

The Liminal Space of Métis Poetry: Between Centre and Periphery

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This article explores the literary space of Canadian literature in world literature and the liminal space of Métis poetry, which is distinctive in being situated between the European and Indigenous aspects of Canadian literature. The paradox is that Métis poetry and literature in Canada, long marginalized, can now create another space for Canadian literature, or for poets born or living in Canada, in world literature and comparative literature, a small literature among large literatures. By examining Métis poetry in Canada and analyzing the poems by Louis Riel (1844–1885), Pauline Johnson (also known as Tekahionwake or Double Wampum, 1861–1913) and Naomi McIlwraith (contemporary), the article can provide a sense of distinctiveness and uniqueness, even if some of these qualities are also present in “Métis” poetry outside Canada. Riel and McIlwraith occupy a literary and cultural in-between space—Riel writing in French and McIlwraith in English and Cree—mixing major and minor centers and part of this “nation within a nation” this threshold space where self, identity and other are all called into question.

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The literary space of Canadian literature in world literature

Goethe was important in framing *Weltliteratur* or world literature, for example, what he told Eckermann in 1827: “National literature is now rather an unmeaning term; the epoch of World literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach.” (351) This interest in world literature, which continues to this day, begins in Europe even if Goethe also refers to other literatures: “It is pleasant to see that intercourse is now so close between the French, English, and Germans, that we shall be able to correct one another. This is the greatest use of a world-literature, which will show itself more and more.” (432) The

space of world literature will unfold and Goethe emphasizes beauty in literature, which he sees among the ancient Greeks, and is not interested in the production and reception of literature in a space based on nationalism and patriotism. Canadian literature and small literatures did not and do not find a significant place in world literature and comparative literature. One aspect of Canadian culture and the study of literature I tried to raise in a volume edited by Eugene Eoyang, Gang Zhou and Jonathan Hart was the state of comparative literature in Canada, and in this article I am trying to show that there is another way to make space for Canada in world and comparative literatures, using the particular case of Métis poetry, which occupies a liminal or threshold space between the European and Indigenous aspects of Canadian literature and does so in French and English in a distinctive way (Eoyang, Zhou and Hart). Here, I explore the context and space of Canadian literature and culture before discussing Métis poetry. Canada shares English and French with other countries like Britain, the United States and France so is part of anglophone and francophone literatures and its indigenous languages are shared with the United States, except in instances I examine here. Thus, Canadian literature blends English, French and Indigenous languages in a distinctive way and that is the literary space I am analyzing after exploring the persistent debate over Canadian identity and space in its literature and culture. Given this context, the poetry I discuss here is from small and not small, minor and not minor literatures. The literary crosses borders, having connections within and beyond the nation. Marshall McLuhan, who coined among many phrases, the global village, saw Canada as a borderline case (McLuhan 226).

The article moves from the general debate over Canadian culture, literature and poetry and places that within the context of theories of literary space before examining the three poets of mixed Indigenous and European backgrounds (now most often referred to as Métis). Early in this debate, there is little or no mention of Indigenous or Métis contributions. My article tries to help explore that space within Canadian poetry and literature as a contribution to comparative literature and world literature.

In *On Canadian Poetry* (1943), E. K. Brown, trained at Toronto and at the Sorbonne, who would teach at Toronto, Manitoba, Cornell and Chicago, writes: "There is a Canadian literature, often rising to effects of great beauty, but it has stirred little interest outside Canada." (Brown 3) Brown explores that space, noting changes in literary taste and literary geography: "*Saul*, a huge poetic drama by a Montreal poet,

Charles Heavysege, had a passing vogue in Britain and in the United States, impressing Emerson and Hawthorne and inducing Coventry Patmore to describe it as ‘indubitably one of the most remarkable English poems ever written out of Great Britain.’ [...] Today, along with Heavysege’s other works, his *Count Filippo* and his *Jephthah’s Daughter*, it is unknown within Canada and without.” (Brown 3–4)

