TransCanada Institute at the University of Guelph, and have been active in its various projects.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Martin's exploration of "the Canadian literary institution" in *Sanctioned Ignorance* is helpful in its theorization of the institution via Pierre Bourdieu and Jacques Dubois. See especially 53-93.



both the agenda of Canadian publishers and the curriculum of Canadian university departments” (124).<sup>14</sup> There are no shortage of other examples of this chronology, but here again Coupland is memorably blunt: “CanLit was invented in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s,” he writes, “the time when Pierre Trudeau was Prime Minister and Canada was busy trying to decolonize itself from mother England” (n.p).

Scholars have confidently dated the beginning of CanLit with such precision because there is a broad consensus as to its key events. The 1951 Royal Commission on the National Development of the Arts, Letters, and Sciences –better known as the Massey Commission– resulted in a new set of state-funded initiatives supporting the arts as a means of establishing a distinct Canadian identity, highlighting the need for a national literature and instigating the influential Canada Council for the Arts and the National Library. Post-war nationalism was further encouraged by plans for the Canadian centennial celebrations and Montreal’s hosting of the 1967 World Fair. In 1959, the first journal dedicated to the field, *Canadian Literature*, was established, followed by Carl F. Klinck’s influential edited collection, *Literary History of Canada* (1965). The incorporation of “Canadian literature” as a university subject began in earnest during the 1960s, in which students could study the newly christened “Canadian classics” being identified and published by McClelland & Stewart’s “New Canadian Library” series, launched in 1958. Northrop Frye was still willing to declare there was no such thing as Canadian literature as late as in 1965, but the essay in which he did so –this is the famous “where is here?” piece– was promptly canonized as one of the new field’s defining critical texts.

The chronology above will be familiar to any scholars who have engaged research examining Canadian literature as an institution, much of which has focussed on the field’s methodological nationalism. It is worth noting, however, that the lines of continuity between early and late Canadian literary globality can be found within the heart of the nationalizing forces propelling the emergence of CanLit as an institution. Not only was the Massey Report explicit in its goals of mobilizing literature as a “defence” against the American cultural imperialism, for example, it also looked to use it for the “projection of Canada Abroad” on the grounds that “ignorance of Canada in other countries is very widespread”. Insisting that the “promotion abroad of a knowledge of Canada is not a luxury but an obligation,” the Commission recommended the state formally foster “exchanges with other nations in the fields of the arts and letters”.<sup>15</sup> Over the next fifty years, Canada’s federal government did just that, through a series of modest but sustained funding programmes incentivising the development of Canadian studies outside of the country. These efforts supported the interdisciplinary study of Canada in nearly fifty countries since the 1970s (Tanti *et al.*, xii), and were reaffirmed in the 1995 formalization of the “projection

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<sup>14</sup> As both Margery Fee (22-23) and Paul Martin point out, critics have had a tendency to overstate the absence of pre-1960 university courses in Canadian literature as part of this chronology (19).

<sup>15</sup> See Chapter 27.



of Canadian values and culture” as one of the three “pillars” of Canadian foreign policy. These incentives included the recently cancelled “Understanding Canada” program, run through Canada’s Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, which helped to fund international conferences, sponsored international student research and travel, and organizations such as the longstanding International Council for Canadian Studies.

Scholars outside Canada have rightly noted that Canadian literature’s circulation abroad is complicated by the politics specific to each country,<sup>16</sup> but it is hardly surprising to find others expressing some hesitation about their complicity in Canada’s soft diplomacy goals. Danielle Fuller, reflecting on her transatlantic readings of CanLit, concedes she “had the unsettling sense that we were also cultural goods made by or in Canada, and thus a part of a state-funded nationalist CanLit project” (67). Indeed, as the editors of a recent collection note, such programs have been part of the “diplomatic and economic scaffolds that supported the [...] circulation of Canadian literature within global circuits” –the specific trajectory of which have been shaped by state policies predetermining the countries in which such research could receive funding.<sup>17</sup> The “popular belief that Canadian literature has become a ‘world literature,’” they conclude, “is the result of diplomatic, cultural, and academic programs” (Tanti *et al.*, xxvi).

