What is Québécois Literature?

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CHAPTER ONE

How has the literary history of francophone Canada been told in the twentieth century?

Turning now to examine the particular trajectory of the literary histories of francophone Canada, it is worth recalling Söderlind’s point about the use of the term ‘Canadian’: ‘Any critical practice that uses an adjective like “Canadian” to delimit its object of study is inevitably engaged in a nation-defining, if not a nation-building enterprise.’ But, as will be demonstrated in what follows, if our focus here is specifically on francophone Canada, then the nation being defined has a rather different status. Indeed, the place of the nation in literary histories of francophone Canada is both fundamental and curiously unstable. The history of Canadian literature in French is a story only understandable in relation to Canada’s multi-layered colonial history and the various ways in which cultures have operated at different times and in different parts of Canada, as borders and populations shift and are displaced. As a consequence, the definition of ‘nation’ is an ongoing preoccupation, and one which is further complicated by the relationship between Quebec and the other francophone populations of Canada. So, while, as Blodgett argues, literary history seeks to ‘provide meaning, to canonize, and, inevitably, to commemorate the nation’, ‘francophone Canada’ is not a nation like others.

Literary history in nineteenth-century Quebec

While the majority of the literary histories that will be discussed here have been produced in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, two
earlier publications deserve mention as each in its own way demonstrates the role of literature in the establishment of a distinctive national identity. The first of these is primarily a resource rather than a literary history in that it consists of a compilation of works published originally in the periodical press, collected into a series of four volumes by James Huston, a member of the Institut Canadien in Montreal. But it is more than a simple anthology as the introduction makes clear. As a contribution to literary history, the Répertoire national ou recueil de littérature canadienne represents an alternative to the classical model of literature taught in the collèges classiques. Huston offers a very different, local collection of texts with an altogether different function: ‘nous n’avons pas eu l’idée de soumettre au lecteur des modèles de littérature, ou de faire revivre des chefs-d’œuvre de pensée, de goût ou d’exécution’.

Huston’s role as literary historian is most evident in his selection of texts, conditioned to some extent, he claims, by a desire (need?) to avoid political bias, hence the exclusion of political pieces; but his presence is also evident in the brief introductory comments which precede the texts and in his introduction to the first volume. Published between 1848 and 1850, the volumes present texts in chronological order as follows: Vol. I (1778–1837), Vol. II (1837–44), Vol. III (1844–46), Vol. IV (1846–48). Huston’s title establishes the link between literature and nation and the terms ‘canadienne’ and ‘nationale’ are used interchangeably. This nation is constructed as a nation emerging from colonial domination: ‘le lecteur se réjouira […] de voir combien la littérature canadienne s’émancipe du joug étranger’ (I, vii). Huston’s introduction employs a number of rhetorical features that recur in later literary histories. To define the relationship between la littérature canadienne and that of France, he uses personification to draw on the image of the child growing to maturity (‘la littérature canadienne s’affranchit lentement […] de tous ses langes de l’enfance. […] elle s’avance, en chancelant encore’, I, vi) and organic links (‘elle commence […] à croire qu’elle pourra s’implanter sur le sol d’Amérique comme une digne bouture de cette littérature française qui domine et éclaire le monde’, I, vi–vii). The dividing line between ‘la littérature française’ and ‘la littérature canadienne’ coincides with the end of French rule, thus excluding the French-authored literature of New France and establishing ‘la littérature canadienne’ as a post-(French)-colonial literature.

Huston’s primary criterion for selection is the place of publication (in ‘les nombreux journaux franco-canadiens’, I, iii), but this includes the work of both Canadian- and foreign-born authors published since
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the arrival of the printing press in Quebec in 1764. The collection includes poetry (Joseph Quesnel, François-Xavier Garneau), songs, essays, satires (Bibaud), drama (Antoine Gérin-Lajoie), letters (notably *Dernières lettres d’un condamné* by Chevalier de Lorimier, executed for his involvement in the 1837–38 rebellion), lectures by Étienne Parent and extracts from novels, including Patrice Lacombe’s *La Terre paternelle* (1846). As the range of material shows, the understanding of what constitutes ‘littérature’ for inclusion in the Répertoire is broad in terms of genre. Huston aimed to commemorate the nation, ‘retirer de l’oubli […] des écrits d’un grand mérite sous le rapport littéraire et sois le rapport national’ (I, viii) and his work became a unique source for later literary histories and anthologies. But Huston’s concern is not simply with preserving the past; he hopes to ensure the future of francophone literature in Canada: ‘tous nous fait voir que la littérature nationale entre dans une ère nouvelle: ère de progrès et de perfectionnement […] ce Répertoire aura aussi l’effet d’engager […] tous les jeunes gens à travailler avec énergie à éclipser leurs devanciers’ (I, vii–viii).

A similar preoccupation with the future development of a national literature emerges from Edmond Lareau’s *Histoire de la littérature canadienne*, which appeared in 1874, the first literary history to be written on francophone Canadian literature. Lemire recognizes the value of Lareau’s work as a bibliographical source: ‘son ouvrage repose sur une documentation étonnante pour une époque où les instruments de recherche faisaient entièrement défaut ou presque’. Lareau’s definition of ‘la littérature canadienne’ ranges still more widely in terms of genre than that of Huston, a contrast which foreshadows the shifting borders of twentieth-century literary histories. So, after an introductory chapter on the nature of literature, the second chapter is devoted to works published under the French regime. The remaining six chapters each cover a specific genre, the range of which indicates the scope of what constitutes ‘littérature’ in nineteenth-century Quebec: poetry, history, novels and short stories, science (natural sciences, physics, chemistry, agriculture, medicine, education), law, journalism. Another indication of the scope of his work is his inclusion of English-language works in the corpus. Yet, unlike Huston, Lareau does not include dramatic works, a sign of neglect which continues to be a feature of literary histories of francophone Canada at least until the mid-twentieth century.

While praising the impressive range of the work, Lemire is critical of Lareau’s style: ‘Malheureusement pour lui, Lareau ne s’est pas contenté d’être bibliographe. Il a voulu jouer au véritable historien de la littérature.'
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La lecture des grandes histoires de la littérature lui a certainement indiqué le ton à adopter. Aussi prend-il son sujet d’assez haut.12 Lareau’s tone is at times pompous, with sweeping generalizations about a range of classical and contemporary European literatures, imitating the ‘grandes histoires de la littérature’ used in the collège classique. Karine Cellard (following Lucie Robert, whose work she quotes) argues that Lareau’s literary history remains faithful to the aesthetics of classical humanism ‘avec son découpage générique et ses paramètres critiques inspirés de la trilogie atemporelle du Beau, du Vrai et du Bien’. As a result, she finds that ‘bien que la littérature nationale y soit pensée comme témoignage de l’autonomisation de la société canadienne dans le concert des nations, l’idée d’une spécificité propre au corpus littéraire n’intervient aucunement dans le discours porté sur les œuvres’.13

While there are indeed many signs of the rhetoric of classical humanism in Lareau’s text, particularly in the initial generalizations about the nature of literature, the picture is perhaps rather more complex, and in ways which will be relevant to later, twentieth-century literary histories. It is true that in his first chapter Lareau defines literature in universalist and idealist terms, but in subsequent chapters his rhetoric and argument draw on a different set of premises, which suggests that the belles-lettres rhetoric is just that, a rhetorical flourish indicative of his educational background (collège classique, followed by legal studies). In fact there are judgements on particular authors and texts which do point to common, Canadian qualities, usually related to thematic aspects such as history, legend, landscape or everyday life. In the chapter on the novel, for example, Lareau compares the anglophone, Irish-born Rosanna Leprohon to Bourassa, Gérin-Lajoie and Chauveau: ‘Le talent de Madame Leprohon la rapproche assez de ces trois écrivains. Elle recherche, elle aussi, les scènes de la vie domestique et les épisodes de la vie canadienne’ (334). But for Lareau the emergence of a national literature in a former colony is a slow process. Recognizing the dominant role of metropolitan French (and English) literature, he looks to a gradual cultural differentiation, a process involving not only local subject matter, but also specific qualities of tone, style and form: ‘Si nous savons donner à nos productions un tour particulier à notre état de société, si nous les imprégnons d’une odeur locale assez musquée, si nous leur donnons une manière d’être à part, nous les détachons, par là, des sources étrangères et leur imprimons un cours indépendant’ (59).

Because of the coexistence in Lareau’s history of aspects of idealist and materialist discourses on literature, it is possible to read his account
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as a narrative which embeds the literary production of Canada in a material world in which economics and politics play a determining role. One example of the latter is his comment on the impact of Canadian independence: ‘En rendant au pays sa véritable autonomie et en le plaçant au rang des nations libres, la rupture du lien colonial dégagera les esprits des nombreuses attaches qui les retiennent encore à l’étranger, et le travail commun sera plus fort pour accomplir de grandes choses dans le sens de nos destinées littéraires’ (iii–iv). Like Huston, but a quarter of a century later, he sees Canadian literature as poised on the threshold of maturity: ‘encore une décennie et nous aurons atteint les commencements du véritable âge d’or de notre histoire littéraire’ (iii). His awareness of the importance of local economic factors in the development of literary activity emerges in a variety of comments. Art needs material stimulus: ‘rien ne désenchante autant le talent et l’imagination comme les nécessités de la vie et le travail qui y obvie’ (61). He argues that writing for the periodical press is the only viable forum for writers in an emerging literature such as that of Canada (489); he emphasizes the link between poverty, poor educational provision, literacy and the size of the reading public in francophone Canada (60); he stresses the difficulty of access to books, both in French and English (resulting from ideological and material factors). In this understanding of a range of economic, ideological and institutional features Lareau’s text clearly situates the emerging literature in French in Canada within a very specific cultural and historical context. To this extent the text prefigures the trend in literary histories of the twentieth century which understand the production, distribution and reception of literature in francophone Canada to be the product of a particular network of social, economic and ideological factors.

Finally, in terms of the presentation and layout of his text, Lareau introduces a number of features which appear commonly in literary histories, emphasizing their didactic, but also their performative/promotional function. The names of authors stand out in the text: first they appear in list form in the Table of Contents which introduces the volume; secondly, the same list is reproduced as a subheading to the chapter; thirdly, within the chapter the authors’ names are written in capitals; all authors discussed at any length are then listed in an index at the end of the book; lastly, to compensate for any potential oversights and omissions, Lareau’s narrative moves into bibliographical mode, as he lists authors and publications which space does not allow him to discuss. This insistent naming of authors asserts by accumulation the
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existence of a national literature and the repetition of the names begins a process of canonization as the reader becomes familiar with groups of names.

A number of questions arise from this discussion of Huston’s and Lareau’s contributions to literary history which relate both to the generic problems and choices of all works of literary history and to the specific nature of the literary history of francophone Canada. While Huston’s Répertoire is not a literary history, as an anthology it is a selected representation of French-Canadian literature, and Huston’s preface functions in a similar way to prefaces and introductions to later literary histories. Lareau’s work can be considered as an example of what Perkins terms the narrative form of literary history, with the proviso that certain aspects (notably the use of listing to maximize coverage) can be seen as more typical of the encyclopaedic form, and others (the subdivision by genre rather than historical period for the main body of the work) somewhat diffuse the sense of historical development. The two works, different as they are from one another, set up the following issues, namely, the choice of periodization (and the effects of the chosen periodization); questions of eligibility for inclusion (both of genres and of authors); the particular ways in which the link between nation and literature is constructed (including the choice of designation); questions of voice and form (including the presence of recurrent patterns of rhetoric, argument and imagery); and changing patterns of methodology and approach. A further point has emerged from these two nineteenth-century works which will prove relevant to later discussion. Huston and Lareau present French-Canadian literature not only as evidence of an established corpus, which they illustrate and defend, but, more importantly, as an argument in support of a future literature, which their works aim to encourage and promote. Their works are, therefore, as much about a literature which does not exist as a literature which does. The main body of this chapter will explore how the writing of the history of francophone Canadian literature has developed since the turn of the twentieth century, considering aspects both of what they include (in terms of historical, geographical and literary range) and of how the content is presented (how it is classified, structured and interpreted). As will be seen, many of these issues can be understood as a consequence of the problematic status of a literature emerging from a network of colonial relationships and of the fundamental but shifting link between literature and the nation.
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**Titles: naming the corpus**

Blodgett’s *Five-Part Invention: A History of Literary History in Canada* discusses a corpus of histories of the various literatures of Canada, published between 1864 and 1999. The range of designations used in the titles in his corpus illustrates the trickiness of delineating and naming bodies of literature. Consensus emerged relatively easily around the use of the term ‘Canadian literature’ to refer to Canadian literature in English, but the term has also been used in a number of comparative literary histories. The naming of Canadian literature in French has been less straightforward. Table 1.1 gives the titles of those histories of francophone Canadian literature which will be discussed in varying degrees of detail in the current chapter. Texts selected may include elements of the anthology, the encyclopaedic dictionary and the narrative format. The titles of histories of Canadian literature in French can be broadly divided into three chronological periods.

In the nineteenth century both Huston and Lareau use the term ‘littérature canadienne’, in keeping with the association of the word ‘canadien/Canadien’ with the francophone settlers in Canada, an association that lasted well into the nineteenth century and distinguished the francophone population from *les Anglais*. The two works differ, however, in their use of the term. Huston’s *Répertoire national* affirms the existence of a national literature in French which he dates back to the arrival of the printing press in Quebec. As Biron, Dumont and Nardout-Lafarge point out, English-language literature in Canada was slower to claim a national specificity: ‘Demeuré plus près de l’Europe, l’écrivain canadien-anglais n’écrit pas pour la nation.’ For the Anglo-Canadian population (whose numbers had outstripped those of the francophones by the mid-nineteenth century, largely as a result of an influx of over 960,000 immigrants from Great Britain between 1815 and 1850) it was the Confederation in 1867 which was to boost interest in an English-language Canadian literature.