There was still little space in the world for Canadian literature when Brown was writing, almost six decades after Riel was hanged in 1885 after his part in the Northwest Rebellion that he had led (he was also a leader of the Red River Rebellion, the first being in 1869) even if literary tastes changed within Canada and without. In the 1940s, Brown says: “Every Canadian reviewer devotes a large part of his sadly limited space to comment on British or American books. Every Canadian reader devotes a large part of the time and money that he can allow for books to those which come from Britain and the United States.” (8) There is little room for any Canadian literature let alone Canadian poetry. Brown does not mince words in describing the struggle for making a literary space in Canada: “What I have been attempting to suggest with as little heat or bitterness as possible is that in this country the plight of literature is a painful one.” (24) This is one reason perhaps that cultures without literary space suffer a kind of suffocation or seek literature or poetry from other cultures. Brown sees one important aspect of late-nineteenth century and early twentieth-century English-Canadian poetry: “One of the chief powers in the poetry of Lampman and his associates is their power in the handling of nature.” (39) There is, according to Brown, a national and international space for the best-known Canadian poets: “In the United States and in England the most widely known and admired of our poets has been Bliss Carman. In Canada Lampman is the nearest approach to a national classic in verse, and the passing of decades has confirmed his status if it has not very much widened the circle of his readers.” (80) Carman and Lampman, both strong poets, are not much known in world literature today. Brown also discusses at length two other accomplished poets—Duncan Campbell Scott and E. J. Pratt—so that while Brown is trying to make space for Canadian poetry, he also shows how hard it is for Canadian poets to find space in Canada let alone internationally (108–152). If this lack of space was true for Anglo-Canadian poetry of poets of British descent, it was more so for those of Indigenous and Métis backgrounds to have a space for others to hear their voices over time.

Given globalization and shifting interests that include a relatively recent awareness of Indigenous cultures and literatures in Canada and

elsewhere (for instance, the United States, Australia and New Zealand), it may be that the literature of the mixed, Métis, mestizo in the New World (and worldwide) from those of mixed Native (Indigenous) and European (English, Spanish, French and the like) backgrounds can cross national boundaries and take up a prominent role not simply in the space of national literatures, like Canadian literature, but in Comparative and World literatures. Paradoxically, Métis poetry and literature in Canada, long marginalized, may now create another space for Canadian literature or poets born in or living in Canada in world and comparative literature, a small literature among large literatures. This liminal or threshold space between the European/settler and the Indigenous, the local and the global, bypasses what Goethe hoped for, the national in terms of literature.

The local, regional, national and global all interact in the debates about the center and periphery, major and minor (small) literatures. Here, I attempt to open a space for Métis poetry within Canadian literature in the framework of the internationalism, globalization of world literature, and Comparative literature studies (on *métissage*, see Glissant, “Métissage”; Benoist; Bonniol and Benoist). Native or Indigenous cultures and settler cultures, often of European origin, meant that, in the New World or Americas, from the earliest times, go-betweens, mediators, interpreters and translators could be caught between both sides (see Hart, “Images”; “Mediation”).

Here, I find a space for poetry and for Métis poetry in the space of Canadian literature and culture, between Native and European Canadian poetry. This is related to, but distinct from, Franco Moretti’s focus on an atlas of nineteenth-century European novels and mapping European literary history, Pascale Casanova’s examination of the literary space of world literature and national literature and Rob Shields’ concentration on North and South and on spatial and literary history perspectives work in terms of Wallerstein’s theory differentiating between center and periphery and also his discussions of center and margin and the “geography of difference” (Moretti 54; Casanova; Shields, *Places* 3–11; Shields, “Spatialisations” 15–40). My space is more the space for writing and reading poetry that is between cultures within Canadian culture, a hybrid culture as part of New World literature or the literatures of the Americas. In other words, my article is about space for Canadian poets and writers and especially Métis poets being afforded space to write and to be read within Canada and abroad, being given some notice, their words being read, written about in practical criticism and literary theory. I am grounding this sense of Canadian and Métis

poetry in close reading of their work to make way for their words in Canadian poetry with the hope that such work will find an increasing place or space in Canadian, comparative and world literatures as well as literatures in English and French. These are sometimes distinctive spaces and sometimes overlapping spaces. These authors are also related to Indigenous literatures in Canadian, United States and worldwide in European and Indigenous languages. Other bigger literatures receive more attention than Canadian, Métis and Indigenous poetry or literatures. For instance, Valdés and Kadir map Latin American literature and Robert Tally explores the spaces of American literature in his geocriticism and, in his most recent work, makes further distinctions between spatial literary studies and literary geography (see Valdés and Kadir; Tally, *Spatiality* ch.3; Tally, “Spatial Literary” 317–331). Canadian literature, which is much smaller or apparently more marginal than the literature of the United States, Spanish America and Brazil, finds a space, as Caribbean literature does, as a small literature amongst the large literatures in the United States, Brazil and Spanish America as well as in the Atlantic world, Pacific rim and the North or Arctic (circumpolar). But Canadian literature, including Canadian poetry and Métis poetry, is more than small or minor. This poetry crosses boundaries and definitions in a geography of otherness, a literary space that moves inward within Canada and outward beyond its boundaries, partly owing to the use of English and French.

