BORDERBLUR POETICS: INTERMEDIA AND AVANT-GARDISM IN CANADA, 1963-1988

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Introduction

literature doesn't mean long live the empire; literature is words

—bill bissett (2 July 1967)

"This is the death of the poem as I have faithfully reported it, November 29, 1966, as I have faithfully reported it, this is the death of the poem" intones Canadian poet bpNichol one day after the Dominion Day celebrations marking Canada's centennial year. Addressing a national television audience, Nichol reads these lines with poets bill bissett and Phyllis Webb, who chant the words "obituary" and "mortuary" alongside him.[1] This poem was published in January 1967 in issue 1 of Nichol's mimeographed publication *grOnk*; it declares that "THE POEM IS DEAD," signifying, for Nichol, the potential for poetry's rebirth.[2] After the poets conclude their chant, the camera cuts from a close-up of bissett to a shot of all three poets sitting at the studio table. Webb instructs bissett, who wears a grotesque mask with a knife protruding from his neck, to "Take off your mask, bill, and join the group," and in doing so, as scholar Katherine McLeod recognizes, Webb "symbolically unmasks the strange identity of the new Canadian avant-garde" for the literary public.[3] Announcing poetry's demise and subsequent regeneration, this episode marks a meeting between Canada's literary public and an emergent generation of avant-garde writers who proclaim a poetics that secedes from established literary traditions. Nichol and bissett televise the advent of an expansive, liberated intermedial poetic they call *borderblur*. Taking borderblur as its subject, this book combines archival research, historical analysis, canon

intervention, and literary criticism to trace the poetic's emergence and pro-liferation as a significant but underexamined node of avant-garde activity in Canada.

Nichol and bissett delivered this performance at the youthful ages of twenty-two and twenty-seven, respectively, on the CBC program *Extension: Here, Now, and Then*; the show was hosted by Webb, a well-known Canadian poet and public intellectual. Airing during Canada's centennial celebrations, in the summer of 1967, *Extension* featured the nation's established literati alongside some more emergent personalities.[4] Each episode was "an experi-ment in the staging of poetry in distinct contexts and manners, with poet-ry presented through film, theatrical readings, conversations at a table and even at a piano."[5] As avant-garde writers who experiment with language and media, Nichol and bissett were well-suited to a multimedia presentation of poetry. With cameras directed at them on a sound stage, a reel-to-reel tape player in the foreground, books, magazines, and papers spread across the table, and their drawings and poems tacked on to the walls, the studio space reproduces the distinctive multimedia characteristics of their work. They sip coffee and smoke cigarettes while Webb guides them through a conversation that touches on such topics as the influence of Allen Ginsberg's Beat poetry and lifestyle, the rock 'n' roll of Mick Jagger, the protest songs of Bob Dylan, and the jazz of Vancouver's Gerry Walker, all while weaving in discussion of their poetries' polyphonic qualities, the destabilization of Western reading practices, diverse uses of media, and implicit forms of social engagement. For Canada, the 1967 centennial signifies a historical turning point, a coming-of-age moment for the country and its cultural identity. I imagine that viewers who tuned in for *Extension*'s investigation of the nation's poetry one day after Dominion Day might have been perplexed by Nichol's poetic eulogy, bissett's grotesque disguise, and their discussions of new music, intoxication, and al-ternative lifestyles. While the show was meant to take the pulse of Canadian letters, Nichol and bissett ultimately offer their viewers evidence of an emer-gent poetic milieu distinguished from Canada's existing national literature by its playfulness, penchant for experimentation, and internationalist attitude.

Regarding nation and literature, Nichol and bissett discuss the ideas that inform their poetics within the context of an emergent sense of the world, unbound by electronic media and untethered from a particular nationalist ideology. At the time, this unbound sense of the world is described by re-nowned Canadian media critic Marshall McLuhan, who in *The Gutenberg*

Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man (1962) first identifies this period as the *electric age* (more commonly known as the electronic or information age), wherein electronic media—radio, television, film, computers, and so on—accelerated the possibilities for information consumption and communication. "Now, in the electric age," McLuhan writes, "the very instantaneous nature of co-existence among our technological instruments has created a crisis quite new in human history. Our extended faculties and senses now constitute a single field of experience which demands that they become collectively conscious."[6] And in turn, the conditions of this age inspired a shrinking sense of the planet he referred to as the *global village*, a term he advanced in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* and recapitulated with more nuance in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964).[7] Nichol and bissett, it seems, had absorbed this sense of the world by 1967. bissett explains to Webb that their poetry emerges from "not having the margins, not having the borders. . . . Not being limited to a sentence construction or an idea."[8] By invoking "borders," bissett draws attention to the intermedial characteristics of his and Nichol's poetics while implicitly undercutting the nationalist ethos of the government-funded television show. For poets like bissett and Nichol, poesis occurs when poetry is enmeshed with other media, including song, image, movement, sculpture, painting, drawing, print, and more.