Even though, like Huston, Lareau is committed to a future literature *in French* in Canada, his 1874 work employs the term ‘la littérature canadienne’ to refer to a much wider corpus. Not only does his narrative look back to the French regime, it also incorporates a number of works by Anglo-Canadians into the genre-based chapters. Referring to the two literatures as ‘la littérature franco-canadienne’ and ‘la littérature anglo-canadienne’, he states: ‘nous les étudierons toutes deux parce qu’elles nous concernent également’ (56). The implication is that the
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Table 1.1 Corpus of histories of francophone Canadian literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Author; place of publication</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1848–50</td>
<td>James Huston; Montreal</td>
<td>Le Répertoire national ou Recueil de littérature canadienne</td>
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<tr>
<td>1874</td>
<td>Edmond Lareau; Montreal</td>
<td>Histoire de la littérature canadienne</td>
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<td>1907</td>
<td>Camille Roy; Quebec</td>
<td>Tableau d’histoire de la littérature canadienne-française</td>
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<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Camille Roy; Quebec</td>
<td>Manuel d’histoire de la littérature canadienne-française</td>
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<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>Sœurs de Sainte-Anne; Lachine</td>
<td>Précis d’histoire littéraire: littérature canadienne-française</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>Camille Roy; Quebec</td>
<td>Histoire de la littérature canadienne</td>
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<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>Camille Roy; Montreal</td>
<td>Manuel d’histoire de la littérature canadienne-française</td>
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<td>1946</td>
<td>Berthelot Brunet; Montreal</td>
<td>Histoire de la littérature canadienne-française</td>
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<td>1960</td>
<td>Gérard Tougas; Paris</td>
<td>Histoire de la littérature canadienne-française</td>
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<tr>
<td>1967–69</td>
<td>Pierre de Grandpré, ed.;</td>
<td>Histoire de la littérature française du Québec</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Montreal</td>
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<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Laurent Mailhot; Paris</td>
<td>La Littérature québécoise</td>
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<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>Réginald Hamel, John Hare</td>
<td>Dictionnaire pratique des auteurs québécois</td>
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<td></td>
<td>and Paul Wyczynski; Montreal</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Montreal</td>
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<td>1987</td>
<td>Edwin Hamblet; Paris</td>
<td>La Littérature canadienne francophone</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sainte-Foy</td>
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<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>W. H. New; Montreal &amp; Kingston</td>
<td>A History of Canadian Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Michel Biron, François Dumont and Élisabeth Nardout-Lafarge; Montreal</td>
<td>Histoire de la littérature québécoise</td>
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</table>
adjective ‘canadien’ as used by Lareau acts as an umbrella-term. A similar reasoning may explain Camille Roy’s decision to use Histoire de la littérature canadienne as the title to his 1930 volume. By the beginning of the twentieth century the use of the adjective ‘canadienne-française’ had become widespread and remained the standard designation for French-language literature in Canada until the late 1960s. However, Roy’s 1930 literary history marks a resistance to a certain type of French-Canadian nationalism, which he saw as increasingly hostile to the Canadian federation. This volume, like Lareau’s survey, includes coverage of English-language Canadian literature. But unlike Lareau, and unlike his contemporary Anglo-Canadian literary historians such as Lorne Pierce, Roy does not integrate the Anglo-Canadian authors fully into his history; rather he treats them in an appendix, retaining the introduction on the French-Canadian spirit and his conclusion on the nationalization of (French-Canadian) literature, both of which were included in the 1918 Manuel. The adjective ‘canadienne’ in the title signals, therefore, an accommodation with anglophone Canada, but one which relies on a mutual respect of difference, rather than any desire for unification, nor, indeed, for separation.

For his final volume of literary history, Manuel d’histoire de la littérature canadienne de langue française, published in 1939, Roy chose a different title, one which, arguably, throws a slightly different light on his corpus. Not only was Roy cautious about a separatist trend to French-Canadian nationalism, in the course of the 1930s he also became critical of what he saw as a provincial promotion of French-Canadian linguistic specificity, as supported by writers and critics such as Alfred DesRochers, Albert Pelletier and Claude-Henri Grignon. For Roy, the French language remained a universal norm, an essential element of the French-Canadian spirit: ‘la langue française ne peut avoir deux génies, ni deux syntaxes ni même deux essentiels vocabulaires. Autrement il y aurait à coup sûr deux langues différentes, dont l’une ne serait pas française.’ His final choice of title reinforces this link between the literature produced in francophone Canada and the one and indivisible French language, so fundamental to the teaching of French language and literature in Quebec’s collèges classiques.

With the exception of Roy’s third and fourth literary histories, the adjective ‘canadienne-française’ was the accepted designation for twentieth-century literary histories of Canadian literature in French up to and including the years of the Révolution tranquille, despite wide variations in other aspects of their respective contents and organization.
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In our selected corpus, Roy’s 1907 Tableau d’histoire de la littérature canadienne-française, his extended 1918 volume Manuel d’histoire de la littérature canadienne-française, the 1928 Précis d’histoire littéraire: littérature canadienne-française by the Sœurs de Sainte-Anne and Berthelot Brunet’s Histoire de la littérature canadienne-française (1946) all use this term in their titles, as does Gérard Tougas for his Histoire de la littérature canadienne-française (1960).26

The first signs of change came in the mid-1960s, when the term ‘la littérature québécoise’ displaced the less geographically specific designation.27 Its progress in the world of literary history was less rapid than in the field of contemporary literature, for various methodological, ideological and pragmatic reasons. In this respect it is interesting to compare titles chosen in the 1960s. Gérard Tougas’s Histoire de la littérature canadienne-française was published in France, hence targeting a different readership from that of the other works cited so far. First published in 1960, before the term ‘littérature québécoise’ was adopted, subsequent editions retain the original title, as one would expect, but do include occasional uses of the designation québécois for contemporary work by authors from Quebec. However, what seems more important for Tougas (who was born in Alberta) is the contextualization of francophone Canadian literature within the worldwide processes of decolonization and the emergence of la francophonie as a newly recognized field. This development, he predicts, will ensure a much higher status for Canadian authors, past and present, as ‘une seconde littérature de langue française’.28

Towards the end of the 1960s a number of literary history textbooks were published to serve the needs of the expanding secondary and post-secondary education system.29 These included Roger Duhamel, Manuel de littérature canadienne-française, Gérard Bessette, Lucien Geslin and Charles Parent, Histoire de la littérature canadienne-française par les textes and Paul Gay, Notre littérature. Guide littéraire du Canada français à l’usage des niveaux secondaire et collégial.30 The first title in our corpus which associates literary history explicitly with Quebec is the four-volume Histoire de la littérature française du Québec, produced by a team of contributors under the overall editorship of Pierre de Grandpré between 1967 and 1969.31 The publication in 1974 in France of Laurent Mailhot’s La Littérature québécoise suggests that the transition is complete.32 The use of terms such as ‘canadienne-française’, ‘littérature du Canada français’ or ‘littérature canadienne de langue française’ tied Canadian literature in French to no single
province. Literary historians were not explicitly drawing a territory that mapped on to the province, and therefore not excluding texts written by authors from outside Quebec, from the other francophone communities in Canada, or rendering their inclusion problematic and assimilationist. From now on, the association of the terms québécois or ‘of Québec’ with francophone Canadian literature is the norm. But this poses its own problems.

One exception to the new consensus is the short literary history cum anthology written by Franco-American Edwin Hamblet and published in France in Hatier’s ‘Profil formation’ series. Hamblet adopts the term ‘littérature canadienne francophone’ as the title of his volume. Unlike Tougas, Hamblet is not situating his corpus in relation to a worldwide francophone population. He writes as a North American for a (metropolitan) French readership and his choice of title allows him to encompass the span of francophone North American history as well as to look towards the future. His conclusion closes with a reflection on the aftermath of the 1980 referendum and what he describes as ‘le dilemme de l’indépendance politique du Québec’. Without taking sides in the debate, his title therefore alerts the reader to tensions between separatists and federalists at a time when literary historians in Quebec favoured the use of the term québécois or Québec in their titles.

With the widespread adoption of the term ‘la littérature québécoise’ and its apparent elision of a literature and a province, a new set of definitions, qualifications and clarifications become necessary. For many the term merely took over the same broad field, a natural successor as the province asserted its national aspirations. Thus Laurent Mailhot writes in 1974: ‘La littérature québécoise existe-t-elle, et comme littérature et comme québécoise? On ne se pose plus la question. […] D’abord française (d’Ancien Régime), canadienne, canadienne-française, voire canadienne-catholique […] la littérature québécoise porte explicitement ce nom depuis un siècle, cette épithète depuis une quinzaine d’années.’

Two years later Réginald Hamel, John Hare and Paul Wyczynski published their Dictionnaire pratique des auteurs québécois, which comprised about 600 entries. Their definition of the term ‘auteurs québécois’ is similarly broad: ‘pour nous, un “auteur québécois” est celui qui par ses écrits a contribué à enrichir, au sens large du terme, la civilisation de la Nouvelle-France d’abord, du Canada français en général, du Québec en particulier’. The authors (with close Ontario connections) include many Ontario-born and Ontario-based writers and academics within their dictionary, signalling the association with the
province in individual entries but not separating them out in any way from the corpus as a whole. In 1989 the same team produced a more extensive reference work, *Dictionnaire des auteurs de langue française en Amérique du Nord*, with around 1,600 entries which covered the francophone presence throughout North America. This work includes authors classified by region (of Quebec), by province (of Canada) and by other country of origin, so enabling bodies of, for example, Ontario- or Manitoba-produced literature to be identified. Included are authors who have migrated to Canada from 28 countries, but since it has not been updated since the first publication in 1989, it does not include the many migrant writers active since the early 1990s. This greater attention to the varieties of francophone identity in North America is an ongoing feature of literary historical works in the last two decades of the twentieth century, which means that the epithet québécois has to be used more cautiously. The self-identification of authors with ‘la littérature acadienne’ or ‘la littérature franco-ontarienne’, the establishment of publishing houses in New Brunswick (Les Éditions d’Acadie in 1972; les Éditions Perce-Neige in 1980), in Ontario (Prise de parole, 1973), in Manitoba (Les Éditions du Blé, 1974) and the literary productions in Quebec of numerous anglophone, aboriginal and migrant writers are factors which demonstrate the still problematic association of literature and nation.

Two of the most important contributions to the field of literary history in Quebec are the ongoing series produced by groups of researchers initially under the leadership of Maurice Lemire at Laval University. Both the *Dictionnaire des œuvres littéraires du Québec* (DOLQ) and *La Vie littéraire au Québec* avoid the adjectival use but refer to Quebec (as a geopolitical entity) in their title. In the most recent volume of *La Vie littéraire* the editors clarify what the use of the term ‘Québec’ implies:

> le titre *La Vie littéraire au Québec* dénote les activités et les problématiques incidentes à la littérature d’expression française du Québec (et donc de la Nouvelle-France et du Bas-Canada pour les périodes antérieures), mais également du Canada français allant jusqu’à la diaspora francophone-américaine, quand ces activités constituent avec celles du Québec des ensembles cohérents et autonomes pour leurs contemporains. (VI, viii)

The geographical and historical elasticity of this definition allows the team to look at related developments in francophone literary expression elsewhere in North America, where these were seen at the time to be consonant with the literary and cultural life of Quebec. However, an
inclusive, wide-ranging use of the term can be seen as problematic from the point of view of francophone communities outside Quebec. In 1987 the editors of the fifth volume of DOLQ add a statement concerning the criteria for inclusion in their work, a clarification which does not appear in earlier volumes. First they cite the criteria adopted by the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec for inclusion in their collections: ‘des documents produits par le Québec ou dont le sujet principal est le Québec’ (‘le Québec’ figuring here both as the collective personification of the members of a nation when used as subject and a geographical location when used as object) (V, lxxi). But the editors recognize that this fails to address a number of complexities (‘l’appartenance d’un auteur à la littérature québécoise demeure parfois discutable, dans la mesure où il s’avère difficile d’établir son appartenance géographique’) and they refine the criteria as follows:

Par exemple, dans le cas d’écrivains franco-ontariens, franco-manitobains, acadiens, ou de tous ceux qui vivent à l’étranger, nous avons établi les quatre critères suivants qui déterminent l’inclusion ou l’exclusion d’un ouvrage dans le corpus québécois: a) avoir été édité par une maison québécoise; b) avoir été écrit par une personne ayant choisi de vivre au Québec; c) viser le Québec comme premier lieu de consécration; d) relever, en tout ou en partie, de l’imaginaire ou du réel québécois. (V, lxxi)

To qualify as québécois, a work must satisfy at least two of the four criteria. Thus, the editors say, all of Antonine Maillet’s work published in Quebec would be included whereas ‘nous devons exclure les ouvrages d’auteurs acadiens comme Melvin Gallant ou ceux de franco-ontariens comme André Paiement, qui ne visent pas le Québec comme premier lieu de consécration’. Arguably an element of subjective assessment enters into at least the last two of these criteria, which the editors recognize. But their decision is clearly an attempt to avoid a certain kind of neo-colonialism which the territorial definition might be seen to promote: ‘En respectant la spécificité territoriale des auteurs, nous essayons d’éviter de verser dans une pratique de colonialisme culturel. Cette politique éditoriale ne règle pas toutes les ambiguïtés, mais elle prend en considération les communautés francophones hors Québec qui revendiquent, à juste titre, une autonomie culturelle’ (V, lxxi).

By the time Volume VII was published in 2003, the editorial team was expressing its policy in a rather more relaxed way. After referring to the criteria cited above, they write: ‘vu les liens étroits qui unissent certains
auteurs franco-ontariens et acadiens, nous les avons inclus dans notre dictionnaire, surtout s’ils ont décidé de publier au Québec. La frontière littéraire obéit à d’autres impératifs que l’appartenance géographique. Nous avons tâché de respecter une autonomie que revendiquent à juste titre les francophones hors Québec’ (VII, xv). Nevertheless, the very existence of such a set of criteria reflects the difficult translation of national/territorial boundaries into the classification of literary and cultural identity; to an extent this is a difficulty inherent in all literary historical projects. But in this case it is symptomatic of a real realignment of francophone literary life in Canada in the last fifty years, a realignment which has resulted from a complex set of centrifugal and centripetal forces common to postcolonial societies, as relationships between Paris, Quebec, Montreal, Ottawa, Moncton and the smaller centres of the francophone diaspora in Canada and North America have been decentred and have regrouped. Without the emergence of ‘la littérature québécoise’ (both as a name and as the product of a set of institutional practices), it is possible that literary and cultural life in Acadie, in northern Ontario or in the Canadian West might have had fewer practitioners, a smaller audience and might have developed fewer local institutions, products as they in turn might be of ongoing processes of accommodation and resistance to external and internal patterns of colonization. In this way, the changing shape of Quebec’s own national self-awareness has in turn provoked or enabled the construction of range of new narratives of identity.

One rather surprising omission from the criteria employed by the editorial team of *DOLQ* is that of the language of expression, which would suggest that the editors consider work not published in French as automatically disqualified from the category québécois. Interestingly, in the most recent literary history listed above, Michel Biron, François Dumont and Élisabeth Nardout-Lafarge’s *Histoire de la littérature québécoise*, the authors do include a brief section on ‘la littérature anglo-québécoise’ which gives a survey of the various ways in which anglophone residents of Quebec (such as Gail Scott, Yann Martel, David Solway and Trevor Ferguson) have explored the implications and the possibilities of writing in English in Quebec. But in this volume as a whole, the authors understand ‘la littérature québécoise’ to refer to French-language literature from Quebec. Their definition concentrates primarily on its historical rather than its geographical or linguistic elasticity: ‘l’expression “littérature québécoise” […] s’emploie rétroc- ativement pour parler de l’ensemble de la littérature du Québec depuis les premiers écrits de la Nouvelle-France’ (12).
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The only English-language literary history included in the list above is that of W. H. New, whose History of Canadian Literature offers an example of a literary history which attempts to tell the histories of the many cultural and linguistic communities of Canada, and should perhaps have been entitled A History of Canadian Literatures. Including francophone and anglophone, Inuit, First Nations and migrant writing, New’s use of the word ‘Canadian’ in his title is therefore comparable in its scope to Blodgett’s use of the word ‘Canada’ in Five-Part Invention: A History of Literary History in Canada, which brings this section full circle.