The Métis and Indigenous find a space in Canadian literature beyond Northrop Frye’s view of it as a bush garden with its garrison mentality, Margaret Atwood’s idea that survival is the central theme or a more multicultural or postmodern view of Canadian literature—as discussed by Hutcheon and Hart—and straddles English, French, immigrant languages from Europe, China, India and elsewhere and Indigenous languages such as Cree (see Frye; Atwood; Hart “Canadian Literature”; Hutcheon). Otherness and the in-between, for me, means that the literary or poetic expands for settler and Native not simply in terms of alterity but through the liminal or threshold space between, that is the space of the Métis. The literary or poetic space of Canada expands its scope through these relations of settler, Native and Métis through centripetal and centrifugal fields in which they engage. Moreover, there are porous borders between Canada with United States in mixed, Indigenous cultures. The use of Indigenous languages that are from the same languages and language families in North America as well as the shared languages of English and French with Britain, France and other countries worldwide means that to make Canadian poetry

or Métis poetry Deleuze's and Guattari's minor literature, Casanova's small literature or Ragon's secondary zone literature is not to tell the whole story and take into account their intricacies (see Deleuze and Guattari; Casanova; Ragon). Otherness and in-betweenness, as I argue here, allow for other aspects and contours of the topic I am discussing. Reading the poetry closely shows that the texture and individuality of these poets and the poems are other to the generalities and find themselves as being between theories and testing abstraction with the specificity of the concrete nature of a poem. This is a key point to my argument. Close reading is a literary space that tests, qualifies, resists and grounds abstract theories.

My own emphasis is on the between space of Métis poetry that reaches promising spaces within Canadian literature but also beyond and internationally. The poems have their own texture and the text opens up to readers beyond the Métis communities and Canada itself. The text is a map or space with a unique texture and so its particularity makes creative trouble for theory itself. The space between writer and reader, here the poet making and the reader reading, is a space where the poem is performed and where it means. Those are the contours and relief of poetry and literature, what I might call the geography of the text. Sheila Hones explores literary geography, including a reader and writer sharing a moment of a "text-based spatial interaction, a geographical event" (Hones, "Text" 1302), and discusses the ways in which literary spaces are real spaces, being both actual and fictional. Here, I argue that poetic spaces are as actual as they are fictional and that Canadian poetry and, more particularly, Métis poetry in Canada, are real spaces (Hones, *Literary Geographies* ch.3; cf. Hones, "Literary"; "Spatial"). They are a poetics of otherness (Hart, *The Poetics*). Like Yanli He, I see limitations of the minor literature of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and the small literature of Pascale Casanova and the secondary zone literature of Michael Ragon despite their important contributions (He; Deleuze and Guattari; Ragon; Conley). Like He, as well as David Damrosch, Marko Juvan, and Theo D'haen, I see globalization and world literature as something that complicates and leads away from minor or small literatures (small being closer to Kafka's German, *klein*, than *mineur* or minor are) (He; Damrosch, *What is*; Damrosch "Major"; Juvan "Peripherocentrism"; "World"; D'haen, *Routledge*; "Major"; "Worlding"). Minor is more of a value judgement than is small literature, which is why I prefer the term "small" even if that term is not adequate. Métis poetry may have an even smaller space or audience than Canadian poetry, but it has potential, partly in its otherness,

in-betweenness and concrete particularity, for us to explore possibilities in what Leibniz called possible worlds and Thomas Pavel deemed fictional worlds (see Hart, “A Comparative”; *Fictional*). Each poem is a world that opens up to the world, to world literature. The poems I shall read of the three poets give a slice of that world, a small but individual texture of the poet’s interpretation and the reader interpreting it.