Given Webb's penchant for innovative and avant-garde poetic forms, it is hardly surprising that she pushes deeper into the fray.[9] She asks them, "is there any real point to trying to affix a label to a kind of poetry?" Nichol responds by explaining that "there's an Englishman who just called it borderblur." Webb chuckles at this, perhaps already familiar with British poet and theologian Dom Sylvester Houédard (also known as dsh), who coined the term. Nichol explains that borderblur reaches into "all the areas, crossing over into all the arts" to, in effect, dissolve boundaries between linguistic, visual, sonic, and performative modes of creative expression.[10] It may at first seem ironic that Nichol connects his and bissett's practices to the terminology of an Englishman, one who might conjure visions of Canada's ongoing colonial legacy. However, borderblur, as Nichol describes it, refuses traditional poetry's conventions, and it undermines the conceptual solidity of national borders. bissett agrees with Nichol and earlier in the episode locates their work within a global movement, suggesting that the point of borderblur is "to drop off the borders," like those poets, he notes, publishing in Brazil, Belgium, England, Holland, Japan, and Scotland. "It's not just a Canadian

trip," he contends.[11] With this list of nations home to kindred avant-garde practitioners, bissett is likely thinking of the global currents of concrete poetry, which were being recognized in international anthologies at the time. This includes Emmett Williams's *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry* (1967), which was published by Dick Higgins's then New York–based Something Else Press and featured Nichol's concrete poem "eyes."[12] bissett further emphasizes his suspicions of nationalism by pointing out that "literature doesn't mean long live the empire; literature is words."[13] While it's difficult to know exactly what bissett means here, I do not read this as an apolitical statement severing poetry from its social or political contexts; rather, by pledging a primary allegiance to words, bissett signals his rejection of the colonial spectre that looms over Canadian literary culture through the importation of its literary tradition and standardized use of British spelling and syntax. Instead, he imagines language to be part of a greater artistic force that does not require falling into the standards of conventional English, and through which he can reject singular notions of national literary hegemony and its "early fantasies of homogeneity."[14] By invoking borderblur, both poets articulate their poetics as distinctive and formally inventive and locate their work within a broader international network of avant-garde practitioners. This book examines how this strain of avant-garde activity complicates long-standing narratives describing Canadian poetry as an expression of Canadian national identity.

I reflect upon this episode of *Extension* for the ways it highlights three central considerations of this study. Firstly, it tidily introduces the terminology that animates this project: *poetry*, *nation*, *media*, and *avant-gardism*. Working through these interlocking terms in chapter 1, I take up the idea of borderblur to theorize it as a poetic that allows me to understand the central characteristics and concerns that emerged under its immediate usage, and also how that idea formulated a network of like-minded poets in Canada in the second half of the twentieth century. This is important to note since borderblur is no longer really a term in vogue. Few poets today would use it to describe their work—they would likely prefer terms like multimedia or hybrid—even though many still fold poetry into other artistic modes; included in that group could be Jordan Abel, Oana Avasilichioaei, Gary Barwin, Derek Beaulieu, Stephen Cain, Wayde Compton, Adeena Karasick, Kaie Kellough, M. NourbeSe Philip, Jordan Scott, Kate Siklosi, Dani Spinosa, Matthew James Weigel, and many others. Borderblur emerges and proliferates within a specific context in the mid- to late twentieth century. Secondly, this episode

of *Extension* introduces one of the main contentions that this study investigates. bissett's statement against borders highlights how these poets used the term "borderblur" to not only distinguish their poetic work but to announce their cosmopolitan outlook. As they note, the poets borrowed the term from British poet Houédard, thereby positioning themselves as Canadians who, by virtue of their poetic and its connection to an international context, complicate notions of poetry as an expression of national identity. Finally, but most importantly, the episode introduces the relationship between two of this book's principal figures—bissett and Nichol—and the contextual environment within which they created and published. I position them as two main actors whose poetries embody a set of common presumptions around which many other poets gathered in Canada. Some of these like-minded writers and artists include David Aylward, Shaunt Basmajian, Martina Clinton, Judith Copithorne, Brian Dedora, Paul Dutton, Roy Kiyooka, Steve McCaffery, Susan McMaster, Penn Kemp, John Riddell, Ann Rosenberg, Gerry Shikatani, David UU, and others—all of whom make an appearance in this book because of their shared interest in dissolving boundaries that separate creative fields, and because certain facets of their poetic outputs can be understood as representative of borderblur. To locate poets under a single banner may be more expedient than necessarily precise, but they are united by a network of small presses, little magazines, and performance spaces that distinguished them from the majority of the writers in Canada at that time, and, more concretely, they developed their work in proximity to Nichol and bissett, either through publication, friendship, performance, collaboration, or financial support. Taken together, they form an avant-garde network of affiliation that developed an alternative vision for poetry and its production in Canada, one that exceeds the traditional, page-based work that dominated the literary mainstream during the second half of the twentieth century. This book begins to tell the story of how this network of Canadian poets came to be connected by a shared poetics.

In the works of the poets examined in this study, I find indications that they imagined themselves to be working with a dynamic cosmopolitan outlook as the complexities of emergent electronic media and international relations formed their sense of poetry at home. But what specific conditions gave rise to this explosion of intermedial creativity in a Canadian literary context? If borderblur did not actively nurture the dominant national literary discourse, to what conversations and contexts does it contribute? How did

borderblur intervene into the imaginative process of national identity formation? If borderblur is conceived as a cosmopolitan alternative to the dominant nationalist literature, what conditions have since arisen to welcome some of these poets into the fold of the Canadian literary canon? How does the legacy of borderblur live on in Canadian literature today? These are the questions that animate this study.