Shaping the history: periodization, its forms and effects

It is difficult to imagine a literary history without some temporal subdivision into periods. Yet periodization is problematic and can always be disputed. The key dates of a nation’s history do not necessarily correspond to changes in the literary production of that nation; not all areas of the literary institution develop at the same rate over any given period; no one ‘period’ will be homogeneous; the boundaries between designated periods are never clear-cut; patterns of reception, of literary influence, of pastiche will give certain texts, genres, or styles a longer and more varied life than others. The relationship between periods is far more complex than its chronological succession may suggest, as Laurent Mailhot points out:

La périodisation littéraire n’est pas nécessairement de type caténaire, encore moins de type causal. Entre les maillons, entre les cristallisations, viennent s’insérer des creux, des mous. Les héritages sont acceptés sous bénéfice d’inventaire, des révoltes peuvent indiquer une filiation, les ruptures sont rarement aussi radicales ou absolues qu’elles le prétendent. Contre hier ou avant-hier, c’est parfois à une époque plus ancienne que les avant-gardes font appel pour relancer l’histoire.

As an example of the complex web of relationships between literary phenomena over the course of time he cites the example of the activities of the journal and publishing house Parti pris in the 1960s:

Parti pris est à la fois fille émancipée de la Révolution tranquille, arrière-petite-fille des patriotes de 1837–1838, sœur ou cousine des mouvements de décolonisation qui doivent eux-mêmes autant à Sartre qu’à Fanon, Berque ou Memmi. Parti pris est surtout la mère, la matrice
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des nombreux mouvements socio-culturels et littéraires qui, dès 1968 (année de la disparition de la revue) se partageront et diviseront son héritage.44

This state of being embedded within a series of networks, both within and beyond Quebec, is symptomatic of the ways in which cultural objects operate; yet relationships of this degree of complexity are obscured by the practice of periodization, which encourages synchronic and diachronic readings of a less flexible kind. A different structure would be needed to explore such relationships in sufficient detail, arguably a structure like that adopted by Hollier in *A New History of French Literature* (2001) which can pursue a series of micro-narratives. But despite its problematic and somewhat arbitrary nature, periodization remains one of the defining features of works of literary history, a feature which will be deployed in various ways.

The choice of periodization and the ways in which it is labelled play a significant role in the construction of a corpus into a particular shape in time. Traditionally the literary history of France has been told by century, a practice that is still evident in much of the teaching and research in the field of (metropolitan) French literature today. This periodization has been widely challenged as artificial and inattentive to the complex relationship between social reality and the literary text. Nevertheless, as Aron and Viala note:

*La* difficulté à trouver un juste mode d’articulation entre histoire sociale et politique et histoire de la littérature explique en partie pourquoi le découpage par siècles a été si couramment usité. Il n’est pourtant pas neutre, puisqu’il tend à constituer des unités là où les données politiques et littéraires ne les attestent pas.45

Histories of francophone literature in Canada are not modelled on the French pattern of periodization, partly because of the shorter historical span to be covered, but also because of the particular conditions of production of the literature of a settler society. It is in the choice of periodization that signs of the nation are often most apparent and in the case of a colonial and postcolonial society those dates are frequently dictated by shifts in power and by the consequent loss or acquisition of self-determination. This section will study the ways in which eleven literary histories of francophone literature in Canada, published between 1907 and 2011, have defined their corpus in temporal terms. It will discuss the various ways in which a particular periodization has been written into the text; it will also consider the effects of this choice on the
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The relationship between literature and nation which is thereby constructed. The works which will be discussed have been selected to give a spread of texts over the century but also a variety in terms of authorship, format and intended readership. Each will be introduced separately and its individual pattern of periodization examined before comparative conclusions will be drawn.

In what follows, the choice of periodization for each literary history is represented in simple tabular form. The starting date against which each text is measured in the tables is 1534, the date of Jacques Cartier’s first voyage to Canada, in the course of which he claimed the territory in the name of the King of France, François I. The only exception to this pattern is the table representing the periodization of W. H. New’s *A History of Canadian Literature*, for reasons which will become clear. A blank cell at the beginning of the table indicates that a literary history begins its narrative at a date later than 1534. The tables show the historical subdivisions of the literary history and any designation of the period given in the chapter title. There is no attempt to reflect in the table the relative length of sections, but where this is significant comments follow in the analysis. In the case of multi-volume series (de Grandpré and the two series edited by Lemire) each cell records the periodization adopted for one individual volume. While start-dates vary to some extent between volumes, end-dates of the single volume literary histories are often remarkably close to the date of publication, something which is all the more evident in second or successive editions where the corpus has been updated. In the multi-volume series, each volume is written with greater sense of historical distance, the most recent volume of *La Vie littéraire* (2010) taking the history up to 1933. The latest volume of the *Dictionnaire des œuvres littéraires du Québec* (2011), however, covers works published much closer to the contemporary period (1986–1990).

**Literary histories for the cours classique**

The first twentieth-century literary history of French-Canadian literature, Roy’s *Tableau de l’histoire de la littérature canadienne-française*, excludes the literary production of *la Nouvelle-France*: “L’histoire de notre littérature nationale commence après la cession du Canada à l’Angleterre. Les livres qui ont été faits avant cette date sont l’œuvre de Français de France qui, pour la plupart, sont retournés dans leur pays; et ces livres ont tous été publiés en France.” The following 140 years are subdivided into periods of 40, 20, 40 and 40 years, which
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initially suggests a preference for round numbers rather than a division based on key historical events. However, in the introductory chapter the four periods are justified in terms which clearly link political developments with what Roy presents as changes in the mentality and the literary activity of the French-Canadian population. The first period is characterized by abandonment: ‘après la Cession les Canadiens sont abandonnés à eux-mêmes, et ils doivent donc travailler eux-mêmes à leur fortune économique et littéraire’ (10) but also by the positive impact of the advent of parliamentary representation: ‘L’acte de 1791, qui établit parmi nous le régime parlementaire, va donner à nos députés canadiens français l’occasion de faire entendre les premiers sons de l’éloquence canadienne’ (11).

Table 1.2  Periodization of Camille Roy, Tableau d’histoire de la littérature canadienne-française (1907)

|-----------|---------|---------|---------|

The second period again links literary expression with political development and a change of collective mentality, designated now as ‘l’esprit canadien’, an emerging national consciousness: ‘Avec la fondation du premier journal politique canadien-français, en 1806 [Le Canadien], commence une phase nouvelle de notre histoire. L’esprit canadien se fait plus inquiet, plus ardent, plus batailleur, et il va s’exprimer plus librement par la parole et par la plume’ (11–12). Roy, like Huston before him,47 sees 1820 as a turning point in political, intellectual and literary life; he associates this third period with the projected union of Lower and Upper Canada and the 1837–38 Rebellion: ‘Pendant toute cette période, on s’efforce de constituer plus fortement que jamais la vie publique, distincte et personnelle, du peuple canadien-français. Et comme rien n’exprime mieux que la littérature une conscience nationale, c’est à fortifier et développer la littérature canadienne-française que plusieurs esprits vont s’appliquer’ (14). It is in this third period that Roy situates the first great leap towards agency of French-Canadian literature: ‘Cette troisième période est donc celle où notre littérature nationale prit un premier et véritable essor’ (15).

For the fourth and final period of his history (1860–1900) Roy chooses as his turning point a date with literary significance, rather than relating this period of emergence with events in Canadian history. The date is associated with the ‘le mouvement littéraire de 1860’, also referred
to by Roy as ‘l’École patriotique de Québec’. These terms refer to a heterogeneous group of writers, including Crémazie, Chauveau, Taché, Gérin-Lajoie, Le May, Fréchette, Alfred Garneau and Casgrain, who met together at Crémazie’s bookshop in Quebec City. In characterizing this new period, Roy also looks to France, contact having been renewed in 1855, for positive influences (such as France’s recognition of some Canadian authors) and negative effects (the inevitably unequal struggle of Canadian literature against the quantity and quality of texts from France). Literature now takes centre stage, personified in the narrative: ‘la poésie canadienne, que Crémazie avait animée d’un souffle nouveau, essaya de se faire encore plus souple, plus variée, plus abondante’ (17); ‘[La poésie] paraît vouloir aujourd’hui s’émanciper de ces formes traditionnelles; elle se fait plus originaire, plus vive avec M. LeMay, dernière manière, avec MM. Nelligan, Lozeau, Charles Gill, et quelques autres qui se sont groupés dans l’“École littéraire de Montréal”’ (18); ‘En même temps que la poésie, la prose a multiplié ses œuvres pendant la quatrième période de notre vie littéraire. L’histoire surtout a considérablement agrandi le champ de ses travaux’ (18); ‘Il semble que depuis 1900 notre littérature canadienne est en voie de progrès’ (20). The use of such phrasing denotes a shift in focus, suggesting that French-Canadian literature now has sufficient energy and activity to be discussed in terms of an organic evolution in which by turn the literary genres, authors or groups of authors become the agents, fulfilling the promise of the ‘esprit canadien’ which emerged in the second period.

Roy’s first literary history displays a rather uneven relationship between history and literature. Specific historical events or developments give way in the later periods to questions of literary influence or institutional factors (such as the increased distribution of literature from France after 1855). The future-oriented conclusion presents the Tableau modestly as ‘une liste d’écrivains et d’œuvres qui nous permettent d’affirmer que notre littérature existe, et qu’elle est en progrès’ (74), progress which he argues will naturally follow if Canadian authors focus their efforts more closely on Canadian subject matter, which in turn will ensure the originality of their work. His conclusion thus puts the onus and the expectation on the next generation of authors (likely to emerge from his intended readership of collégiens) rather than on any more widely based social, political or institutional factors.

The Précis d’histoire littéraire: littérature canadienne-française was the work of sœur Marie-Élise (Évelyne Thibodeau) of the Sœurs de Sainte-Anne and is the only single-authored literary history in the corpus
to be the work of a woman. Critical assessments of its impact vary. Annette Hayward assesses its positive contribution to the development of ‘la rhétorique au féminin’, while Karine Cellard finds its significance, both as literary history and as an example of early feminist discourse, to be more limited. Her judgement is based on the predominantly traditionalist discourse concerning gender roles, the place assigned to women writers within the account and the generally traditional religious and patriotic values promoted particularly through the biographical details in the portraits biographiques. Indeed, both the incorporation of moral judgements within the biographical portraits and a number of rather clumsy presentational features (including the repetitive summary of key points) mark the text out as highly didactic, in keeping with its function as a textbook. As an example of ‘une rhétorique au féminin’, the narrative voice is certainly somewhat self-effacing and non-authoritative; assessments of the aesthetic value of texts and the literary status of authors are regularly based on citations from a range of established male critics (including Camille Roy, Émile Chartier and Charles Ab der Halden). This may, however, be a tactic employed to good effect within a field dominated by male authors and critics.

Indeed, while the ideology and theoretical underpinning of this literary history are not in themselves innovative, certain aspects of the work are highly significant. The Précis includes a number of French authors who migrated to Canada (not only in the colonial period); it devotes a separate section to ‘littérature féminine’ with entries on women poets, novelists and journalists; and the format of the literary history is updated, with the addition of photographs of authors (including eleven photographs of women) and an index. Perhaps most importantly, the Précis shows an awareness of the significance of institutional matters well before most contemporary critics (and arguably foreshadows the adoption of sociological theory by literary historians in the late 1970s–80s). Notably, the link between education and literature is highlighted in various ways, including a reference to the 1908 foundation of secondary education for girls by the Congrégation de Notre-Dame and a list of several of its former pupils now active as writers, many of them journalists. In this way women’s education is clearly linked with intellectual activity rather than spiritual vocations, so deviating from a traditionalist discourse. Elsewhere in entries on male authors, details are often included of where they studied (including periods of higher education in France). Thus, whether such innovations are by design or by chance, the Précis does present an alternative introduction to
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French-Canadian literature for early generations of female students, in its highlighting of women writers and the recognition of the role of a variety of institutional factors in literary life.

Table 1.3  Periodization of Sœurs de Sainte-Anne, Précis d’histoire littéraire: littérature canadienne-française (1928)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Periodization</th>
<th>1534–1760</th>
<th>1760–1820</th>
<th>1820–60</th>
<th>1860–1900</th>
<th>1900–</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

In terms of its periodization the Précis sets a new norm, breaking with Camille Roy’s practice of excluding the literature of la Nouvelle-France from French-Canadian literary history. The way in which this choice is defended shows a fine balance between deference and innovation. The introduction cites at length the definitions of the literary corpus given by Émile Chartier (author of literature textbooks for the collèges classiques for boys). Sœur Marie-Élise comments: ‘D’après cet exposé, une très longue période de l’Histoire canadienne est fermée à l’Histoire littéraire, – toute la période de la domination française’ (5, original emphasis). Rather than arguing the point, the author simply includes this ‘longue période’ as the first period of French-Canadian literature. The five periods into which her corpus is divided are largely consistent with Roy’s periodization, but the extension backwards and forwards in time make this literary history distinctive. The periods are characterized in terms of political significance (‘1534 à 1760, c’est-à-dire de la découverte du pays à sa conquête par les Anglais’),54 of literary activity (following, and quoting Roy, in the highlighting of 1860 as the inauguration of the mouvement littéraire) and above all in the link between literature and patriotism (the terms ‘patriotisme’ and ‘patriotique’ being used in the descriptions of the second, third and fourth periods). The presentation of the fifth period once again pays a silent tribute to Roy: ‘De 1900 à nos jours. Période contemporaine, remarquable par l’abondance des productions, un art plus parfait, et surtout par ce qu’on appelle la nationalisation de notre littérature’ (6–7). The weighting of the Précis emphasizes the contemporary period, nearly 200 of the 332 pages being devoted to the years since 1900. This is justified with the following statement, which indicates an awareness of the role of the market in the development of a national literature: ‘Il s’est publié, dans notre province, à partir de 1900, c’est-à-dire depuis vingt-sept ans, plus de livres et de brochures que dans les cent trente-six années qui ont suivi l’établissement de l’imprimerie à Québec, en 1764’ (137). So this female-authored literary history not only
looks back to include in its survey the period in which the crucial bond between the convents and the education of women was established; it also looks forward to a literary landscape in which women play a more prominent part.