Until recent decades, the literary space of Métis and First Nations’ poetry in Canadian literature had not received the attention it deserved. The poetry of Canadian poets, particularly Métis poets (of mixed European and Indigenous or First Nations background) from the Prairies, that of Louis Riel, who writes in French and English, and of Naomi McIlwraith, who is bilingual and writes in English and Cree, contributes to the mapping of Canada as a literary region. These are layers of literary space within the Canadian cultural space. Métis poetry challenges the binary opposition between European/settler literature in English and French and Native Canadian literature or poetry.

The liminal space of Métis poetry: Riel and McIlwraith between center and periphery

The Métis, who have lived between European and Canadian First Nations culture and literature, help to map what I call “a literature between” in Canada—Canadian literature is its own space and not simply a small literature in the Americas and in the world. These poets map Canada (various Canadas) and beyond through their poetry. The context for this space within a space is part of the multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic, multi-spatial and multicultural nature of North America in general, and Canada in particular.

Métissage is a longstanding debate in the French-speaking world. More specifically, in France during the 1930s, this term was explored in anthropology (Neuville; Gossard). There was a debate on this in French Canada and then in English Canada and there is an ongoing discussion (see Crépeau; Karahasan; Beaulieu and Chaffray; Ens and Sawchuk; Morris; Bouchard). Indigenous writers and scholars also explore this world of the in-between (Gunn; LaRocque, “The Metis”; “Native”; King, “Godzilla”; *A Coyote*; *The Truth*; Armstrong; Owens; Lukens; Scheick; Silko; Vizenor). In the past half century, writers and theorists have come to use *métissage* as a term for the recovery of occluded spaces, stories, histories cultures and regions, especially owing to colonialism, sometimes, as in the work of Edouard Glissant, recovering

oral traditions and questioning Western concepts, something that has led to the recuperation of occulted histories (see Glissant, *Le Discours* 462–463; Lionnet). By examining Métis poetry in Canada and analyzing poetry by Riel and McIlwraith as well that by Johnson, I can give a sense of distinctiveness and singularity even as some of those qualities might occur in “Métis” poetry outside Canada.

Métis and First Nations poetry are part of a multicultural and multi-ethnic mosaic. As we saw and as Hones and Anderson also observe, territories are actual and metaphorical (see Hones, *Literary Geographies*; Anderson). The idea of otherness in a Canadian context includes native-born, bilingual and bi-cultural, Métis, First Nations authors from Canada, and the idea of people coming from other shores to settle in North America, whether by choice or by force. The otherness stressed here is in the liminal or threshold space between Indigenous and settler cultures in a Métis or hybrid space that overlaps with but also challenges any notion of purity. This liminal or threshold space of Métis poetry in Canada is a representation of reality as part of Canadian poetry and poetry in the literature of the Americas and world literature.

Poetry matters just as McIlwraith’s use of Cree matters in her poetry. In a mass and commercial society, we tend to measure matters by market size and sometimes by profit, which would mean that poets are from the small genre of poetry and do not matter. I am looking at the space between, a threshold space, for those who were sometimes crushed between cultures or literatures, who sought to find space to express themselves. Riel was both Native and French and McIlwraith is Cree and Scottish. Riel and McIlwraith are poets and may also be writing to express themselves, irrespective of their place in literature in Canada or the world. Reception and categorization are more a matter for scholars than for writers and even for readers. Indigenous literatures and hybrid literatures, written in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese or Indigenous languages such as Cree and Maori deserve more attention, and that is even truer for poetry, which apparently has little use in a utilitarian society or profit in cultures given to money.

I introduce Riel and McIlwraith with another poet, of mixed background who identified herself with the Indigenous peoples and who wrote between the time of these two poets. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake) explains the title of her collected poems: “so both flint and feather bear the hall-mark of my Mohawk blood” (Johnson xvii) and the biography in the collection describes her: “E. Pauline Johnson (TEKAHIONWAKE) is the youngest child of a family of four born to the late G. H. M. Johnson (Onwanonsyshon), Head Chief of the

Six Nations Indians, and his wife, Emily S. Howells,” born in Bristol, England, who emigrated to Canada (xiii). Pauline Johnson is proud of her Native family as well as someone who performed her poetry in England as well as in Canada and the United States.