As cultural actors sought to modernize Canada's national and cultural identity in both the lead-up to 1967 and the years since, it seems that Nichol and bissett had already realized literary critic Jahan Ramazani's claim that "even a 'national poet' turns out, on closer inspection, to also be a transnational poet."[15] With that said, this book does not necessarily adopt a transnational critical approach. Rather, it maps the emergence and proliferation of borderblur poetics in Canada in the mid- to late twentieth century as the formation of a literary identity that is aesthetically diverse, internationalist, and intermedial. Borderblur is profitably recognized as a Canadian literary avant-garde "paratradition," a term used by scholar Gregory Betts to describe avant-garde literature, and which I invoke here to account for borderblur's Canadian context and its deviation from the national literary matrix. Despite borderblur's rootedness in the counterculture, as a description "paratradition" is preferable to "countertradition," since this latter term might suggest a persistent opposition to literary hegemony.[16] Given the poetic's propensity for aesthetic openness, to suggest that borderblur poets were explicitly nationalist, transnationalist, or anti-nationalist would be antithetical to their work. Just as they resisted aesthetic foreclosure, political circumscription risks over-generalization and does not account for the way their relationship to nationalism may shift over time and across contexts. Regardless of what this means for each poet's relationship to nationalism, I argue in this book that they created an intermedial literary paratradition that eschewed a distinctive nationalistic agenda and instead formed an active branch of an international avant-garde network that was entangled with the emergent conditions of their time.

Canons and Controversies: Literary Traditions and Intermediality in Canada

In the following chapters, I examine three manifestations of this Canadian literary paratradition by focusing on concrete poetry, sound poetry, and kinetic poetry, each of which can be neatly located under an umbrella term advanced

by Fluxus artist Dick Higgins—namely, *intermedia*, which describes a broad range of creative work that falls "between media."[17] Originally published in 1966 in the *Something Else Newsletter*, Higgins offered "intermedia" as a term for engaging with works that fuse multiple art forms in such a way that it's difficult to distinguish them from one another. These kinds of works prompt critics and audiences to reconsider the conventional "separation between media [that] arose in the Renaissance,"[18] and to effectively unsettle the conventions of genre, literary practice, and the discourse of analysis. When Higgins began to take stock of his own avant-garde milieu, "intermedia" was an effective term that captured a broad range of practices happening across Europe, North America, South America, parts of Asia, and elsewhere. Reflecting on the mid-1960s when he first offered the term, he writes, "The world was filled at that time with concrete poems, happenings, sound poetry, environments, and other more or less novel developments."[19] This description corresponds to much of the work examined here.[20] In the context of this study, *intermedial* works create meaning and effect through the inseparable combination of language with other media, as implied by Nichol's definition of borderblur above. In the contemporary context, we might draw parallels between intermedia and the concept of *multimodal communication*, which recognizes, as leading scholars Gunther Kress and Carey Jewitt point out, that "*language is partial*"[21] to the pursuit of meaning-making, and this is true, too, for the poets discussed in this book. While I find *multimodality* to be a useful term for retroactively theorizing borderblur as a poetic, since it emphasizes that language is not the only means of communicating, *intermedia* is more directly applicable to the works that this book examines. Given the close temporal proximity between Higgins and the poets discussed in this book, as well as the network of avant-garde practitioners that they shared, intermedia as a term embodies both aesthetic principles of borderblur and gestures toward the cosmopolitan scene they were responding to. We shall see, too, the subtle and not-so-subtle ways that the term directly informed certain facets of avant-garde practices and communities in Canada. There was the formation in 1967 of the Intermedia Society, for example—an artist-run space in Vancouver dedicated to the exploration of emergent media by a variety of creative practitioners, including poets such as Copithorne, whose work is discussed in chapter 2. The term also places media near the centre of this book's discussion, an especially important point since the work of media theorists such as McLuhan (discussed below) were touchstones for situating

borderblur as a practice in Canada. This is important to recognize because many of the books, poems, games, installations, and ephemera examined in this study are representative of borderblur in that they rely on the fusion of language with other media. Higgins's definition of intermedia is echoed by Nichol's fundamental argument, made in 1967, that "we have reached a point where people have finally come to see that language means communication and that communication does not necessarily mean language."[22] For Nichol, like Higgins, writing and art making occurs through interactions between language, image, sound, gesture, space, and so on. Thus, I recognize that the poets that I have here gathered under the umbrella term "borderblur" often embrace intermediality and all it offers. Though concrete, sound, and kinetic poetry have substantial, and at times overlapping, histories and meanings, each form sees specific combinations of language with other media. These forms distinguish borderblur poetics as a Canadian paratradition, since they are generally acknowledged as unconventional and certainly not mainstream. Concrete, sound, and kinetic poetry will be more thoroughly defined in each respective chapter, but for now, these three terms bear some cursory definition to understand what distinguishes this poetry from the singular media of Canada's dominant national literature.

Concrete poetry, sometimes also referred to as visual poetry, describes a poetic form that fuses literary and visual arts by combining language with non-linguistic elements. Concrete poems are often recognized for the ways that words and individual letters form shapes, patterns, and images through the poet's intentional arrangement of language and attention to related materials such as typeface, colour, graphics, and page layout and size. Sound poetry is a form that seizes upon the historically oral and aural aspects of poetry by bridging literature with auditory practices such as music, chant, and sound art. Sound poetry is often intended for performance and utilizes language and language's elemental parts—such as phonemes and morphemes—to create dramatic and often chant- or song-like poems. Kinetic poetry, meanwhile, as a pre-digital form, is significantly under-theorized in the Canadian context. While concrete and sound poetry, respectively, engage the optic and sonic realms of the human sensorium, kinetic poetry is holistic by comparison and incorporates body movement and gesture, feeling, and sensation. The kinetic poems examined in this book often require a more fulsome engagement with the audience's body in the process of meaning-making, as exhibited in flipbooks, immersive installations, and interactive and

game-based works. Chapters 2–5 address each term's history and theorization in more detail, but it is significant to note, for now, that this book attends specifically to their manifestation under the aegis of borderblur poetics in the early 1960s and its proliferation in Canada through to the late 1980s.