Roy’s 1939 Manuel d’histoire de la littérature canadienne de langue française is available in a posthumous edition which incorporates both the author’s amendments up to 1942 and the editor’s typographical corrections. It adopts a different periodization from the 1907 Tableau. This is not only because it can now include forty years of the twentieth century; Roy has also extended the coverage backwards to 1608 to include writings from the period of the French regime in Canada (but unlike the Précis he does not include the period of exploration from 1534). Unlike his earlier manual, which subdivided the period from 1760 to 1860 into three periods, the 1962 edition merges these three into a long ‘Période des origines’, better to reflect the balance of literary production (though in the process de-emphasizing the French abandonment and the change of colonial regime). Consequently his account now presents a slow process of emergence of a literature from the days of explorers and evangelizers writing for a French audience to the mid-nineteenth century, when Quebec-born writers were producing works for a relatively restricted Canadian reading public. As in the first of his literary histories, it is 1860, marking the emergence of the Quebec-based literary movement, which is seen as significant, a turning point effected by a literary moment rather than a politically significant event such as the 1867 British North America Act which established the Canadian Confederation. The next pivotal moment in the periodization is 1900, the beginning of the new century. But in the overview of progress (which is how the narrative presents it), Roy refers to a number of influences, within and beyond Canada, including a paragraph on 1895 and the formation of the École littéraire de Montréal; this is the alternative date used in a number of later literary histories to signal the beginning of a new era.

Table 1.4 Periodization of Camille Roy, Manuel d’histoire de la littérature canadienne de langue française (1962 [based on 1939 edition])

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1608–1860</th>
<th>1860–1900</th>
<th>1900–45</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Période des origines</td>
<td>(posthumous editions)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How has the literary history of francophone Canada been told?

In the 1939 work Roy’s periodization is integrated more fully into the structure of the volume than in the 1907 Tableau. The first chapter, entitled ‘La race française au Canada’, gives an overview of the history and spirit of the French-Canadian people and a discussion of the situation of the French language in Canada before outlining the periodization to be adopted. The book is then arranged, still by genre, but in three separate periods, each presented by a brief introduction to the literature of the period in relation to key developments in literary and cultural life, including significant institutional influences. Thus in the introduction to the period 1900 to 1945, entitled ‘Le renouveau littéraire: 1900 à nos jours’, Roy refers to literary movements and groupings, to the influence of access to French literature, but also to the development of higher education in Quebec and the work of the Société du parler français au Canada, founded in 1902, all of which he links to ‘le développement progressif de notre vie nationale’ which in turn has encouraged ‘un accroissement de vie pour notre littérature’, so fulfilling the hope/prediction expressed in the conclusion to the 1907 Tableau of the ‘nationalisation’ of French-Canadian literature.

As seen in the discussion of titles in the previous section, Roy’s successive literary histories reflect his response to various developments in intellectual and political life. This volume, updated to include the latest work of contemporary writers, is focused very much on the state of French-Canadian literature in the present, rather than presenting a case for the future realization of a national literature, which the 1907 volume had offered. This is both because francophone Canada now had a much richer corpus of literature and because the nationalist fervour which had inspired the earlier Roy no longer seemed so vital or so attractive. Cellard notes the consequences of this shift: ‘lorsqu’on la formule en d’autres termes que la “nationalisation” de la littérature, cette visée pédagogique ne constitue plus l’aboutissement et le centre symbolique du système discursif élaboré par la mise en récit. Ce sont alors les écrivains [...] qui deviennent les acteurs réels de cette mise en intrigue.’ The conclusion, no longer including his call for a nationalization of literature, now focuses more on the defence of those ‘universal’ humanist values promoted most ably through the secondary education system of the collège classique and on the central importance of the French language. Cellard reflects on the diminished status both of the nation and of history in Roy’s final literary history, wondering whether the nationalism that was developing in the late 1930s in Quebec had taken on a life that Roy was not ready to embrace: ‘a-t-il [...] été victime
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de sa modération, se recroquevillant défensivement sur ses idées au fur et à mesure que le nationalisme canadien-français dont il avait été l’un des promoteurs outrepasait sa conception culturelle, élitiste et bon-ententiste du patriotisme?57 Certainly by the late 1930s there was a range of different, mostly secular voices, grouped around reviews such as La Relève, which would take a new approach to literature and would write its history very differently. Nevertheless, as the 1962 date of the edition cited here indicates, Roy’s literary histories (1907–62) had a longer life and more captive an audience than any other histories of francophone Canadian literature.58

An alternative voice in the 1940s
Berthelot Brunet’s Histoire de la littérature canadienne-française is included in the corpus as much for its quirkiness as for its value as a literary history. Blodgett suggests that the work ‘may […] be read within the tradition that Camille Roy fostered’ and that ‘with the exception of his particular engagement with the contemporary, his understanding of the canon differs little from that of his predecessors’.59 Yet, as Cellard points out, this literary history ‘apparaît sans doute trop subjective pour se plier au dogmatisme attendu d’un professeur de collège classique’, its contemporary approach deviating too far from ‘l’usage didactique que l’on fait habituellement de l’histoire nationale’.60 In fact the differences between Roy and Brunet strike me as far wider than the similarities; this is evident both in the distinctive use of periodization and in the degree of ambivalence and playfulness of the narrative.

Table 1.5 Periodization of Berthelot Brunet, Histoire de la littérature canadienne-française (1946)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Precursors la Nouvelle-France</th>
<th>By genre. Roughly 1900 as turning point, though varies by genre ('la poésie s’émancipa vers 1890–1900'), p. 52</th>
<th>−1945</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The first thing to say about Brunet’s periodization is that it is vague.61 He gives few dates, either because he assumes a well-informed (educated, adult) reader or because his interest lies more in the literature than its history. Table 1.5 is a mere approximation of his temporal structure which, as can be seen below, the chapter headings themselves do not reveal:

Introduction
L’histoire
How has the literary history of francophone Canada been told?

Les romanciers de notre époque victorienne
Les chroniqueurs
Le journalisme avant le grand journal
Les orateurs
La poésie avant la vraie poésie
La poésie voyage
La littérature des clercs
Les femmes
Les journaux et les revues
Les professionnels
Les romanciers véritables

Yet while Brunet’s historical markers may be few and far between, the narrative of his literary history does have a strong shape in time and one that is distinctive for the time of publication. The Introduction states: ‘L’histoire de la littérature canadienne-française offre cette singularité que ses meilleurs écrivains se rencontrent à ses débuts et à la période contemporaine: le prologue et l’épilogue ont plus d’importance que le corps de l’ouvrage.’62 His judgement of much of the literary production between the ‘débuts’ (la Nouvelle-France) and the contemporary period (which, he implies, starts somewhere between 1890 and 1910) is blunt: ‘S’ils comptent des noms remarquables, les âges intermédiaires, jugés dans l’ensemble, ne s’élèvent guère au-dessous d’une honorable médiocrité’ (4). So, unlike most francophone narratives of French-Canadian literature, Brunet’s work constructs a trajectory which starts with la Nouvelle-France as the high point (Cartier, Marc Lescarbot, Champlain, Les Relations des jésuites, Marie de l’Incarnation, le père Charlevoix, le baron La Hontan all categorized as the precursors of French-Canadian literature), then declines after the Conquest and British rule, to re-emerge slowly from what he refers to as ‘le “dark age” de notre histoire nationale et de notre histoire littéraire’ (9). His use of English here is telling; it acts as a self-conscious reference to the process of acculturation to which francophone Canadians had been subjected under British rule. But francophone Canadians also had to liberate themselves from the cultural domination of France, or rather from the models of French literature mediated to French-Canadian readers by the clergy-dominated establishment. Poetry is the first genre to show the potential for autonomous development: ‘La poésie canadienne s’émancipa entre 1890 et 1900, non pas qu’elle ait coupé toutes ses amarres, mais, timidement, elle osa prendre deux ou trois bordées. La poésie avait toujours le visage tourné envers la France: il lui arriva
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pourtant de croire pour un instant, à ses propres forces’ (52). Literature in other genres is slow to follow suit: ‘jusqu’en 1900 ou 1910, notre littérature compte surtout des poètes et des critiques, exclusion faite, bien entendu, de nos innombrables orateurs’ (11). But as certain chapter headings indicate, French Canada does, by 1945, have ‘real’ literature, produced by writers of serious literary merit, including the poetry of Anne Hébert and Hector de Saint-Denys Garneau, novels by Ringuet, Roger Lemelin, Gabrielle Roy and Robert Charbonneau, and the radio sketches of Claude-Henri Grignon ‘une des œuvres marquantes de la littérature canadienne, pour populaire qu’elle soit’ (122).

Whereas previous literary historians referred solemnly to a range of causes for the late development of French-Canadian literature, Brunet’s analysis is often irreverent. Thus, referring to the ‘dark age’ which followed the Conquest he writes: ‘Ce n’est ni le lieu, ni l’occasion de parler politique: on n’en comprend pas moins que nos pères avaient d’autres chats à fouetter qu’à rimer des vers galants ou qu’à composer des discours historiques’ (9). Here it is a change of register which gives the line a slightly comic, ironic slant. In another case he criticizes the religious and literary establishment which dominated the latter part of the nineteenth century in terms that distance him clearly from the literary histories of Catholic pedagogues such as Roy and sœur Marie-Élise:

N’oublions pas que nous avons subi l’influence de la littérature catholique du Second Empire (et point seulement celle de Veuillot), et que les dernières vagues du jansénisme français battaient encore les murs de ces auteurs que la province de Québec connut surtout par les distributions de prix et les achats des dévotes à l’aise. (25)

Yet while in his language and the certainty of his personal preferences in literature Brunet appears unorthodox, another aspect of his narrative technique is somewhat more difficult to decipher, that is, his frequent references to French authors. Often this takes the form of a simple comparison (‘[Thomas Chapais] est à M. Groulx ce qu’était le comte de Mun à Charles Maurras’, 40), but he also uses antonomasia (the use of a proper name as a common noun, as in ‘notre Voltaire’ or ‘le Balzac de nos jours’). Élisabeth Nardout-Lafarge analyses the contradictory effects of such a device, arguing that ‘l’usage de cette figure constitue […] un pacte de lecture, établi sur la connivence’. As he drops his parallels into his narrative, Brunet is using them both to legitimize his own account of French-Canadian literature (and his own status as a critic) and to test the literary knowledge of his readers. Yet in deploying the figure,
as in his description of François-Xavier Garneau’s *Histoire du Canada* as ‘nos sagas et notre *Chanson de Roland*’ (20), he draws a parallel, momentarily claiming comparability and challenging the uniqueness of masterpieces; at the same time the very comparison underlines the distance between the works, a distance which always disadvantages the minor literature. The ambivalence of the rhetorical figure resembles, as Nardout-Lafarge points out, the contradictory nature of Brunet’s own position, arguing for the recognition of French-Canadian literature while forever circling back to French models and measures, a position which his irony seeks, perhaps, to conceal.

**Interdisciplinary overtures**

A former literary critic for *Le Devoir*, Pierre de Grandpré was working at the Ministry of Cultural Affairs when he took on the editorship of the four-volume *Histoire de la littérature française du Québec*, a project which was very much of its time. He assembled a team of about 25 contributors, experts in a range of fields, including historians Pierre Savard and Claude Galarneau; sociologists Jean-Charles Falardeau, Marcel Rioux and Fernand Dumont; geographer Michel Brochu; linguist Gaston Dulong; literary scholars Michel Tétu, Jean Éthier-Blais, Gilles Marcotte, Réginald Hamel, Paul Wyczynski and Georges-André Vachon; and literary critics such as Guy Boulizon and Alain Pontaut. The combination of social scientists and arts-trained contributors was in keeping with the aims and ethos of the new post-secondary education to be offered in the cégeps, but the diversity of their methodological approaches made the editor’s task difficult. (In this respect it will be worth comparing the structure later adopted for *La Vie littéraire au Québec* by Lemire and his team whose projects similarly combine social science and literary methodologies.)

Table 1.6  Periodization of Pierre de Grandpré, ed., *Histoire de la littérature française du Québec*, 4 vols (1967–69)

| Vol. 1 1534–1900 | Vol. 2 1900–45 | Vol. 3 1945 à nos jours | Vol. 4 1945 à nos jours |

Table 1.6 shows the overall structure of de Grandpré’s four volumes. Periodization within the volumes varies between strictly historical
What is Québécois Literature?

divisions and more literary and ideological categories. So, 1534–1900 is presented in four parts:

1. Les Écrits de la Nouvelle France (1534–1760)
2. Aux lendemains de la conquête (1760–1830)
3. Le Romantisme libéral (1830–1860) (with an introductory essay entitled ‘Une affirmation de soi au souffle de la liberté et de l’avenir’)
4. Un post-romantisme civique (1860–1900) (the introductory essay entitled ‘Le repli traditionaliste’)

Here the turning towards conservatism in 1860 is presented as having a negative impact on the emergence of an autonomous intellectual and literary culture, whereas the previous section (1830–60) stresses a sense of awakening, of developing self-consciousness, of future liberation. Blodgett cites this construction of the period 1860–1900 as a ‘repli’ as indicative of Grandpré’s own narrative of a rise towards nationhood, and in particular towards the Révolution tranquille: ‘Thus the present explains the past, or, to use a more political term, it colonizes it, so to speak, thereby compelling the needs of the past to be those of the present.’ Seen from the perspective of this necessary rise towards autonomy, the conservatism of the 1860s represents a step backwards, the end of the liberalism of the previous period rather than the beginning of something new. Volume II divides into two parts – ‘Obstacles et croissance. L’entrée dans le XXe siècle (1900–1930)’ and ‘La crise de croissance de l’entre-deux-guerres (1930–1945)’ – the turning point being defined by the economic crisis of the Depression years rather than by any literary, intellectual or ideological feature. The division between the final two volumes reflects some of the more general unevenness in the project, Volume III being devoted solely to poetry, while Volume IV follows the format of earlier volumes, having chapters on individual genres (the novel, theatre, history, journalism, essay and literary criticism). But it is Volume III which emerges as the high point of the emergence of an autonomous literature in Quebec, largely because of de Grandpré’s view of the nature of poetic language. Volume III is subdivided into chapters which follow a broadly chronological sequence, starting with chapters on ‘Les grands aînés’ (Grandbois, Hébert, Saint-Denys Garneau), through ‘L’héritage symboliste’ (Hertel, Bessette, Hénault) to ‘Du Refus global à une poésie d’appartenance’ (Giguère, Lalonde, Gauvreau) and ‘Poètes du pays réinventé’ (including Leclerc and Vigneault). As the chapters are also concerned with different poetic forms and styles, there are a number of overlaps and
The literary history of Francophone Canada has been told in a way that evokes a movement towards the future, a new nation. This is seen both through images of filiation and membership of a future collective. The predominance of the poetic voice in de Grandpré's literary history reflects his understanding of the special role of poetic language, influenced by Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological philosophy. For Merleau-Ponty, poetic language is 'une manifestation, une révélation de l’être intime et du lien psychique qui nous unit au monde et à nos semblables'.