Johnson also writes about history in her poetry, including the Northwest Rebellion of which Riel was a leader and for which he was hanged, facing some of the Protestant-Catholic politics that Thomas D’Arcy McGee had faced. Johnson ends her poem, “A Cry from an Indian Wife,” which alludes to rebellion in the Northwest, thus:

Go forth, nor bend to greed of white man’s hands,
My right, by birth we Indians own these lands,
Though starved, crushed, plundered, lies our nation
low ...
Perhaps the white man’s God has willed it so. (Johnson 19)

There seems to be a call to arms against white greed and, through rhyme, the implied image that white hands have taken “Indian” lands. Moreover, Johnson uses verbs to express this unfair situation—“starved, crushed, plundered” (Johnson 319). The last line appears to be ironic as if this situation resulted from the will of the God of the white man. Johnson, part Mohawk and part English, born in Canada, is someone who might now identify as Native or as Métis (an intricate matter in terms of official and personal identity) (see Lawrence). This space between European/settler and Native culture is fluid and has changed over time. Johnson’s poetry is often concerned with representing Natives, their lands and their points of view.

Louis Riel, a Métis leader and poet and perhaps the best-known Métis in Canadian history, spent time in Montreal 1858–1866, the Red River 1868–1873, Quebec and New England 1874–1878, Minnesota and Dakota 1878–1879, Montana 1879–1884, Saskatchewan 1884–1885 (see Campbell), the movement of a life on both sides of the border (see Durnin). Although Riel did not always date his poems, which he wrote in French and English and in these various places, I am following the numbers, dates and places that Glen Campbell, the editor, assigns to the poems without certainty and I maintain the spelling and grammar of the original. It seems that in the Red River (Rivière Rouge) (70/05-08), Riel wrote a lyric poem/song “La Métisse,” which begins: “Je suis métisse et je suis orgueilleuse / D’appartenir à cette nation (I am Métisse and I am proud / To belong to this nation)” then continues: “Je sais que Dieu de sa main généreuse / Fait chaque peuple avec attention (I know that God with his generous hand / Treats each

people with care),” proceeds to “*Les métis sont un petit peuple encore / Mais vous pouvez voir déjà leurs destins / Etre haïs comme ils sont les honore* (The Métis are still a small people / But you can already see their destinies / To be hated as they are honour them)” and ends with “*Ils ont déjà rempli de grands desseins* (They have already fulfilled great designs)” (Riel 88, lines 1–8). Although the syntax is a little thorny, even as the destinies of the Métis are to be hated, they should be honored (expressed in an imperative). In a time of racial theories and racism not friendly to the Métis, Riel represents the situation, the lack of space with the expansion of the settlers, and attempts to seek to create a larger space in poetry and discourse—an imaginative space—for this small people or nation under threat, to give this Métis woman pride in her nation whom God has made with care as he has with each people or nation. The stanza has the rhyme scheme ababcdcd and the rhyme emphasizes, in this poem in the first person, the speaker’s self-representation of herself as proud to belong to this nation and her voice representing God’s generous hand, making with care or attention each people and the “petit peuple” (small people) of the Métis full of grand or large designs. The smallness of the Métis can be enlarged through design and, by implication, by Riel’s poem and song.

Probably writing from Beauport or New England between 1874 and 1878, Riel begins one of the poems (4-074): “*Le Sang Sauvage en moy rayonne: / Et je louange mes aïeux* (The Wild Blood shines in me: / And I praise my ancestors)” (my translations here, above and below, Riel 178, lines 1–2). “Sauvage” in French, as it does in sixteenth and early seventeenth-century English (“salvage”), means wild, and “savage” in English came to be pejorative, so I prefer the “Wild” here. Campbell says that Riel was one eighth Native from his paternal grandmother (“bisaïeule paternelle”), a “Montagnaise-Chippewan” (Campbell 180, note 2). Riel is proud of this Indigenous ancestry. In the same poem, he raises the issue of cruelty: “*Les espagnols ont du courage. / Mais leurs exploits sont effrayants. / Tant d’autres sont durs au sauvage, / Tout en paraissant vrais croyants* (The Spaniards have courage. / But their exploits are frightening. / So many others are tough on the wild, / While appearing to be true believers).” (Riel 179, lines 29–32). Riel begins with representing the Spanish as having courage, but then says that their exploits cause fear and many are hard on the Indigenous peoples while also representing the Spaniards as people who seem to be believers or Christians. For Riel, the Natives have harsh Spaniards in their space. In another poem (4-106), Riel writes in English in Helena, Montana (82/06-09), and opens thus: “I