As is well established in Canadian literary scholarship, there was a flurry of activity in the years before and after 1967 that effectively consolidated a distinguished national literature in Canada that largely excluded concrete, sonic, and kinetic poetries. These activities are recapitulated in Nick Mount's *Arrival: The Story of CanLit* (2017), which describes the establishment of Canadian literary hegemony, or as he calls it, the "CanLit Boom." Convinced that postwar affluence encouraged Canadian cultural development, Mount traces the emergence of Canadian literature as a distinctive part of Canadian public and private life. The period, according to Mount, begins in 1959 and concludes in 1974, and he narrates the emergence of such renowned Canadian literary personalities as Margaret Atwood and Michael Ondaatje; the rise of Canadian literary grant and prize culture as distributed by national institutions such as the Canada Council for the Arts; the establishment of Canadian literary presses like McClelland and Stewart, Anansi, and Coach House; the flourishing of new bookstores; and the arrival of an affluent Canadian reading public. *Arrival* has been criticized for its lack of diverse representation, which results from Mount's focus on a narrow canon of authors who assumed powerful cultural positions during the boom. In his review of the book, literary critic Paul Barrett, for example, finds fault in *Arrival* because its "cast of characters are exceptionally white in a way that is not truly reflective of the CanLit community."[23] Mount omitted, for example, indispensable writers such as Maria Campbell and Austin Clarke.

Though it might not call for the sort of urgent correction Barrett advocates, the fact is that avant-garde writers of the borderblur paratradition are similarly given only slight acknowledgement in *Arrival*. Though no single book of criticism could achieve encyclopedic completeness, such omissions and under-representations combine to produce an uneven account of the Canadian literatures that emerged during the postwar era. While Mount briefly attends to bissett and Nichol in his narration of the Canadian literary establishment, his predominant focus on traditional literary expression at the expense of intermedial forms of expression directs readers' attention away from many writers who were captivated by the possibilities of borderblur, some of whom were women and feminists like Judith Copithorne,

Penn Kemp, Susan McMaster, and Ann Rosenberg, as well as writers with compound identities such as Armenian Canadian Shaunt Basmajian and Japanese Canadian Gerry Shikatani. Within the existing scholarship, these writers remain under-acknowledged or ignored altogether. This book seeks to remedy this issue by writing these figures more forcefully into the narrative of borderblur's proliferation, thereby providing a critical aperture just wide enough that I hope other scholars and readers will continue to gaze. In 1964, Copithorne, for example, arguably produced the first concrete poem among the borderblur poets, published in *blewointment*, with her hand-drawn mixture of text and image. Soon after, *blewointment* featured an increasing number of related works (a significant point first publicly recognized by Betts in his 2021 book *Finding Nothing: The Vangardes, 1959–1975*). Likewise, Rosenberg's semi-erotic novel *The Bee Book* (1981)—which blends concrete poetry with prose narrative—has been overlooked by scholars, despite W. H. New's comparison between Rosenberg and the celebrated Québécois writer Nicole Brossard.[24] With its attention to these important figures, this study, generates a more diverse account of avant-gardism in Canada in the mid- to late twentieth century.

The beginnings of this thriving avant-garde literary culture can be seen, for example, in the network of little magazines and small presses that promoted borderblur poetics in Canada and brought scores of intermedial works into circulation. These venues and their publications gave writers an opportunity to combine and experiment with media and materials and write about taboo subjects while reaching a small but receptive audience. For example, bissett began publishing *blewointment* magazine in Vancouver; it ran from 1963 to 1977 (Blew Ointment Press operated from 1968 until approximately 1984) and inaugurated borderblur as a recognizable paratradition by featuring concrete poetry, lyric poetry, pattern poetry, collages, drawings, found materials, and more. Nichol, who lived in Vancouver during the early days of *blewointment*, relocated to Toronto and brought the publication's spirit with him. He then started Ganglia Press, which produced *Ganglia* magazine (active from 1965 to 1967), jointly edited and published with Toronto poet David Aylward, to initially feature some of the writers Nichol knew out West, notably George Bowering, Copithorne, and bissett. Its related outgrowth, *grOnk*, was published starting in 1967 and, formalizing its interests in international borderblur, called for "manuscripts concerned with concrete kinetic and related borderblur poetry."[25]

Figure 0.1: Front cover of *Ganglia*, no. 1, published January 1965.

These endeavours inspired other small presses and magazines and in this way helped to form a significant network of avant-garde literatures. A prolific publisher in his own right, David UU founded and operated Fleye Press (1966–70), Divine Order of the Lodge (1971–5), Derwyddon Press (1976–81), and Silver Birch Press (1987–94), alongside his work with Nichol on *grOnk*; in a flurry, Copithorne released three issues of *Returning* magazine from July 1972 until May 1973; bissett, with poets Patrick Lane, Seymour Mayne, and Jim Brown, founded Very Stone House in 1965; in 1970, Steve McCaffery began publishing a handful of works under the moniker of Anonbeyond Press; Michael Dean started Wild Press; Richard Truhlar and John Riddell co-founded Phenomenon Press and *Kontakte* magazine in 1975; in the same year, Truhlar founded the Kontakte Writers in Performance series, which featured readings and performances by Canadian and international writers and ran for a total of ten years; seeking opportunities to publish literature in more varied media in 1979, Dean, Brian Dedora, Paul Dutton, McCaffery, Nichol, Riddell, Truhlar, and Steven Ross Smith began publishing Underwhich Editions; and so on and so on.[26] Another significant venue for borderblur poetry was Toronto-based Coach House Press, where Nichol worked in various capacities and edited notable works like Copithorne's *A Light Character* (1985) and Rosenberg's *The Bee Book*. Coach House was also the publisher of the first anthology of women's poetry in Canada, according to Kemp, who edited it in the summer of 1973 (issued as *IS*).[27] None of these forums were exclusively dedicated to borderblur poetics; at times, they featured "trad" poetries, as the poets liked to call them (that is, traditional free verse poetry). However, they were essential venues for showcasing intermedial works in their magazines, books, chapbooks, broadsides, pamphlets, cassettes, vinyl records, floppy disks, games, and microfiche. With their support for an alternative intermedial poetic, these forums provide significant evidence of a thriving and dynamic paratradition that tested the limits of conventional poetry and publishing while seeking more expansive forms of poetic expression.[28]