Poetry, as explained by Blodgett, can cast the past in a new light; it can thus overcome 'the problem of beginnings and endings, as well as the silences of the past, by becoming a signifying intention that exculpates Quebec from the possible opprobrium of having been a colonizer, of having collaborated with its colonizer in turn, and with having, as a result, strayed into the non-being of an unworthy, not to say, false past and false consciousness'. Seen in this light, de Grandpré's literary history becomes a 'harbinger of freedom', a 'triumphal act that, by “assuming” the present, is capable of transforming the past so as to find a way out of it'. The meaning of the different periods presented in the successive volumes has to be understood in terms of the project which de Grandpré sees at the heart of Quebec's literature – its eventual autonomy and liberation from the past.

Each volume is introduced by de Grandpré, which gives some overall continuity, and by an essay of a broadly sociological nature. Within the volumes, the input of social scientists tends to be most evident either in these introductory context chapters or in subsections which discuss work in their own disciplines (by historians, journalists or essayists). So, in the volume on poetry, Fernand Dumont contributes an introductory chapter on 'Vie intellectuelle et société depuis 1945: la recherche d’une nouvelle conscience'. Here he outlines the relationship between literature and society as follows: 'le milieu social, par le sort qu’il fait aux hommes, par le contexte qu’il offre à leurs angoisses et à leurs rêves, contribue à former cette expérience dont la littérature est le sous-produit et, à sa manière, le sens'. However, Dumont's relatively brief contribution declares itself to be more of a personal témoignage than a sociological analysis: 'Le sociologue dispose [...] de techniques et de concepts qui sont autant de procédés d’objectivité; mais je ne peux en user dans ce bref exposé. On trouvera donc ici moins une tranche d’histoire ou une monographie, qu’un témoignage.' The subjectivity of his analysis is clear both in his
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lengthy citation of Gabrielle Roy’s return in 1947 to Saint-Henri, the working-class setting of Bonheur d’occasion, and in his recollection of his working-class father’s plea for him to bear witness to the lives of his class: ‘toi qui sais écrire, il faudrait que tu dises tout cela…”69 Nor do the author-based entries develop any consistent approach towards the sociological significance of the works discussed or towards the factors which may have influenced their production or reception. Indeed, the presentation of authors is not unlike the format adopted in an anthology. Authors are represented by extracts from their work, with varying amounts of analysis or commentary, followed by biographical details and literary influences, and bibliographical information. Together with photographs of many of the authors (and portraits or drawings of earlier writers), the format reinforces an author/works-focused literary history in which the links, comparisons and contrasts are only developed in the introductory overview of the period or genre. Cellard points out that the place of biographical detail is considerably downgraded, being placed at the end of the entries,70 but as she argues, many of the contributors continue to ‘mythifier la figure du poète et à monumentaliser ses incarnations singulières’.71 As will be seen, the collaboration between scholars at the Centre de recherche en littérature québécoise at Laval University, under Lemire’s leadership from its inception in 1971, developed a radically different approach, both to the presentation of authors and the relationship between literary works and their mode and context of production, one which is much more thoroughly grounded in sociological methodology.

Two literary histories for the French market

In 1974 the Presses Universitaires de France published two very different histories of francophone Canadian literature. La Littérature canadienne-française, the revised fifth edition of the 1960 Histoire de la littérature canadienne-française, was the work of Gérard Tougas, professor at the University of British Columbia, where he founded the Centre de recherche en histoire littéraire du Canada français. In the same year PUF published in the ‘Que sais-je?’ series a much shorter work, aimed at the student market, with the title La Littérature québécoise, by Laurent Mailhot, an academic from the université de Montréal. The shapes which their literary histories take can be seen in Tables 1.7 and 1.8, in which the patterns of periodization differ considerably. Tougas, like Roy in his earlier literary histories, excludes the period of French rule from the proper sphere of French-Canadian literature. The dates chosen for the first three sections are tied to events of literary significance: the introduction of the printing
press in Quebec in 1764, the publication of the first volume of François-Xavier Garneau’s *Histoire du Canada* in 1845, and that author’s death in 1865. Historical writing being classified as a genre of literature at the time, Garneau is presented as the real starting point of a distinctive French-Canadian literature, a literature which Tougas sees as marked by the literary romanticism of the early nineteenth century, which developed a distinctive style in Canada. The third period is therefore triggered by Garneau’s death, but also by his enduring influence. The ‘modern’ chapter begins with the new century (but a number of pages then return to discuss Nelligan whose work was complete by 1899) and the ‘contemporary’ chapter opens with the Fall of France and the subsequent transfer of publishing from Paris to Montreal in the early 1940s.

Table 1.7 Periodization of Gérard Tougas, *La Littérature canadienne-française*, 5th edn (1974)

| 1764–1845 | 1845–65 | 1865–99 | 1900–39 | 1940–
| Les difficiles débuts | L’âge de Garneau | Vers la création d’une tradition littéraire | L’époque moderne | L’époque contemporaine (1974 edition takes in early 1970s)

A number of aspects distinguish this literary history from others. The last page of the conclusion leaves the reader (and the authors of the future), on the threshold (but only on the threshold) of a fully realized national literature: ‘Les grands classiques de la littérature canadienne-française ne manqueront pas de surgir de la terre laurentienne pour peu que les écrivains y mettent suffisamment d’ardeur et de persévérance.’72 In a way this echoes the works of Lareau and the early Camille Roy. But Tougas’s narrative creates a somewhat different version of a future-oriented trajectory; here, the future is not simply the recognition of Quebec’s literary autonomy in accordance with a nationalist project, but involves assuming a leading role within a future francophonie. The brief preface and the conclusion to the 1974 edition look forward to ‘une littérature française agrandie aux dimensions du monde’ in a post-Empire world, in which French-Canadian literature can take a leading role in the exciting new context of la francophonie.73 Blodgett finds another difference between Tougas’s literary history and those of his contemporaries. Tougas’s narrative, he argues, is characterized not by the emergence of a national destiny but more by the
successive phases of a central tension, which results from the continuing working through of currents of influence from metropolitan France and anglophone North America. Arguably, Tougas’s personal trajectory (born and educated in Alberta, he followed postgraduate studies in France and the USA before pursuing his academic career at the University of British Columbia) may have given him a rather different perspective on francophone Canadian literary history. For Blodgett the tension which he detects in Tougas’s work between France and anglophone North America seems to lead to a desire for stasis and equilibrium ‘a condition of inertia [which] argues against a notion of history that addresses events in time’.74 The tension which underlies Tougas’s narrative is related not only to the francophone Canadian experience of being colonizers and colonized, but also to their future postcolonial status. As Tougas comments, the francophone population has created a literature which is highly distinctive, but which shares features with the literature of other colonized populations: ‘Par un réflexe dont le Canada français n’offre pas le seul exemple dans l’histoire des peuples conquis, ces écrivains ont filtré les éléments étrangers qui, avec le temps, sont venus se greffer sur la sensibilité nationale.’75 Rather than seeing this reflex as indicative of stasis, I would suggest that Tougas’s use of terms such as ‘filtrer’ and ‘se greffer’ prefigures the debates within postcolonial studies about the notion of cultural hybridity, in which case the ongoing tension in Tougas’s literary history might be better seen in terms of hybridity, characterized by Dennis Walder as invoking ‘ideas of cross-fertilization, of the potential richness of traffic between and across boundaries’.76

Like Tougas, Mailhot’s narrative also looks to the future to give meaning to his history, but his is a future firmly focused on Quebec. This may well be an effect of the specific political context of its production. Blodgett points out that whereas the final volume of de Grandpré’s Histoire de la littérature française du Québec was completed before the October Crisis of 1970, Mailhot’s volume would have been a work in progress in the early 1970s and as such is more cautious. Not only were there growing concerns about the polarization between Canada and Quebec; there was also a longer-term fear that the domination of English-language culture would eventually eradicate francophone culture in North America.77 But given its restricted format (the book is only 128 pages long) and the target audience being non-Canadian students, there is relatively little space to explore the current situation of francophone Canadians.78 The periodization in Table 1.8 marks out significant periods in Quebec’s political development.
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Table 1.8  Periodization of Laurent Mailhot, *La Littérature québécoise* (1974)

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However, the subtitles to the second, third and fourth sections suggest that something else is going on. The choice of 1837 as the end of ‘Origines’ and the beginning of ‘Cheminements et reflets’ marks not a new stage of development, but rather the beginning of a long period of stasis, which Mailhot presents as the result of the failure of the Rebellion. Once more, François-Xavier Garneau emerges as a key figure, but Mailhot characterizes his position as ‘au fond pessimiste, tragique. Sa conclusion convient parfaitement au siècle d’inaction et d’exaltation qui suit 1837.’ (25) Subtitles such as ‘1860: le mouvement immobile’ (27) and comments such as ‘passant d’un préromantisme (1830) à un post-romantisme affadi (1860), la littérature, malgré Chateaubriand et Scott, ne trouvera pas tout à fait son romantisme’ (31) reinforce this sense of the ‘cheminements et reflets’ amounting to very little. The third period (‘Entre la campagne et la ville’) draws not so much a line of progress from the rural to the urban, but rather a sense of being caught between the two, between the urban reality of the majority of the population and a traditionalist rural mythology which is still proving to be a strong factor. Blodgett sees the central narrative structure being not one of constant progress, but of a gradual shift towards the future. The final section, ‘De la province au pays’, does finally seem to indicate a movement towards autonomy, the finding of a voice, as the first section of the chapter, ‘L’âge de la parole’, suggests. But as with Tougas, Mailhot looks to the future for the realization of québécois literature, a future still only to be anticipated. In this he is far less positive than de Grandpré, although this anticipation still angles the history towards the eventual achievement of a national literature: ‘Notre littérature n’est pas une littérature “arrivée”; elle s’annonce, elle arrive’ (121). Significantly, his conclusion draws on two colonial figures which allude to the source of this incompletion, which could be interpreted as an ongoing process of indigenization. He cites André Brochu’s judgement of *Menaud, maître-draveur*:

notre côté ‘peau-rouge’ et notre côté ‘pied-noir’. Peau et pied, enveloppe
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et racine, notre corps est de plus en plus un, alors qu’autrefois, hier, nous avions l’esprit et la chair tournés vers deux directions opposées. […] La littérature québécoise est une certitude et un doute, le discours et l’écriture d’un pays. (121–22)

However, Mailhot’s text also opens up another way of thinking about periodization, which rethinks the linear relationship between past and present. He sets up the familiar question in the introduction about the existence of la littérature québécoise: ‘La littérature québécoise existe-t-elle, et comme littérature et comme québécoise?’ His response is clear: ‘On ne se pose plus la question.’ A canon exists, enacted through a series of returns and re-readings, which together establish, and continue to reshape, a literary tradition: ‘Depuis Maria Chapdelaine, depuis Refus global et Tit-Coq, depuis tel prix Fémina ou Médicis? Depuis que Groulx lit Garneau; Savard, Cartier; Ducharme, Nelligan; Aquin, les Patriotes’ (7). This may encourage readers to see themselves engaged in the legitimation of a literary corpus, in which texts are linked across time both by affiliations, influences and preferences and by contrasts and oppositions, both literary and ideological.

Literary history as collaborative, interdisciplinary research

The eight volumes of the Dictionnaire des œuvres littéraires du Québec (DOLQ) and the six volumes of La Vie littéraire au Québec together constitute an incomparable research tool. They offer access to the literary corpus of Quebec in very different ways. While DOLQ presents alphabetically arranged entries by title, La Vie littéraire offers a narrative account of literary activity on a range of levels that together compose the system that is the champ littéraire. These two projects would seem to be at opposite ends of the spectrum of encyclopaedic and narrative literary history, but this is not entirely the case, neither in terms of their respective structures, nor when it comes to content and methodology.

Table 1.9 Periodization of Maurice Lemire, et al., Dictionnaire des œuvres littéraires du Québec, 8 vols (1978–2011)

|--------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|

In 1978 the first volume of DOLQ appeared, to be followed by a further seven, the latest of which, published in 2011, covers works
How has the literary history of francophone Canada been told?

published between 1986 and 1990. The declared aim of DOLQ is primarily archival or archaeological. Lemire presents the first volume as ‘un apport à l’histoire littéraire et culturelle du Québec’, ‘un inventaire aussi complet que possible’ (I, xv) rather than an attempt to offer any literary evaluation of the material. The corpus assembled includes the literature of la Nouvelle-France, which forms a major part of the first volume, but in his introduction to this volume Lemire focuses primarily on the nineteenth century, seen in the light of the Conquest. This he explains by the wealth of existing research on the pre-Conquest era compared with the relatively under-researched nineteenth century.

The format adopted is that of a dictionary, the arrangement being alphabetical by title, not author. The index of proper names indicates in bold those pages on which the author’s works are discussed and a bibliography of the primary texts included is listed by author, so allowing the reader to search by author as well as title. However, the alphabetical listing of works by title has the effect of displacing the author as the centre of significance, which in turn produces arbitrary and interesting juxtapositions for the reader. The effects of this departure from the author/biography/bibliography format are heightened by the short chronological span covered by individual volumes of DOLQ. Whereas the first volume covers the whole period from 1534 to 1900, the periodization of subsequent volumes reflects the rising curve of literary production, as can be seen in Table 1.9. The latest four volumes each cover a five-year period. This means that researchers working on authors such as Gabrielle Roy, Anne Hébert, Yves Thériault or Marie-Claire Blais need to consult six separate volumes to check references to their works published prior to 1990. Since these entries may also be written by a range of contributors, no single line of interpretation is offered. Entries focus primarily on the named text, but other information is incorporated into the entry. A brief biographical section is supplied in italics in the first entry on an author (that is, in the entry devoted to their first publication). This is followed by a presentation of the work (attributed in each case to one of the contributors). In some cases these are quite extensive critical analyses and may also include brief references to other works by the same author or by other authors, an evaluation of its qualities, its reception, its position within the genre or its significance in terms of literary history. The entry concludes with a section printed in smaller font listing bibliographical information, including details of successive editions, translations, reviews and critical works.
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As a research tool the series offers a unique resource in terms of its comprehensive scope and the unexpected results of the juxtaposition of works of completely different genres, literary status and authorship. The overall effect of the methodology and organization of the corpus is that the literary works are listed rather than classified, and one could argue that the real potential of DOLQ as a contribution to literary history is only fully appreciated in chance discoveries or in combination with other research tools. The entries do supply a certain amount of cross-referencing and the index by proper name gives access to an author’s other works within the period covered. But in the absence of any thematic or formal index (by genre, for instance), DOLQ does not allow for searching by other categories. Perhaps in recognition of this lack, the digitized first volume has added a search feature by date of publication, by author, literary movement and genre; such a facility will doubtless enhance the research potential of the other volumes when they are digitized.