can sing in my poetry / Right and wealth.” (Riel 279, lines 1–2) In another language, Riel is creating another space. The power of poetry is different here: “My poems can show the big trains / Run by the Northern Pacific / Over Hills and through rowling plains: / I can celebrate their traffic.” (Riel 279, lines 5–8) Like Whitman, Riel can sing a song of America and its changes, here the railroad across the plains in which the bison roamed. At St. Peter’s Mission (83/08), Riel writes an ode, “Le peuple Métis-Canadien-français (The Metis-Canadian-French People),” a poem that represents Métis, Natives Canadians, French, Canada and the United States (4–114; Riel 319). The opening of the poem gives a sense of Riel’s hope: “J’aime sans mesure et j’admire / Les Métis-canadiens- français: / Ce peuple nouveau qui se mire / Déjà dans se brilliants succès (I love without measure and I admire / The Metis-Canadians-French: / This new people who is reflected / Already in brilliant successes).” (Riel 319, lines 3–6) The first-person speaker cannot measure the love and admiration he expresses for this new people—Native and French, French-speaking—in what is now Canada and the United States. Riel’s celebratory poetry pays homage to the Métis and the new culture and space they have forged and his poetry continues to forge for them, a space that is part of Native, settler and mixed or hybrid poetry in Canada and the United States. Riel creates new spaces within Canadian and world poetry and literature.

The Canadian prairies can provide a good example of the bilingual and how that affects geography, otherness, mapping, center and periphery in terms of language, poetry, culture, the personal and the public. Cree, English, French and other languages co-existed on the Canadian prairies, which came to have an artificial border between the United States and Canada in a region (the Great Plains), which had no natural boundary and certainly not in terms of these two polities. Naomi McIlwraith is writing in Edmonton on land under Treaty 6, between the Crown and Cree, Assiniboine and Ojibwa on 23 August 1876 and on 9 September 1876, its boundaries extending to what now constitutes parts of central Alberta and Saskatchewan. McIlwraith has a mixed background of Cree and Scottish—what is now often called Métis culture to include people who are partly British as well as the original meaning of those who are partly French as “half-breed” has come to be much less used. She explores, in *kiryâm*, boundaries and spaces, personal, familial, social, historical, cultural and political, between cultures. This is a hybrid and contested space in language, memory, identity, representation and much else. This is a territory about lost territory, the lands of the Cree being wrenched from them,

their language lost and reclaimed slowly by the speaker and the author. Their own center has become their periphery, and the periphery of Europe has come and claimed as the Europeans' own the very center of the Cree lands. The British authorities and then the Canadian governments after independence have made the Cree other to themselves; the Cree have had their language taken away. McIlwraith finds herself on both sides of this divide, trying to understand her family, cultures and herself, reclaiming Cree culture, language, remembrance. She is trying to undo misrepresentation, to remap center and periphery, to offer a new geography of otherness.

The reader follows McIlwraith's journey. Her book begins with the section, "Family Poems," with the poem, "The Road to Writer's Block (A Poem to Myself)," which opens as follows:

Turn left at desire. Take this burden
and never let go. Cling
as a burr latches onto fleece.
Be sure that your load includes
the self-imposed responsibility to learn
a threatened language: namely *néhiyawéwin*.
Go home: *kiwê*.
Head north: *kiwêtinohk itohhtë*.
Take a route unknown to you.
Do not plan too far
into the future. Do step forth with mute
naïveté. Invent a folktale so fantastic it can't
be disbelieved. Do this in the same way
you would mould green truth from fact, tender
as the first prairie crocus—*wâpikwanis*. (McIlwraith 5)