These kinds of activities emerged because the poets mentioned above could not see themselves reflected in the efforts of established publishers, award juries, or other cultural leaders who endeavoured to articulate a Canadian literary identity during Mount's "CanLit Boom." This was the main objective, for example, of McClelland and Stewart's (hereafter M&S) New Canadian Library series (NCL). Under the general editorship of literary
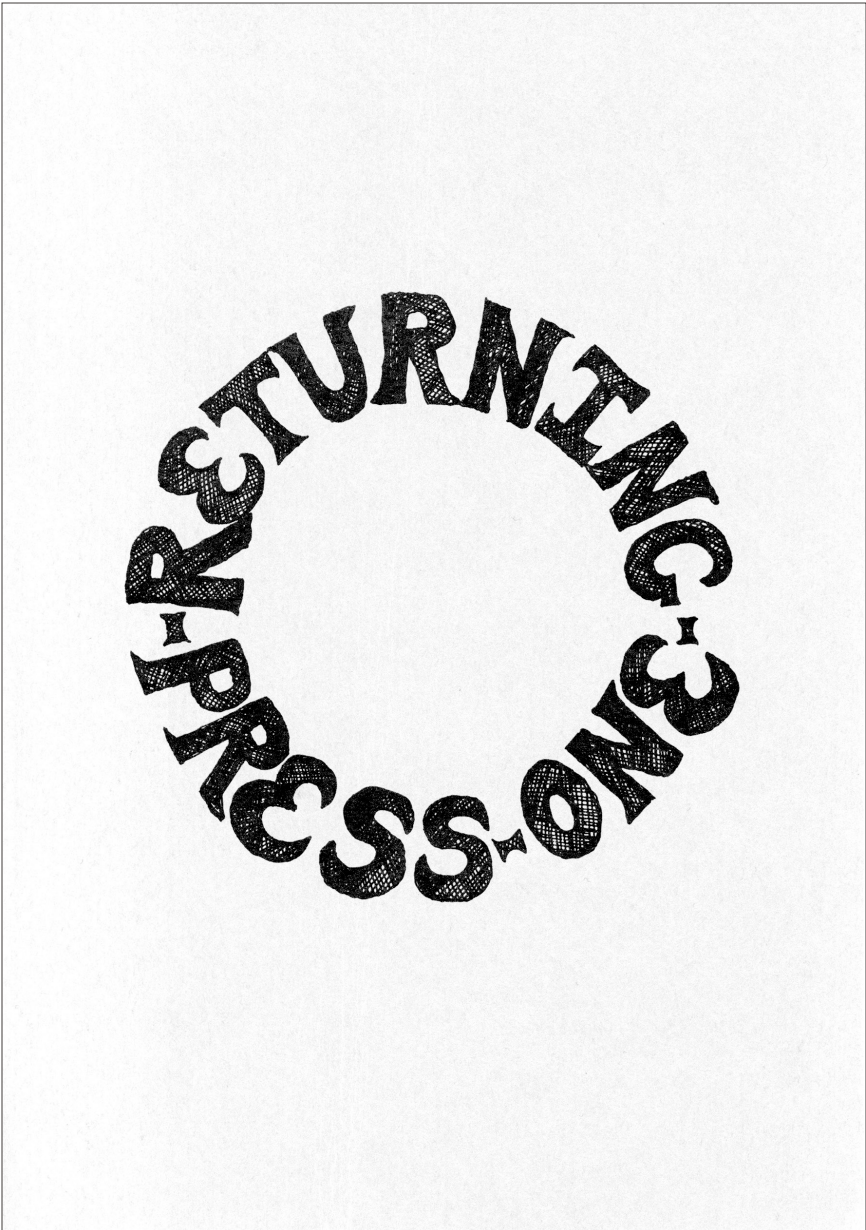
Figure 0.2: Front cover of Judith Copithorne's magazine *Returning*, no. 1, published 1972.

critic Malcolm Ross, M&S published 152 volumes under its Main Series between its founding in 1958 and the end of Ross's editorial tenure in 1978, according to Janet B. Friskney. Ross and Jack McClelland, who handled the series as M&S's publisher, believed that the books published and reprinted in the series represented a Canadian literary tradition. This tradition includes Stephen Leacock, Mordecai Richler, Susanna Moodie, Catherine Parr Traill, Robertson Davies, Frederick Philip Grove, Leonard Cohen, and many other well-known, oft-studied Canadian writers. Despite Canadian publishing historian Friskney's claim that the NCL "had no claims to canonical status at any point,"[29] it laid a substantial amount of groundwork for the creation of a Canadian literary canon. These titles, many of which are still reprinted, anthologized, enjoyed, and taught today, consequently shaped the public's imagination of life and literature in Canada.