The research centre’s website outlines the aim of the series as follows: ‘Il se veut un ouvrage de référence sur toutes les œuvres considérées comme faisant partie de la littérature québécoise, sans égard pour leur popularité ou pour leur qualité, mais en regard de leur littéralité à l’époque de leur parution.’ Nevertheless, while encyclopaedic in format, there are many features within the work of reference which reveal both the training and tastes of the literary historian and the ideological position of the project. This is particularly noticeable in the presentation of the corpus in the first two volumes. Each volume includes an introductory essay by the editors on the literature of the period, in which the format shifts away from the encyclopaedic to the narrative or indeed to questions of literary taste. Given the principle of inclusivity that drives the project, Lemire’s introduction to the first volume strikes a somewhat ambivalent tone. He assures his readers that, as this is primarily an archival project, the editors are not concerned with literary evaluation, yet he cites Baudelaire in what could be seen as a desire for literary legitimation of his own critical voice: ‘Du passé lumineux recueillir tout vestige’ (I, xv). Indeed, Lemire offers his introduction to Volume I, covering the period 1534–1900, as some sort of compensation for the aesthetic inadequacies of the works presented in the dictionary proper:

Pour que le lecteur ne soit pas trop dérouté par la monotonie des sujets, les maladresses de composition, les fautes de style et la tendance moralisatrice qui caractérisait la littérature au xixe siècle, nous avons tenu à lui
exposer la conjoncture dans laquelle cette littérature s'est développée et à lui donner quelques explications sur les principaux genres littéraires qu'elle a cultivés. (I, xv)

The introduction also expresses a judgement on the collective psyche of the French-Canadian population in the nineteenth century for their compliance with the dominant ideology, a compliance which it is suggested has seriously retarded the progress of literature in Quebec:

la pauvreté de notre littérature au siècle dernier ne vient pas d’abord de l’indifférence à l’égard des lettres, ni de l’ignorance des grands courants de pensée, ni encore d’un manque de talents, mais bien d’un univers psychologique à caractère surtout négatif où l’on préfère l’inaction à l’erreur. Il est vraiment curieux que les Canadiens, – si audacieux par ailleurs, – se soient ainsi transformés en défenseurs de l’orthodoxie. (I, xlii)

This tone of blame (or is it auto-critique?) continues in the introduction to Volume II, where Lemire contrasts the situation and responses of the reading public of 1900–39 with his 1980 perspective: ‘Cette impression générale de statisme qui se dégageait de la littérature de l’époque pouvait donner un sentiment de quiétude qui convenait bien à des populations habituées aux réponses toutes faites de leur religion, mais il éloignait les esprits curieux qui cherchaient dans la littérature des interrogations nouvelles et n’y trouvaient que des refrains assoupissants’ (II, lxix). The narrative which underlies DOLQ, that of the rise towards nationhood, is evident in familiar images incorporated into his concluding remarks: ‘Pourtant, comme des eaux souterraines, les courants de l’authenticité verbale n’en poursuivaient pas moins leur chemin vers la lumière’ (II, lxix). But for the DOLQ team, the figure of the nation not only informs their presentation of individual texts, it also refers to the distinctive patterns of institutionalization of literature in Quebec. In the introduction to Volume V, the editorial team clarify their position: they do not consider Quebec’s literature to be either a sub-product of French literature, or part of a worldwide wave of francophone literature, or a strand of Canadian literature: ‘Avec le DOLQ, nous avons tâché de dissiper toute ambiguïté à ce sujet: en tant que littéraire autonome, la littérature québécoise possède ses propres critères de légitimation et ses propres instances de consécration’ (V, lxviii). The introductory essays to each volume give a brief overview of publications in different genres during the period, but this section is equally concerned with aspects such as the literary market, distribution, academic publishing, theatre
troupes, literary associations, the changing status of writers, all of which set the texts within the context of literary production rather than offering threads of access into the corpus. The next series to be discussed is dedicated specifically to the study of the processes which are involved in the production, institutionalization and legitimation of this national literature.

In 1991 the first volume of *La Vie littéraire au Québec* appeared, also under Lemire’s editorship. Six volumes have appeared to date, the latest of which is devoted to the period 1919–33, which means that the whole of the series is devoted to the period treated in the first two volumes of DOLQ. A further two volumes are planned to cover 1934–47 and 1948–c.1965. The coverage of historical periods is therefore quite different in the two series, there being more to the history of literary activity than the number of titles printed. Whereas DOLQ included the literary production of la Nouvelle-France in its corpus, the first volume of La Vie littéraire opens with the establishment of the first printing press in Quebec in 1764. The period of French colonial rule is constructed as national heritage, thus stressing the post-colonial significance of the emerging literature, but also, of course the newly colonial relationship of the francophone population of Canada to Britain. As Table 1.10 indicates, the volumes cover quite short time spans.

|--------|-----------|---------|---------|---------|-----------|---------|----------------|----------------|

While *La Vie littéraire* takes a very different approach to literature as an object of research from DOLQ’s focus on establishing the corpus of the national literature, its choice of methodology and organization has some similar effects. As with DOLQ, *La Vie littéraire* moves the focus away from a model in which the author is the central protagonist, and the subject becomes the literary field in its widest conception, in which authors and texts appear as part of the larger picture. Describing their work as ‘un outil de référence à caractère scientifique’, the editors explain their aim as follows:

Cette histoire littéraire n’est pas principalement organisée autour des œuvres ou des auteurs. Elle apparaît plutôt comme celle de la constitution de la littérature québécoise et elle concerne en premier lieu l’étude
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des conditions d’émergence et du cheminement par lequel la littérature acquiert son autonomie et sa légitimation, c’est-à-dire sa reconnaissance sociale. (I, vii)

Whereas in de Grandpré’s edited volumes the structure proved to be problematic and the combination of social scientific, arts and humanities methodologies was not integrated into the project, here the sociological approach has become central not only to the theoretical framework but also to the internal structure and the narrative of the successive volumes. The editors draw on Foucault’s notion of literature as ‘une formation discursive’ and Bourdieu’s concept of the literary field when setting out their methodological approach:

[là littérature québécoise] découpe dans la société un ensemble de textes et de pratiques singulières, qui se structurent en un ‘champ’, selon la théorie de Pierre Bourdieu, et constituent un ‘domaine discursif’ participant de ce que Marc Angenot a nommé le ‘discours social’. Ces approches ont servi à fonder la constitution de la littérature sur les cinq processus suivants: l’enseignement littéraire, le milieu des créateurs, la formation des frontières, le discours sur la littérature, la manifestation du littéraire dans les œuvres. (I, ix)

These five processes are followed through from volume to volume, giving a fixed and repeated structure to the analysis of the trajectory of Quebec’s literary history. At the heart of the narrative is ‘la poursuite problématique d’un statut culturel autonome et légitime, tant en regard des autres activités intellectuelles qu’en rapport avec les autres littératures, en particulier la littérature française’ (I, viii). The structure adopted allows the editors to analyse the various factors which are operating in the establishment of the literary field.

Each volume is organized according to the following structure:

Présentation:
L’enseignement littéraire
Le milieu des créateurs
La formation des frontières
Le discours sur la littérature
La manifestation du littéraire dans les œuvres
La périodisation
Introduction
Chapitre 1. Les déterminations étrangères du champ littéraire
Chapitre 2. Les conditions générales
Chapitre 3. Les agents: individus et regroupements
Chapitre 4. Le marché de la littérature
The ‘Présentation’ explains the methodology, adapting the content to suit the specific period of each volume. Each of the chapters covers a particular aspect of the literary field across the whole period under examination in that volume. This has the effect for the reader of a gradual building up of a series of layers within and against which the literary production of the period is written, circulated and received. The specific subdivisions within the seven chapters may vary slightly from volume to volume; so, for example, in Volume I, Chapter 1 covers the literature of la Nouvelle-France as the literary heritage of the French colonial period, whereas Volumes V and VI consider the continuing influence of French literature, of Catholicism and of American literature on the literary field in Quebec. But the recurrence of the same structure and general categories contributes both to a consistency of approach by members of the team and a growing familiarization with the methodology on the part of the readers. Blodgett comments on the didactic effect of the recurrent structure: ‘The shape itself is a measure of the didactic intent of this history, an intent present in all literary history, but emphatically a part of this one. [...] Not only is the past built upon in each successive volume, but also the past is expanded upon in ways that fulfill reader expectations derived from the repeated format.’

Each volume of the series includes the rationale for the periodization of the series as a whole, a rationale that stays largely unaltered for the earlier volumes, but is adjusted for the volumes devoted to the twentieth century. So, Volume V, initially planned to cover 1895–1914, was extended to 1918, and Volume VI, intended to cover 1919–36, goes no further than 1933. The presentation of the periodization, repeated from volume to volume, is one of the tools the editors use to reinforce their methodology. The outline of the first period (1764–1805) opens with a reference to infrastructural developments: ‘L’introduction d’infrastructures telles que l’imprimerie, la presse, les librairies et les bibliothèques appelle l’émergence d’une écriture publique’ (I, xii). The period opens with the date of the introduction of the printing press in Quebec. The level of literary activity is related to the relative levels of experience of the Canadians and the French immigrants with literature’s various forms and functions: ‘Mais les Canadiens, peu familiarisés avec les nouvelles institutions, restent plutôt à l’écart d’une vie littéraire
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que domine l’imprimé. Quelques Français, récemment immigrés et connaissant mieux la presse, initient les coloniaux à l’exercice de l’opinion publique’ (I, xii). The second period opens in 1806, the date of the creation of Le Canadien, a paper explicitly linked to the interests of the French-speaking population. In this period (1806–39) political changes bring about a change of function for the periodical press which in turn encourages intellectual activity and writing: ‘Avec l’avènement de la démocratie parlementaire, le journal devient l’organe principal de l’opinion publique. De plus, commencent à paraître des périodiques à caractère encyclopédique. Dans ce climat d’agitation politique, les premières œuvres d’envergure sont publiées sous forme de volumes au pays’ (I, xiii). This period ends with the publication of Lord Durham’s Report calling for the assimilation of the francophone population after the failure of the Rebellion of the Patriotes in 1837 and 1838. The year 1840 sees the Act of Union under which English becomes the official language.

It is in this third period (1840–69) that the field gains a relative autonomy, characterized by a dynamic of conflict between ultramontanists and liberals. The presentation stresses key political factors, but also their impact on intellectual life: ‘L’échec des patriotes, que vient sceller l’union des Canadas, favorise la montée du clergé, qui profite de la conjoncture pour augmenter son emprise sur l’enseignement, la presse et l’assistance publique. Ses initiatives alarment les libéraux qui ripostent par la fondation de journaux et d’associations’ (I, xiii). It is from this context (of defeat, a rising clerical class and the resistance of liberal politicians and intellectuals) that the idea of a national literature emerges, an idea initially promoted by liberals, ‘concrétisée par la publication du Répertoire national de James Huston, qui donne une première reconnaissance à la littérature canadienne. […] Le champ se structure de manière autonome’ (I, xiii). The third period ends in 1869, the year in which Mgr Bourget excommunicated the members of the liberal Institut canadien de Montréal (of which Huston had been a member and, briefly, the president). The fourth period is one of retrenchment and fragmentation of the field (1870–95), a period which is introduced by the post-Confederation translation of the Canadian capital from Quebec City and the consolidation of power of the ultramontane faction within the Catholic Church as twin signs of political and ideological domination. Within the fragmented literary field, the narrative sees small pockets of resistance to the dominant ideology, including the emergence of women writers.
The fifth period, as in a number of the literary histories, opens in 1885. This is the first period to be presented initially through the development of the literary field rather than through external political or religious developments: ‘L’institutionnalisation du champ prend une configuration moderne avec une avant-garde organisée au sein de l’École littéraire de Montréal et un circuit légitime représenté notamment par la Société du parler français au Canada’ (I, xiv). This polarization of the two tendencies, often characterized as the division between exoticists and regionalists, characterizes a period which includes the First World War, the ending of which marks the end of the volume. The periodization of the sixth volume which covers 1919–33 opens with the dramatic changes to the means of production of literature, but this is then related to a significant transformation of the literary field:

Le champ littéraire se scinde en deux circuits de production, élargi et restreint. Si le premier donne naissance à une paralittérature nationale […] le second suscite la professionnalisation du métier d’éditeur, la création d’associations d’écrivains, l’intervention de l’État […] et le développement d’une critique littéraire si importante qu’on a pu parler de ces années comme d’un ‘âge de la critique’. (IV, xvi–xvii)

The summary of the periodization used in the series reveals a system which is far from deterministic or mechanistic. Despite the outwardly fixed structure adopted for each volume, which might give an expectation of certain changes on an infrastructural level producing parallel developments at a superstructural level, the dynamic is much more complex. As the literary field is formed and gains a greater degree of autonomy, so the relationship between the various aspects is subtly altered. This results in a shifting balance between the determining power of institutional elements, such as the political structures or the influence of the Catholic Church, and the literature produced in Quebec, which itself becomes gradually more active a player in society. So in the earlier periods, political and religious factors determine the periodization, whereas this begins to change in the course of the nineteenth century:


This changing dynamic between the different elements of the field feeds
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into a narrative of a rise towards greater autonomy, just as the emerging institutionalization of literature provides a structure for the legitimation of the literature of Quebec.

Yet struggle and conflict take place at all levels of the process and between various spheres. The repeated structure of the volumes provides a framework in which these various dynamics can be located. First there is conflict between the various fields of intellectual activity as literary activity asserts its autonomy as a field: Reflecting on the process in a separate publication, Lemire explains: ‘Ainsi le littéraire vise à se libérer particulièrement de la tutelle de la classe dominante ou de celle d’autres disciplines qui pourraient lui dicter ses lois.’ This process happens in the course of the nineteenth century, but also continues in the twentieth century as further restrictions on autonomy are contested. But there is also conflict between external and internal instances, whether as part of the process of decolonization or as response to the influence of the popular culture of the USA: ‘Pour des raisons d’identité, une société ou une nation peut être amenée à juger les codes émis par une instance étrangère comme ne lui convenant plus. Ceci veut dire que l’on procède à un dédoublement des instances de légitimation et à l’émission de nouveaux codes.’ Within the field of literary activity, certain internal struggles can be understood in part as an internalization of these outer conflicts; so, for example the relationship to the literature of France can be seen as a need to establish autonomy in the process of decolonization from France’s enduring cultural domination; but France (or other cultural centres outside of Quebec, such as the USA) might at various times be invoked as the source of more progressive codes to be emulated as a way of modernizing the national literature (as it was by the parianistes such as Morin, Roquebrune, Dugas and others involved in 1918 with the review Le Nigog). As Bourdieu points out, a desire for autonomy may take many, often contradictory forms: ‘la même intention d’autonomie peut en effet s’exprimer dans des prises de position opposées (laiques dans un cas, religieuses dans un autre) selon la structure et l’histoire des pouvoirs contre lesquels elle doit s’affirmer’. The complexity and multi-directionality of such interactions and responses mean that any simple narrative of autonomization and legitimation would be a distortion of the processes involved.