The striking half-line is the opening of a set of directions the poet writes to herself. Why she should turn left and not right, she does not say, but it arrests the reader and the poet mid-line. The alliteration of "Turn" and "Take" are part of the order of direction, an imperative to the self overheard by the listener or looked on by the reader. Ear and eye absorb this imperative of directions or directives to self and other. "Take this burden / and never let go" involves enjambment so it takes a turn to the other line to discover the second imperative, a surprising exhortation as well as an order "never" to "let go." Here is an imperative of determination and tenacity. The next word "Cling" also awaits, through enjambment, completion, "as a burr latches onto fleece," this simile showing how the "Cling" is like "a burr," nature's inspiration for velcro, latching to this "fleece." These imperatives "Turn" and "Take" and "never let go," combine with the

imagery to show that the burden is taken on with a stubborn defiance and not as a weight leading to defeat. McIlwraith turns to more imperatives of solidity and steadfastness: “Be sure” and “Go home.” She speaks to herself as other by referring to herself in terms of “your” and “you.” The speaker insists that “your load” also comprises of “the self-imposed responsibility” that McIlwraith defines as learning “a threatened language,” which the poem and her glossary define for the unilingual reader. As a supplement to the poem, McIlwraith explains as she translates and the reader learns from “Cree-English Correspondences”:

<i>nèhiyawêwin</i>	the Cree language, speaking Cree
<i>kîwê</i>	go home
<i>kîwêtinohk itohîê</i>	go north, northwards (towards the north wind)
<i>wâpikwanîs</i>	flower (McIlwraith 125)

Her translations are sometimes a little different here or a little more expansive than what she provides in the poem. The commands in this poem are a mixture of positives and negatives. For instance, she says: “Do not,” “Do” and “Do.” She commands herself not to plan too distant in the future, to step forward mute and naïve, to invent such a fantastic folktale it cannot be disbelieved, as if to “mould green truth from fact,” which McIlwraith elaborates on with a striking image, “tender / as the first prairie crocus,” much more specific and memorable than the “flower” in the translation from the Cree in “Correspondences.” These self-imperatives define the speaker in language and culture.

In “Reclamation Poems” McIlwraith begins with “Cree Lessons,” a poem that explores linguistic boundaries in English and Cree about other differences and opens thus:

We are keen, though some of us have better ears than others.
The teacher’s voice inflects the pulse of *nèhiyawêwin* as he teaches us.
He says a prayer in the first class.

Nouns, we learn, have a gender.
In French, nouns are male or female,
but in Cree, nouns are living or non-living, animate or inanimate.
A chair, *têhtapiwin*, is inanimate. *tohtôsâpoy*, or milk, is also inanimate.
But the breast it comes from is animate. (McIlwraith 43)

The speaker once more represents how keen she is (and the group is too here) to learn Cree. She makes a voice the teacher has to inflect the pulse of the language and distinguishes French from Cree in the context of

an English-Cree poem. French is given to gender, Cree to living or not. The speaker finds part of herself in language, in a lesson her ancestors knew and she thinks she must learn. For her and in her ears and on her tongue, *nêhiyawêwin* is gaining a place and its cadence and rhythm and sounds are becoming part of McIlwraith's poetry. This is the space of her music, the heuristics of her linguistic geography.

McIlwraith begins the section, "A FEW IDEAS FROM *amiskwacî-wâskahikanîhk*," with "The Young Linguist," a poem that begins as follows:

A girl, perhaps five,
whose father will later tell me she speaks
English, French, and Armenian,
approaches me at Fort Edmonton Park.
"How do you say 'Hi' in the teepee way?"
she asks. (McIlwraith 73)

Language is part of the encounter at work, or the space between people and cultures. Armenian now comes into the conversation along with English, French and Cree. The young and not so young exchange through linguistics. The poem ends with a bilingual explanation:

"Around here," I reply, "the Cree say,
'*tânisi*,' or if you want to say,
'Hello, how are you?'
we say, '*tânisi kiya*.'" (McIlwraith 73)

Often the speaker is the student, but here she is the teacher. The poem also represents the eagerness of the child to learn language, which implicitly is the opposite of the impulse that repressed Indigenous languages such as Cree. There is space for Cree and Armenian in this geography of otherness, in a map without center and periphery.

The final grouping of the poetry is "History Poems." The last in this section is the title poem, "*kiyâm*—Let It Be." McIlwraith begins the poem thus:

The dictionary tells me
it means "think nothing of it," and
"let's go then,"
"so much for this,"
"let there be no further delay,"
and a few other things like that. (McIlwraith 119)

Here is another language lesson. The speaker learns about the Cree of some of her ancestors, and shows in this opening but throughout the poem, the richness and multiplicity of the word, *kiryâm*, which begins as “let it be” but resonates in so many ways. This one word, which is also the title of the collection, shows, as in a grain of sand, the extent of the multiple meanings and nuances of Cree. McIlwraith, in ending this section and her book of poetry, makes space for Cree in English, in her bilingual and multi-polar, multivalent geography of otherness. McIlwraith has helped to open up the mapping in Canada in relation to itself and to other spaces and cultures.