The NCL is predominantly comprised of fiction; as a whole, the series is somewhat homogenous and reflects a largely realist orientation. In aesthetic terms, any poetry in the series represents traditional poesis with few to no traces of intermediality. *Poetry of the Mid-Century, 1940–1960*, published as part of the Original Series in 1966 and edited by Romantic literature scholar Milton Wilson, includes poets Earle Birney, Irving Layton, P. K. Page, Leonard Cohen, Margaret Avison, Jay Macpherson, Raymond Souster, Alden Nowlan, James Reaney, and Kenneth McRobbie. Though some of these poets, like Birney and Avison, would come to briefly flirt with borderblur, this volume articulates a vision of Canadian poetry as predominantly "trad." Another anthology included in the NCL, *Poetry of Contemporary Canada, 1960–1970*, published in 1972 and edited by Eli Mandel, represents a slight evolution, including as it does Cohen alongside Al Purdy, John Newlove, Milton Acorn, Joe Rosenblatt, Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje, George Bowering, Gwendolyn MacEwen, and, perhaps surprisingly, bissett. His included poems, however, are only representative of his distinctive orthography (with some play with margin indents), not his intermedial work.[30] Published one year before and five years after Canada's centennial year, neither of these volumes adequately reflect the avant-garde literature that emerged in the 1960s.

As editor and publisher, respectively, of the NCL, Ross and McClelland had somewhat divergent views on the merit of unconventional texts. Friskney explains that Cohen's amphetamine-fuelled postmodern novel *Beautiful Losers*, for example, was despised by Ross but adored by McClelland. Their

correspondence on the subject, as summarized by Friskney, includes some tense debate, but it is clear that Ross had his way, as he ultimately exercised a veto to keep *Beautiful Losers* from the initial series run, declaring it "quite infantile in its thematic conception, & other[wise] pretentious and very self-conscious in its structural methods, painstakingly and repetitively dirty in its imagery and detail."[31] Ross's rejection of *Beautiful Losers*, even in its traditional novel form, indicates that much of borderblur—also characterized at times as self-conscious, juvenile, and controversial—was not aligned with the Canadian literary tradition Ross imagined. The NCL's achievement in moulding a specific tradition inspired several publishers to pursue similar paperback series showcasing supposedly representative works of Canadian literature in the 1960s, including University of Toronto Press's Canadian University Paperbacks in 1963; Oxford's Oxford in Canada Paperbacks in 1965; and Macmillan of Canada's Laurentian Library in 1967.[32]