As has been argued, the structure of the volumes does not promote a linear reading of literary history. The various practices of production and reception of literature do not operate in a simple, diachronic manner, but rather ‘Dans l’ensemble des processus et des pratiques, un système
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synchronique d’interrelations se constitue’ (I, xi). So production, reception and literary education reinforce and interact with one another, resulting not so much in a single direction of development, but rather a spiralling movement in which the teaching and studying of literature play an active role: ‘L’histoire littéraire du Québec devrait se lire non comme un axe continu, allant de la production à la réception, mais plutôt comme une spirale où le mouvement lui-même est facteur de changement’ (I, xii). This spiral pattern is presented to the reader in the very format of each volume as the chapters circle around the literary field, viewing it from a series of angles, including that of the agents (those active in the field, both as individuals and as groups), the various infrastructural elements (including the printing press, booksellers, libraries), and the educational structures and practices. It is useful to remember the complex interweaving of such instances when thinking about the place of the nation within literary history, and the various ways in which literature and nation have been associated in the history of francophone literature in Canada.

A plural literary history

The reason for including New’s literary history in this chapter is that it is one of the rare histories of literature in Canada that seeks to include the full range, geographically, historically and culturally, of literature produced by all participants in what John Ralston Saul has termed Canada’s ‘confusion of minorities major and minor’. This has an impact on periodization and on the extent to which periodization can or cannot be linked with the figure of the nation. New addresses the issue of the ‘nation(s)’ in his introduction: ‘French before it was British, Aboriginal and Inuit before that, when “The Dominion of Canada” became independent on 1 July 1867 – by an Act of the British Parliament (the British North America Act) – the nation was nonetheless established on the British model. […] But other languages and cultures persisted’ (3). As can be seen in Table 1.11, New does divide his work into six chronological periods, but these subdivisions look very different from those in the other volumes discussed. Each section is headed by a title that categorizes each period by a dominant mode of narrative adopted by its literary creators. So the short first section, ‘Mythmakers: Early Literature’, is undated and is devoted to pre-contact culture, but also pays careful attention to the ways in which such oral traditions and myths have subsequently been recorded, and establishes from the outset that there was no unified pre-contact culture, but rather great cultural diversity. The periodization of the following chapters is determined on the whole by what New sees
as different phases in Canada’s literary life, although 1867, the date of the British North America Act, does have national significance (for the four provinces in the original Confederation). Within individual chapters, New focuses on literary works rather than plotting the history of separate national identities. Subsections are triggered by social or political events at some points (the First World War, the Depression years) but equally may focus on form, medium or genre, as in sections headed ‘Voice and Point of View’ or ‘Radio and Stage’.

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The book aims to be inclusive, discussing anglophone and francophone literature (including work from the francophone diaspora), aboriginal myths but also modern and contemporary aboriginal writing, migrant writing and children’s literature. Sometimes these are discussed separately, sometimes in free-flowing discussion of a genre. The language of expression is made clear, titles being given in the original, but (as the target reader is anglophone) quotations from French texts are cited in English translation in the text. Of necessity, given the scope of the book, there is little extended analysis of literary texts, which results in a format which is somewhat encyclopaedic with a high level of naming of authors and texts. This is particularly noticeable in the last chapter, a tendency prevalent in many of the works in our corpus, as if the ever-expanding level of literary production defies the control of the narrating literary historian. Literary texts are contextualized at certain points, mostly with reference to issues concerning social or cultural identity. But there are only very brief references to political figures such as Parizeau, Duplessis, Trudeau, Adrienne Clarkson, and Bush Snr and Jnr. New is more interested in stressing the diversity and wealth of Canada’s literatures than in discussing institutional or other social factors. While the periodization is based on New’s own distinction between different types of voice, or narrative modes, the 65-page chronology adds an important historical element to New’s literary history and extends the
encyclopaedic function of the text. Maps and images at the beginning of the book stress the pluralism of New’s vision of Canada.

It is worth comparing the conclusions to the two editions. In the preface to the 2003 edition New recalls that the first edition ended with the line: ‘it is well to regard this entire book as a history-in-process’. In 2003 he adds the comment: ‘It still is’ (xiii). Yet the 2003 edition is rather less open-ended in that, despite his rejection of the possibility of any unified conception of nation (‘definitions of a single Canadian identity are suspect’, 4), he seems ultimately to be reconciling the plurality that his literary history has been pursuing with a set of shared, liberal values: ‘It is the cultural plurality inside the country that most fundamentally shapes the way Canadians define their political character, draw the dimensions of their literature, and voice their commitment to causes, institutions and individuality’ (4). The kinds of shared social attitudes which he finds include popular culture, common civil rights, expected behaviours and localized adaptation to space and distance, values which overshadow concerns with inequalities, conflict or marginalization. The final chapter ends on a harmonious note reflecting on Canadian identity/ies in a plural, responsible society and on Canada as a place to live with shared values, its writers affirming ‘the possibilities of language, in short, in a place still liveable and still to be lived’ (358).

In many respects New’s literary history presents francophone Canadian literature in an interesting, pan-Canadian context, and in a historical frame which extends backwards in time, so setting the various phases of colonial history into context. The ‘birth-of-a-nation’ narrative is undermined by the number of parallel narratives in operation, the combination of which exposes the relativity and partiality of such notions of nationhood. Nevertheless, one critic, cited on the back cover, seems to have managed to read New’s book in much more traditional terms, using the common trope of organic life to describe literature: ‘New has done a marvellous job of detailing the taproots and multiple branches of Canada’s English and French literatures, in all their forms.’ And perhaps, despite the many non-traditional features of the literary history, what emerges from the comparisons and generalizations is a somewhat cosy multicultural narrative, whose challenges are softened by the liberal humanism of New’s vision of Canada.

Re-reading the corpus
The authors of *Histoire de la littérature québécoise* position themselves clearly within the field of literary history. They see their work as being
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very differently inspired from the twin projects of DOLQ and La Vie littéraire au Québec. Above all they approach the corpus as literary scholars and literary critics and explain their aim as follows: ‘faire prédominer les textes sur les institutions; proposer des lectures critiques; marquer les changements entre les conjonctures qui distinguent chacune des périodes’ (11). They compare their project with that of Pierre de Grandpré, whose work in the late 1960s was the most recent example of ‘une histoire littéraire du Québec fondée sur la lecture des textes’ (11). Even de Grandpré, of course, had co-opted social scientists and historians to contribute to his edited volumes, so arguably Histoire de la littérature québécoise is unlike any of its predecessors in its primary focus on the text and the detail of some of the readings and re-readings it comprises. But as with any literary history, periodization has to be addressed and choices have to be made about whether to prioritize social, political and economic factors or to treat literature as a phenomenon which can be characterized in terms of changes in literary form, genre or language, or by groupings, movements or schools. The brief introductory sections which open each of the five parts give an overview of the literary developments in the period and contextualize them within their intellectual context, a context which may in turn be related to material and political changes (the size of the population of Montreal; the impact of the tramway as a way of opening up access to the city centre; the exacerbation of the divide between rich and poor in the Depression years). The authors state their general position as follows: ‘La périodisation de l’histoire de la littérature ne peut être totalement indépendante de l’histoire sociale et politique, mais nous avons cherché, ici encore, d’accorder un statut central aux œuvres, en signalant les transitions proprement littéraires’ (15). The way that this is carried out can be seen Table 12.1. The volume is divided into five unequal parts, parts 3–5 representing almost three-quarters of the text.

Table 12.1 Periodization of Michel Biron, François Dumont and Élisabeth Nardout-Lafarge, Histoire de la littérature québécoise (2007)

As can be seen, references to Quebec, France and external matters dominate the first three sections, while literary factors are used to label the period from 1945 to the present. The longer Parts 3 and 4 are further divided into sections. In Part 3 these sections are labelled according to extra-literary factors (Part 3 A. ‘L’attrait de Paris: 1895–1930’; Part 3 B. ‘Un monde en crise’). But in Part 4 the subdivisions are at once more literary and more Quebec-based (Part 4 A. ‘L’autonomie de la littérature: 1945–1960’; Part 4 B. ‘L’exposition de la littérature québécoise: 1960–1970’; Part 4 C. ‘Avant-gardes et ruptures: 1970–1980’). This would seem to indicate that the process of autonomization of Quebec literature had been achieved by the mid-twentieth century. The final part, which covers twenty-five years, has no such subdivisions, perhaps because it is slightly shorter than Parts 3 and 4, but also probably because such periodization is much more difficult to impose on recent history. Within these parts or sections, individual subsections are characterized by references to literary genre (‘Contes et légendes’, ‘La poésie d’inspiration surréaliste’, ‘Les fictions de soi’) or by author (often an individual author used as the focus for a particular literary development: ‘Gaston Miron: le poème et le non-poème’; ‘Nicole Brossard et l’écriture féministe’) or occasionally by text (‘Les voix de Maria Chapdelaine’; ‘La bataille des Belles-Sœurs’). Series of spotlights on texts and authors allow for detailed textual analysis as well as relating specific works to the wider literary context, opened up by discussion of the text. Thanks to their combination of scholarly detail and textual focus, set against a wider literary background, these subsections, typically between five and ten pages in length, can be read as free-standing essays in a way not unlike the entries in Hollier’s ‘encyclopaedic’ New History of French Literature, discussed in the introductory chapter. However, their grouping within each part does aim at a selective coverage of the major trends across the full range of genres in a more systematic way than Hollier’s series of single events, each of which opens up a new journey into literature.

It is particularly in the final part of the literary history that the authors raise questions about the nature of periodization. Commenting that in the years following the referendum many writers in Quebec felt themselves to have lost a mobilizing cause which had in the past given them both an individual but also a collective sense of purpose or identity, they reflect that history seems no longer to be shaped by a series of fundamental shifts, common to all: ‘Les changements s’effectuent de façon relativement douce, sans rupture et sans figure de proue. Il n’y a pas de révolution comme en 1960, il n’y a pas de manifeste comme en
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1948, il n’y a pas d’école littéraire comme en 1895’ (531). This sentence confirms in retrospect the way in which certain moments and figures (la Révolution tranquille; Borduas, Refus global; Nelligan) have come to shape the story of Quebec’s national literature. But the question is whether this kind of outline is only clear in retrospect and only grasped once it has gone. Post-1980s Quebec is defined and experienced by many writers, they suggest, as an absence, as loss: ‘Pour plusieurs, cette absence de symboles ou de “grands auteurs” définit en creux la période qui s’ouvre vers 1980. Celle-ci ne parvient pas à se représenter positivement, comme si elle était privée de repères ou ne se voyait que sur un mode négatif, en accumulant les signes de ce qu’elle a perdu, de ce qu’elle n’est plus’ (531). The authors join Pierre Nepveu in his assessment of the project of la littérature québécoise, embodied by Parti pris in 1965, as a project which ‘se serait à la fois réalisé et dissipé, et la “chose” se survivrait pour ainsi dire à elle-même comme une ombre ou un fantôme, semblable en cela à la plupart des autres littératures dites nationales à l’ère du post-modernisme’ (531–32). This ghostly presence of nationhood, as something that was desired and pursued but is no more, throws the whole enterprise of writing literary history into a different light, one which will be discussed in the conclusion to this book. For the authors of Histoire de la littérature québécoise the demise of the ‘nation’ in literature seems to have happened just as Quebec literature was achieving recognition as an autonomous literature. In common with all other national literatures, they argue, Quebec literature is now caught up in ‘un vaste processus de minorisation et de décentrement’ (532), with the result that while literary activity seems to be ever more intense (they cite the fact that in the year 2000, 531 novels and 268 volumes of poetry were published in Quebec, compared with 160 novels and 147 collections of poetry in 1986 [531]), literature in Quebec no longer concerns itself with its national identity, its québécité. This loss of centre affects not only the writers of imaginative literature, of course. Whereas New’s literary history offered a humanist vision of multicultural Canada as he closed his second edition in 2003, Biron, Dumont and Nardout-Lafarge move from narrative mode to meta-narrative reflection on the nature of literary history and the difficulty of characterizing a fragmented, diverse and flourishing literature without one of its central structuring devices. In a rather different way, they too adopt pluralism as their keynote, but present it as a plurality of voices and forms which can be related to each other at this stage by no more than ‘des résonances entre certaines œuvres’ (535) and, one might add, the ghost of a nation.
The appended chronology

The chronology has in recent years become a regular component of literary histories. In the corpus of texts discussed here it is only since the late 1970s (starting with the first volume of DOLQ in 1978) that the addition of a chronology became the norm, either as part of the introductory material or as an appendix. Essentially the chronologies place literary and cultural ‘events’ within a national but often also within an international historical framework. Adding a backbone of evidence which supports the choice of periodization, this feature accentuates the ambivalent positioning of works of literary history between the narrative account and the encyclopaedic or reference work. Literary histories at both ends of the scale from narrative to encyclopaedic include chronologies. Thus, all four of the most recent works discussed in this chapter supply a chronology, the respective authors adapting its form and content to suit the overall function of their work. The two single-volume studies (A History of Canadian Literature and Histoire de la littérature québécoise) focus on Canadian literature and Quebec literature, respectively, but their chronologies differ strikingly on a number of counts. New includes a chronology of 65 pages, arranged in two columns headed ‘Author/Title’ and ‘Event’. The timeframe of the chronology, like that of the work as a whole, is from 13000 BC until 2002, which, together with the lack of national divisions, distinguishes this chronology from those included in the other three literary historical works. Events include key historical moments of Canadian but also international significance. Under the Author/Title column New includes the publication of significant works and events elsewhere in the world. There is no reference to Canada or Quebec in the headings, nor is there any division between events in Canada and elsewhere in the world. Literary works are categorized into one of four categories (anthology, drama, prose, poetry), which allows the reader to follow the development of a specific genre across cultures. A range of culturally significant products and events are mentioned (the founding of key journals and publishing houses, film, the plastic arts) alongside titles of works from elsewhere in the, mainly Western, world (Shakespeare, Cervantes, the King James Bible, More, Machiavelli, Darwin, Orwell, de Beauvoir, Dr Spock, D. H. Lawrence, Fanon). The historical events listed include a combination of events from Canadian and world history, references to patterns of migration (South Asian immigration into Canada from 1903, the arrival of the Doukhobors from 1898, the gold
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The effect of this is not only to remove boundaries between the various literatures within Canada, but also to embed Canadian titles and events in a larger history.

In the chronology included in *Histoire de la littérature québécoise* the columns are similarly labelled ‘Œuvres’ and ‘Vie politique et culturelle’. But here the focus is much more exclusively on Quebec. The chronology mirrors the time span of the literary history, beginning in 1534 with ‘Premier voyage de Jacques Cartier au Canada. L’explorateur prend possession du territoire au nom du roi de France.’ Unlike New’s multicultural literary history, this chronology has very few references to world events, anglophone Canada or the indigenous population. The function of this chronology is to serve as a close reflection of the content of the literary history, reinforcing the sense of a nation under construction, and paralleling the inclusions and exclusions of its narrative. Like the literary history itself, the chronology is dominated by events in Quebec’s history and texts from Quebec, including references to the anglophone Quebec writers specifically discussed in the subsection ‘L’imaginaire anglo-montréalais’ (Gallant, Richler, Cohen), migrant writers (Robin, Laferrière, Ollivier) and one or two mentions of writers from ‘hors-Québec’ (Patrice Desbiens, France Daigle). This chronology does not seek to set up cultural parallels with Europe or the USA; rather it retells in summary form the (literary) history of Quebec as an object of study in its own right. But the effect of this reproduction in miniature of the main narrative is somewhat claustrophobic; despite some of the reflections on the meta-narrative of literary history discussed above, the authors here create closed borders around their corpus and the reader is not encouraged to gaze beyond the frontier for parallels or contrasts.