Conclusion

The poetry of Native and Métis poets has mapped the region of the prairies, and a wider Canada, in ways that differ from “traditional” Western, perhaps English, French and European notions of Canada and North America—the New World. This essay contributes to studies of center and periphery in geography, history, and culture, including literature while discussing European settler, Métis and Native poetry to map and remap this multicultural Canada, North America and the Americas. This discussion has explored the ways in which the poetry of Canadian authors, particularly Métis, who identify as of mixed Native and European backgrounds who are acutely aware of language or are bilingual or multilingual, have contributed to the mapping of Canada as a literary space. I have discussed theory, criticism, fiction and especially poetry to show that poetry and other literary forms play a role in mapping regions and that, having provided a context, Métis and First Nations poems, not to mention their theoretical, critical and fictional writing, are a good vehicle for exploring this practice. The focus on Métis and Native poetry, in the contexts of European poetry in Germany, Canada and the United States, is an original route to explore the idea of literary mapping of territory. The individual poems I have read closely qualify, through their very particularity, the tendency of many theories, including those of space and its geometry of center and periphery, to abstraction. Theories are ways in, hypotheses, but the poems themselves explore similar matters in distinctive and concrete ways. The making of the poet and the reading of the reader are where the meaning ultimately lies and this very specificity relates to and qualifies, with poems, the generalizations and abstractions of theory. In the poems, between the poet and reader, a distinct texture occurs and bears a relation to theories that try to define that space and its connection with context.

The Métis poets, such as Riel and McIlwraith, forge a private and public space for themselves that allows space for this hybrid or mixed group. In fact, other poets, such as Pauline Johnson, might well be considered a Métis poet, now that we often use the term to include British-Native poets, once called half-breeds. Mourning Dove or Christine Quintasket is sometimes said to be a Native writer and sometimes Métis, so that European, Metis and Native poetry crosses borders and overlaps and creates its own poetics of space (Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest; Srivastava; Lukens). Although McIlwraith includes Cree with her English and Riel writes French and English poems, much of the Métis and Native poetry is in English or French in Canada. A “small” literature like Canadian literature had and has a hard time getting space in Canada and elsewhere in the world, a place in world literature. Moreover, poetry gets even less space, so that Métis and Native poetry in Canada, even while crossing borders, has an even harder task getting notice over time and finding space in Canadian and world literature. Métis poetry is a liminal space between center and periphery and has implications for hybrid and mixed as well as Indigenous poetry, literature and culture worldwide. These mixed and hybrid aspects of local, regional and national literatures have implications for world literature, the poetics of space and the poetics of otherness.

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Liminalni prostor poezije Métis: med središčem in obrobjem

Ključne besede: kanadska književnost / literarni prostor / liminalnost / kulturna identiteta / poezija Métis / Riel, Louis / Johnson, Pauline / McIlwraith, Naomi

Članek preučuje literarni prostor kanadske književnosti v svetovni književnosti in mejni prostor poezije Métis, ki se na prav poseben način umešča med evropski in avtohtoni vidik kanadske književnosti. Paradoks je ta, da lahko poezija in literatura Métis v Kanadi, ki sta bili dolgo marginalizirani, zdaj v svetovni in primerjalni književnosti ustvarita nov prostor za kanadsko literaturo, za to majhno med velikimi literaturami, in pesnike, rojene ali živeče v Kanadi. S tem ko preučujemo poezijo Métis v Kanadi ter analiziramo pesništvo Louisa Riela (1844–1885), Pauline Johnson (znane tudi kot Tekahionwake ali Dvojni Wampum, 1861–1913) in Naomi McIlwraith (sodobnica),

kreiramo občutek posebnosti in enkratnosti, čeprav se nekatere od teh lastnosti lahko pojavijo tudi v poeziji »Métis« zunaj Kanade. Riel in McIlwraith zasedata literarni in kulturni vmesni prostor – Riel piše v francoščini, McIlwraith pa v angleščini in algonkinskem *creeju* – ter prepletata malo in veliko središče, kot del tega pa tudi »narod v narodu«, ta mejni prostor, kjer se prevprašujejo sebstvo, identiteta in drugi.

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