The kinds of exclusions from Canada's literary mainstream outlined above were deeply felt by those interested in borderblur poetics. Editor and artist Eldon Garnet, for example, published *W)here?* in 1974, an anthology of Canadian poetry featuring UU, Nichol, Copithorne, bissett, and others. Its subtitle, "The Other Canadian Poetry," hints at these artists' outsider status. This location on the fringe of Canadian literary culture at times frustrated the borderblur poets. In September 1968, Nichol asked *grOnk*'s Canadian and international newsletter subscribers, "Aren't we all a little sick of seeing our old standards being anthologized right and left?"[33] Nichol quotes a similarly frustrated bissett in *THE BIG MID-JULY grOnk mailout* (July 1969), sardonically highlighting borderblur's lack of mainstream popularity: "writing what s now calld concrete sound borderblur poetry etc is why we enjoyd so much malnutrition etc for so many years so i feel a special fondness for it."[34] bissett identifies borderblur's unprofitability as a poetic enterprise, despite the rising affluence of Canada's literary public during the boom. Nichol also parodies the Canadian literary establishment in his comic "What Is Can Lit?" "But what the hell is CAN LIT?" quips Nichol's character.[35] Here, he parodies scholarly claims by offering brief perspectives on poets Sheila Watson, Gerry Gilbert, James Reaney, Margaret Avison, and Earle Birney. For example, "Sheila Watson," the narrator explains, "was the first to [illegible] the images of [the] outsider from [illegible] in Canadian [prose]."[36] As evidenced by my attempt to quote these lines, Nichol has obscured certain words in each panel to complicate the possibility of close reading, thus thwarting circumscription
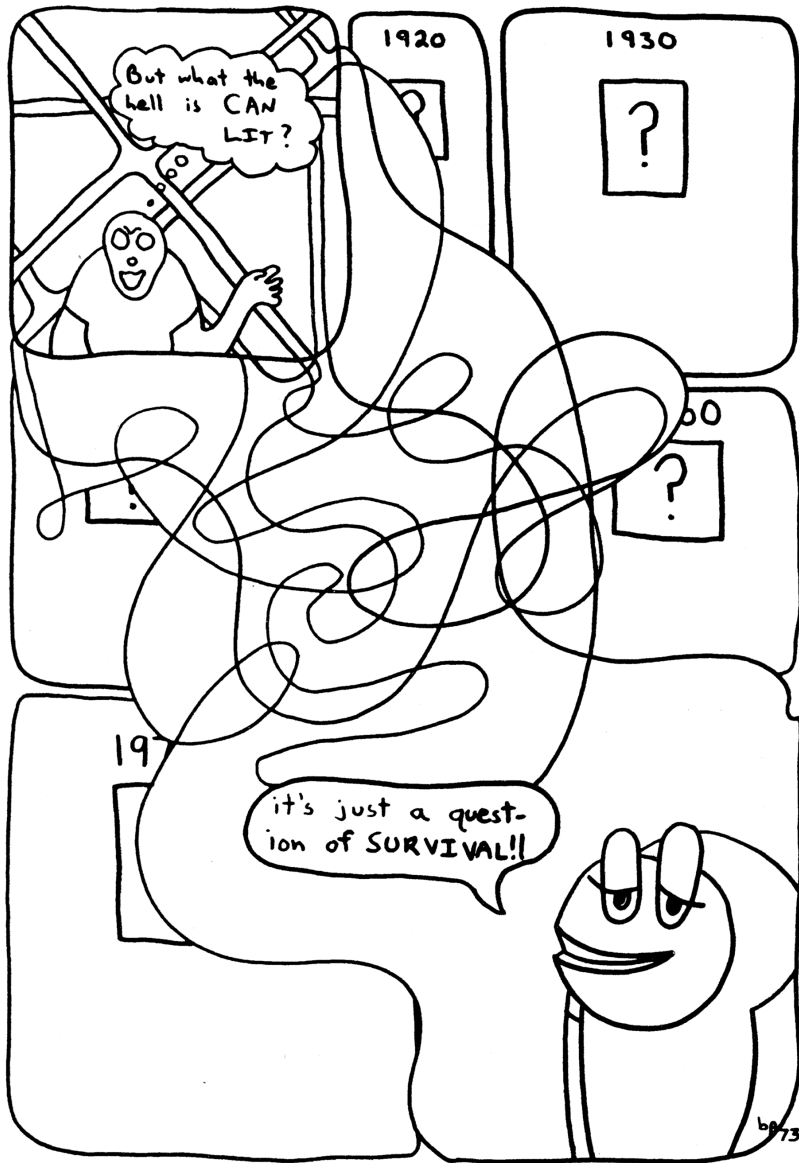
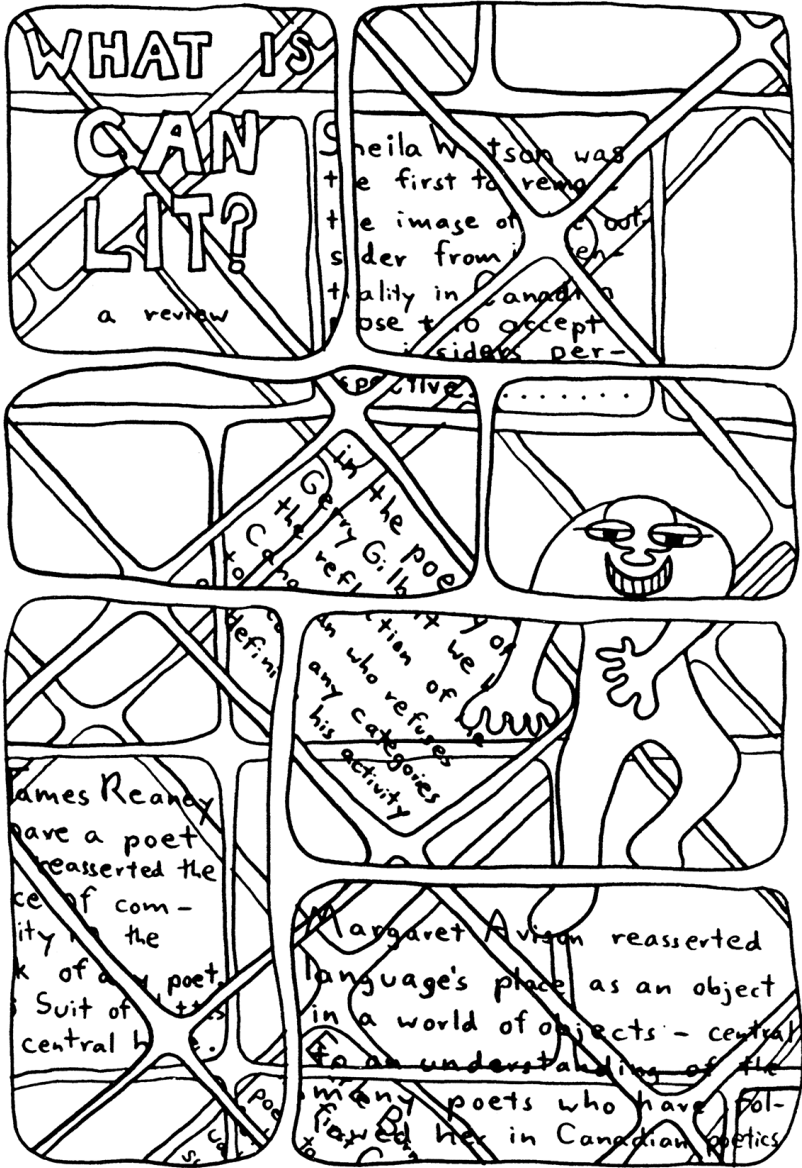**Figure 0.3:** "What Is Can Lit?" by bpNichol, 1973.

Figure 0.4: "What Is Can Lit?" by bpNichol, 1973.

within a defined national literary framework. By citing five Canadian authors and accounting for their diverse practices while at the same time denying critical closure, Nichol effectively undermines narrow definitions of Canadian literary identity.

The humour of these poets speaks to their belief in borderblur as a viable poetic, which was viewed as a threat by the establishment. In fact, poets like Nichol and bissett were publicly targeted by the government. When Nichol's literary talents were recognized on the national stage, for example, they were deemed outrageous. Nichol received the 1970 Governor General's Award for Literary Merit for four titles that demonstrated his literary prowess via their humour and inclination toward intermedia. These texts include a small collection of lyric poems entitled *Beach Head* (1970), an anthology of concrete poetry entitled *The Cosmic Chef* (1970), a box of minimalist concrete poems entitled *Still Water* (1970), and a fifteen-paragraph prose poem entitled *The True Eventual Story of Billy the Kid* (1970).[37] The latter work tells the story of Billy, whose insecurity with his famously "short dick" explains his self-destructive and violent behaviour.[38] Hardly what scholar Frank Davey refers to as "juvenilia,"[39] Nichol's narrative—with its Gertrude Stein–like repetition and Freudian phallocentrism—effectively deconstructs notions of history, masculinity, truth, and the mythic image of the gun-slinging cowboy in the Wild West. Though Billy the Kid is a significant character within the American national imaginary, Nichol's idiosyncratic prose work parodies romantic notions of colonialism, settlement, and territorial conquest, which also inform Canada's national legacy.