Each volume of *DOLQ* includes a very detailed chronology divided into various columns, the specific headings of the columns changing from volume to volume to reflect the usages and political realities prevalent within the period treated. So, for example, the chronologies in Volume I (1760–1899) and Volume II (1900–39) have columns for ‘Le Monde’, ‘L’Amérique anglo-saxonne’ (which includes anglophone Canada) and ‘Le Canada français’ (subdivided into ‘Vie politique et sociale’ and ‘Vie culturelle’). Volume III (1940–59) changes the designation of the francophone columns to ‘Le Québec et le Canada français’ which from Volume IV (1960–69) onwards is simply labelled ‘Québec’. In Volume V (1970–75) the layout adds an additional column, which indicates events and publications from the USA and Canada (i.e. anglophone Canada). The fact that this volume ends the elision of anglophone Canada with
the USA in the chronologies prior to 1970 is interesting. One possible interpretation of the appearance of ‘Canada’ as a separate political and cultural entity is not that a greater awareness of anglophone Canadian culture was developing in Quebec, but rather that the October Crisis in 1970 and its aftermath crystallized the desire of many in Quebec for an independent future. Significantly, in reference to the War Measures Act, the introduction states ‘L’armée canadienne occupe le territoire québécois et particulièrement les villes de Montréal et de Québec’ (V, xii). Such phrasing suggests that Canada/Ottawa has become irrevocably ‘other’ to Quebec in what was an overt demonstration of power. The detailed listings (over a page per year in the later volumes) are densely packed with a mixture of literary publications, events of political and social importance and cultural events. The central objectives of the series has always been to establish a corpus and to make this corpus accessible to as wide an audience as possible. But at the same time, the DOLQ series as a whole is a thoroughly political project, with the nation at its heart, as the changing column headings reveal.

The structure of La Vie littéraire also requires a series of chronologies covering increasingly shorter time spans. Here again the nomenclature involved in the labelling of columns is revealing, but rather different choices have been made, perhaps as a result of the very different focus on institutions, and on the operation of literature within a wider series of social systems, both in Quebec and beyond. And as has been pointed out earlier, each volume of the series includes an opening chapter entitled ‘Les déterminations étrangères du champ littéraire’. The layout used for the chronologies is simple, there being only two columns. In Volume I (1760–1805) these are labelled ‘Canada’ (for a period, one must remember, when ‘Canadien’ meant francophone Canadian) and ‘Monde’. The specific designations shift over time (so Volumes IV and V refer to ‘Le Québec et le Canada français’ while Volume VI has ‘Québec et Canada’). As for the rest of the world, this is defined more clearly in later volumes to refer to North America and Europe (very oddly referred to as ‘Europe centrale’ in Volume V). In this column references to France far outweigh those to any other country. The chronology is very user-friendly, being relatively full, with two or three years per page on average, increasing to a page per year, presented in landscape rather than portrait layout in Volume VI (1919–33), and in easily legible font (larger than that used in DOLQ). In the most recent volume a full page is devoted to each year and entries are annotated with symbols to indicate musical, theatrical, cinematic, art and cultural
How has the literary history of francophone Canada been told?

events in addition to literary publications and other institutional matters (concerning politics, law, education, association, library and archive, publishing). The breadth of cultural reference corresponds to the team’s understanding of the operation of literature within a wider series of social and cultural systems. It refers to texts and events beyond the contents of the volume (which are already very wide-ranging) and selects items which demonstrate the contact between cultures (such as the visit to Canada of Paul Bourget or performances of a melodrama by Fréchette in New York) and the situation of francophone minorities outside Quebec (reference to the abolition of French-language education in Manitoba). As such the chronology, like that of New, is a useful resource in its own right, but also, as in New, its components serve the function of situating their subject (here the literary field as it developed in Quebec) within a wider context and representing it as existing within a network of exchanges and influences in its progress towards autonomization.

This comparison of chronologies underlines the various choices which authors, editors and publishers have to make about such tools, raising questions of selection, presentation, classification, nomenclature, historical and geographical scope, and whether they should be regarded as offering additional material to that contained in the text or a means of recapitulation of key dates, names and titles. In Australian Literature: Postcolonialism, Racism, Transnationalism, Huggan includes a short and simple ‘Australian Timeline’ among the prefatory material, but not without alerting the reader to its status (heavily dependent on existing models, highly selective, and to be read ‘in tandem with the critical reservations about canonicity and historical sequence’ expressed throughout his book). And yet he does include a timeline and as readers we continue to consult chronologies. As such, the chronology reflects in miniature the paradoxical nature of all literary history: despite its appearance of historicality it too is marked by the historiographical practice of the literary historian. My own chronology is no less derivative and no more authoritative than Huggan’s.

Conclusion

One of the central arguments in Blodgett’s Five-Part Invention is the distinction he makes between francophone Canadian and Anglo-Canadian literary history, with time being central to francophone and space to anglophone literary histories: ‘The unwavering stature
What is Québécois Literature?

Table 1.13  Periodization of E. D. Blodgett, ‘Francophone Writing’ (2004)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Periodization</th>
<th>1534–1760</th>
<th>1760–1839</th>
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<td>La Nouvelle France</td>
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<td>Post-Conquest</td>
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that Garneau attains in all histories of French-Canadian literature indicates that its literature is always constructed as a national-historical phenomenon.92 The centrality of history to the narrative of francophone Canadian literary histories allows their authors to construct ‘an unequivocal linear trajectory’.93 This analysis becomes the basis of Blodgett’s own survey of francophone literature in Canada included in The Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature.94 As can be seen in Table 1.13, his periodization is the perfect exemplification of his own thesis. Here the heading for each period contains some reference to the status and development of the nation, literature being presented as a selection of highlights and significant developments within each historical period. Although Blodgett’s periodization is clearly centred on the nation, this does not mean that the content of his account does not at the same time problematize that notion to reveal the heterogeneity of francophone literatures in Canada. The trajectory within the narrative, externally shaped by historical periods, is the developing self-awareness of the francophone literatures (the plural encompassing aboriginal and regional literatures) as minority literatures, which as a result are ‘always engaged in a process of identity construction as a means of social self-discovery or self-definition’.95 As a structuring device, Blodgett’s periodization nevertheless confirms his view that francophone literary history is constructed as a ‘national-historical phenomenon’. Yet this chapter has shown that while the nation does indeed appear at the heart of the literary histories discussed, the specific trajectory has been immensely varied. In some cases the choice has to be pragmatic (how large is the corpus? how long can a chapter be?) But in most cases the authors use the periods to shape their particular narrative, the majority of which construct a path towards the emergence of an autonomous, national literature, from a colonial past to a decolonized or postcolonial future. Table 1.14 presents a composite view of the pattern of periodization used in the literary histories. What is fascinating is the variety of shapes that emerge, a variety which does not simply reflect the different perceptions of, for example, early twentieth-century
How has the literary history of francophone Canada been told?

Table 1.13 continued

|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|

literary historians and their late twentieth-century counterparts. So, for instance, the literature of New France is included by some and excluded by others such as Roy (1907), Tougas and *La Vie littéraire* for a range of reasons discussed earlier. Authors and editors choose to divide their corpus into widely differing numbers of periods (*DOLQ* and Blodgett, eight, to date; de Grandpré, Brunet, Roy [1939], three). The number of periods does not simply grow as the corpus expands over time, as in retrospect the past may take on greater coherence and periods may be amalgamated (compare Roy 1939 with Roy 1907). Periods are based both on broadly political and significant literary events, many authors using some of each, with no clear rationale for their choice. For instance, New uses only literary categories, *La Vie littéraire* uses references to nationhood, Tougas, Mailhot and *Histoire de la littérature québécoise* combine the political with the literary. In some cases it can be argued that as literary life assumes greater autonomy, so it figures more strongly as the determining factor in periodization, but again there is no overall pattern here.

Indeed very little consensus emerges about which dates signify turning points. In the corpus of literary histories since 1900 (including Blodgett’s essay), the only two dates which are used by more than half are 1534 (for Cartier’s claiming of territory for the King of France) and 1900 (as the turn of the century); seven texts also choose either 1760, 1763 or 1764 to indicate the Conquest, the Treaty of Paris or the arrival of the printing press, respectively. 1945 is used in a third of the corpus, while two dates with literary significance (1860 and 1895), and three dates with political significance (1867, 1939 and 1959) are each used in three different literary histories. And, as if to underline the extent to which literary histories serve a variety of ideological ends, the literary dates chosen may be used to quite different effect. One example of this which has emerged in the preceding discussion is the choice of 1860, associated with the formation of a patriotic literary movement which gave the French-Canadian population a providential vocation and its literature a messianic role (for Roy and the Sœurs de Sainte-Anne); however, for de
What is Québécois Literature?

Table 1.14  Periodization in histories of francophone writing in Quebec

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How has the literary history of francophone Canada been told?

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<td>Des origines à 1900</td>
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<td>1895–1918 Vol. 5</td>
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<td>1919–33 Vol. 6</td>
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<td>1960–69 (planned)</td>
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<td>Literature into 21st century</td>
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Grandpré and others it is identified as ‘le repli’, what Lucie Robert has referred to as ‘une sorte de recul’, ‘la victoire conservatrice’.

Politically significant dates show yet another kind of variation in that some refer to the francophone presence as colonizers (1534, 1608), some are indicative of the francophone Canadian population as colonized by the British (1760, 1763, 1837), some refer to their relationship with Anglo-Canada (1867, 1970, 1980), while other dates refer to Canada’s role in the world wars. To summarize, what might be concluded from a discussion of the corpus is that the different patterns of periodization suggest a literary history that is unstable, one that is constantly being revised and reframed according to the perspective of the respective literary historians, and that the basis for the division into periods is uncertain. Any national history is also shaped in part by its position within other, hierarchical structures of power.

If what Blodgett referred to as ‘an unequivocal linear trajectory’ can take such different routes, then what does this suggest about the ‘nation’ and the national literature that is being constructed in francophone Canadian literary histories? Since Huston’s *Répertoire national* in 1848–50 the nation has been central to the literary history of francophone Canada. As Lemire has argued, after the failure of the Rebellion of 1837–38 to increase the level of democracy in Lower Canada, French-Canadian citizens lost the option of fighting for political nationhood for a long period, which meant that national identity was developed on other levels through a form of ‘action nationale’, in which the French language and the Catholic faith could offer some kind of resistance to anglophone domination.

Seen from this perspective, literature and the discourse on literature of Huston, Lareau, Roy and sœur Marie-Élise can be seen to be asserting cultural difference, albeit from ideologically opposed positions (Huston and Lareau promoting liberal values, unlike Roy and sœur Marie-Élise who are writing from within the Catholic establishment). In fact literature in francophone Canada is produced within a field in which a variety of cultural and ideological pressures are in play, acting variously as poles of attraction or repulsion (France, anglophone North America, Protestantism, the Catholic Church, la Francophonie, indigenous cultures, migrant cultures or globalization).

As John Speller writes:

In their struggle to define themselves against both the bordering Anglophone space and the French tradition, Québécois writers have come positively to identify themselves with everything that can distinguish them from their more powerful literary and political neighbours, adopting
for instance motifs from Catholicism in an Anglo-Saxon Protestant milieu, and regionalist themes against the ‘universalist’ French literary tradition.98

The position of constantly variable relativity in which a minor literature finds itself (that is, defining itself in terms of a range of dominant others) helps to explain why, while the nation is repeatedly evoked, or invoked, in the literary histories of francophone Canada, its status is never firmed up, always under construction – until it has gone. So, in our corpus, from 1848 to 2011, historians of a national francophone literature have changed its name, its frontiers, its inclusions and its exclusions. They have called for a national literature, announced its imminent arrival, explained the absence or retardation of its development, questioned its existence, asserted its existence, cited texts and authors in its defence, trusted in its power to reinterpret the past or envisage the future, studied its infrastructure and its meta-narrative, and in the most recent literary histories, declared its demise with the advent of post-nationalism (which Blodgett dates to 1970 and Histoire de la littérature québécoise to 1980).

While Blodgett refers to the linear trajectory as typical of francophone literary histories of Canada, two other models have emerged in the course of this chapter which help to remind us of the process of reading which literary histories allow or encourage. In the case of La Vie littéraire the sociological methodology adopted led to a structure within each volume of a series of layers of production that interact and modify each other in the manner of a spiral, the production, circulation and reception of literature taking place within a field which itself is exposed to pulls and tensions from within and outside. Whereas the dynamism of this sociological view of literary practice draws together processes which are both material and intellectual, Mailhot’s literary history, and Biron, Dumont and Nardout-Lafarge’s Histoire de la littérature québécoise propose models based more on the process of reading itself and the importance of a different kind of dynamic, in which the canon is revisited and renewed by readers (and writers) (re-)reading the texts of the literature of Quebec, in ways which make literary history an ongoing process, which arguably can outlive the nationalist ideologies that were once at its heart.

A final point which this chapter raises is the way in which literary histories define their territory and impose criteria for inclusion and exclusion. As Lemire writes in the introduction to La Vie littéraire:

Au cours de son histoire, la littérature québécoise a dû progressivement se déterminer un espace propre (passage de l’oral à l’écrit, du politique
What is Québécois Literature?

à l’esthétique, du non-littéraire au littéraire, de la culture commune à la culture restreinte), spécifier ses pratiques (genres, mouvements), mais aussi défendre ou déborder les frontières esthétiques, culturelles et politiques qu’elle s’était constituées. (I, x)

In geographical and historical terms these boundaries have varied, as the study of titles indicated. The range of genres and the relative prioritization of those genres have also varied, not only as definitions of what is ‘literary’ have shifted but also according to individual taste and argument (as in the case of de Grandpré’s volume devoted exclusively to post-1945 poetry). But other inclusions and exclusions have been at work, whether they concern literature in English, popular literature, children’s literature or the literature of various minorities (each of which gets fuller discussion in some histories than in others). New’s literary history stands in clear contrast to all of the francophone-authored works in its coverage of literature by indigenous writers. In Five-Part Invention, Blodgett quotes J. L. Granatstein’s reflection on the nature of history as a process not simply of remembering but also of forgetting. With reference to Canada’s history he argues that the challenge is to think of Canada ‘as a nation, as a whole, as a society, and not simply as a collection of races, genders, regions, and classes’. If one applies the same principle to histories of francophone Canadian literature, then the focus on the (largely white, francophone and progressively Quebec-identified) nation has resulted in certain exclusions. As one example of this, indigenous people are included as subject matter, but mostly excluded as the producers and consumers of literature. I will address some of the implications of such questions of exclusion and inclusion in the following chapters.