Recognizing the relatively recent establishment of Canadian literature as an institution that circulates both within and beyond the nation, however, does not mean we must fully accept the rhetoric of newness that sometimes accompanies such work. There is, after all, no shortage of pre-1960 authors and critics who believed themselves to be engaging Canadian literature as an institution, including, for example, the editors of the more than thirty English-Canadian literary anthologies Robert Lecker catalogues as being published before 1945. D.M.R. Bentley’s accusation that “TransCanada is but the latest [...] iteration of a long continuity of presentist bridge-burning and earth-scorching” (28) is certainly overstated, but he is not alone in his concern that an emphasis on the recent institutionalization of Canadian literature risks overlooking the texts and concerns that precede this period. Frank Davey, for example, surveys a number of influential recent collections and notes just a “handful of references to pre-1970 writing,” warning that “even when making generalizations about the entire literature, the critics may seem to be referencing only the last five or six decades of publication” (32). Julie Rak’s vehement critique of Mount’s *Arrival* expresses a similar concern, albeit with different politics. Mount’s study implies “that before the 1960s [...] there was no Canadian lit-

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<sup>16</sup> See Yoko Fujimoto’s account of how Canadian literature gets “lost in Japanese Translation”; Belén Martín-Lucas’ account of how South-Asian Canadian authors in Spain are “read as ‘Indian’ books, not as Canadian ones” (88); and the essays gathered under the heading “Reading Publics” in Tanti *et al.*

<sup>17</sup> Of the twenty-three associations for Canadian studies that were eligible for funding from the Canadian government, fourteen are in Europe and North America; there are none in Africa, the Caribbean, or the Middle East, aside from Israel (Tanti *et al.* xiv).



erature at all,” Rak writes, resulting in a “cluster of sweeping generalizations” that “reproduces assumptions about white, homophobic, sexist, settler Canada, *and it celebrates them*” (n.p., emphasis in original). The point is not that Mount is unaware of earlier writings—he has, after all, written a full book on the literature of Canada’s Confederation period—but rather that the shape and politics of his engagement with Canadian literature in this text is a result, in part, of his willingness to grant it an abbreviated chronology as “CanLit”.

Although part of my argument in this essay has been that historicizing declarations of Canadian literature’s globality is valuable to help us avoid the pitfalls of presentism, I want to close by turning to Brooke’s novel to note yet another complication that arises when one attempts to historicize the field’s globality: its emergence as the earliest of Canadian novels during the field’s institutionalization. Gerson is surely right to point out that “the Centennial era implicitly proclaimed a break with Canada’s literary past, creating a fissure that continues to inform developing critical frameworks about the globalization of culture” (“Writers,” 29), but it is also important to recognize the ways in which the relatively recent institutionalization of Canada’s literary past into something widely discussed as “early CanLit” complicates any effort to construct a straightforward chronology of the field. It was only once Canadian literature moved into universities as a field of study and into the catalogues of publishing houses, after all, that earlier texts and contexts coalesced to emerge as the old history of a new tradition. Brooke’s 1769 novel had largely disappeared to history before its resurfaced in the twentieth century as “Canada’s first novel,” first as part of a small *Canadians* series in 1931.<sup>18</sup> It was not until after the Second World War that Brooke’s novel was fully resuscitated through a series of nationalizing publishing projects that attended Canadian literature’s ongoing institutionalization as CanLit, including McClelland & Stewart’s *New Canadian Library* series (1961; 1995; 2008); the *Centre for Editing Early Canadian Texts* series (1985); and the *Canadian Critical Editions* series (2001). Since then, it has enjoyed the critical attention that is fitting to a “first” novel in a tradition, although, as Dermot McCarthy notes, this attention has “not dealt with the problem of the novel as originary object—with its selection by the tradition to begin the tradition that selects it” (n.p.).

Here, then, is yet another “problem of Canadian literature” in the context of its newfound globality: if it is true that the global economic, cultural, and political lines drawn by the publishing history and plot of Frances Brooke’s *The History of Emily Montague* should serve to remind us that the fiction of Canada’s globality is several centuries old, the novel’s post-1960 emergence as “Canada’s first novel” should remind us that even this long globality has a history that is surprisingly short.

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<sup>18</sup> The novel’s first Canadian edition was published in Ottawa’s Graphic Press’s “*Canada Series*,” in 1931 (Edwards xlvi).



#### 4. CONCLUSION

My goal in this essay has been to begin a process of complicating the rhetoric of newness that often surrounds Canadian literature's emergence on the global stage. I turned to Frances Brooke's *History of Emily Montague* to remind readers of the depth and scope of global linkages undergirding even the earliest novels in Canadian fiction, but also to note the complex temporalities at play in the novel's reclamation as an originary text within a relatively recently institutionalized body of writing. By noting how the nationalizing forces that enabled Canadian literature to "arrive" in the 1960s were also working toward the "projection of Canada abroad," I have tried to link the Canadian literature that has apparently "arrived at the centre stage of world literature" (Nischik 1) with the CanLit "dumpster fire" that is burning in Canada. Ultimately, my hope is that engaging the long history of Canadian literature's new globality might help us better identify, understand, and perhaps even solve some of the problems in CanLit today.

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