It was not long after the Governor General's Award ceremony that several politicians denounced the judges—including University of British Columbia professor Warren Tallman, former commissioner of the National Film Board George McPherson, and CBC host Robert Weaver—and their decision to award Nichol the honour. On 10 June 1971, Conservative member of Parliament Mac T. McCutcheon rose in the House of Commons to express his "displeasure with the award recommendations in relation to the work *The True Eventual Story of Billy the Kid*."[40] Supporting McCutcheon's disapproval, another MP, W. B. Nesbitt, requested that the government "take immediate steps to make appropriate changes in the personnel of the Canada Council in order to prevent future scandalous, ridiculous, and outright silly awards such as the one referred to" earlier that morning.[41] Later that month, yet another MP, J. P. Nowlan, referred to *Billy the Kid* as "nothing more than rude and

pornographic."[42] These documented expressions of outrage had no formal impact on the procedures and processes of the Canada Council. No motions were officially passed in Parliament, nor did Nichol's detractors have any noticeable impact on his poetry. However, it does indicate that certain members of the government attempted to use their privileged positions to shape Canadian literary culture with their conservative imagination. Offering his stance on the attacks made against Nichol and the jury's decision, McPherson told the *Toronto Star* that he is "annoyed by untutored criticism of artistic and literary awards," adding, "I don't think the Governor General entirely approves of some awards, but he doesn't complain."[43]

bissett's status as a cultural outsider is documented in the short CBC documentary *Strange Grey Day/This: bill bissett Vancouver Painter & Poet* (1965), wherein a camera crew follows him through Vancouver. He narrates the film, describing his experience as both poet and painter, detailing the times he was harassed for his Beat lifestyle, and telling of his sense of disconnection from Vancouver's major galleries and art scene. Recounting his inclusion in an unnamed gallery show, he confesses that "it was really no fun, the opening of that show. I thought it would be fun because my painting was in it, but there was no glamour, which was the first thing that disappointed me. Really. No one was trying to make a groovy thing out of it, you know?" He continues:

> At this opening, where my painting was, people who for the last maybe three years wouldn't speak to me—They knew who I was. They had heard about me. I knew who they were. I had myself a few times spoken to them, but they would no longer speak to me because I wasn't making it in whatever club they felt I should be making it in—[They] came up to me that night at the opening behind my back and said, "Congratulations, boy. You made the grade." And if that's what becoming a well-known Canadian painter is, or an international painter is, then I really don't want it.[44]

bissett's displacement from the locus of social and cultural life in Canada continued for decades. And just as Nichol had earlier in the 1970s, he suffered damaging assaults from various politicians in the late 1970s.

Starting in 1977, bissett, whose publishing and writing was partially funded by the Canada Council, began to receive similar charges of depravity and

pornography from critical members of the House of Commons. According to Tim Carlson, these attacks "seemed to centre on" bissett's concrete poem "a warm place to shit," which repeats this phrase nearly forty times without spacing or punctuation.[45] Scholars Don Precosky and Ryan J. Cox have each produced detailed overviews of the attacks on bissett, some of which bear repeating here.[46] On 2 December 1977, Conservative MP Bob Wenman addressed the House to express his outrage that "the Canada Council is supporting, with public money, individuals to write what anyone in this chamber would term as offensive and demeaning pornography."[47] Wenman's attempt to have the Canada Council's funding procedures reviewed failed, but the Conservatives mounted another attack months later on 3 April 1978, when Hugh A. Anderson identified *blewointment* as "a degradation to the printed word in Canada" and argued that "if publications such as the one I mentioned by the Blue Ointment Press [*sic*] of Vancouver are published as a result of government funding, I suggest that a thorough examination should be made so that culture rather than Canadian pornography is advanced." Indeed, he went so far as to push for censorship, claiming that "material which should not be published is being published under the auspices of the Canada Council."[48] Responding to these comments in an interview with Alan Twigg, bissett humorously said that "If I was actually writing pornography, I wouldn't need grants."[49]

bissett was attacked not only by Conservative MPs but also by members of the literary community. Canadian writer John Glassco specifically complained of bissett's intermediality in the *Globe and Mail* on 12 November 1977, where he decries the turn "toward the idea of poetry as a mindless emotional release, a kind of pentecostal 'service of witness'—with the poet as priest or shaman—or what is almost as bad, simply as pseudo cultural vaudeville, a form of bad showbiz."[50] Glassco's comments were aimed at bissett, who was referred to by critics as Canada's poetic shaman on account of his high-energy performances, which often incorporate song and chant.[51] Such comments indicate the discomfort established writers felt about the development of an alternative, and in this case explicitly intermedial, poetic. Such attacks on bissett had a significant financial impact on him as well, as evidenced by the fact that he was denied Canada Council funding for *blewointment* and Blew Ointment Press between 1978 and 1979 (having received $9,550 from the same body between 1976 and 1977). In 1983, bissett sold the press to

recoup his financial losses. Blew Ointment Press was purchased by David Lee and Maureen Cochrane, who transformed it into Nightwood Editions.

On the one hand, bissett's battle with conservative opinion reminds us of his reliance on national funding bodies such as the Canada Council, perhaps complicating the claims made earlier on *Extension* regarding literature's relationship to national institutions. On the other hand, bissett's years of receiving financial support from the Canada Council—and the many publications he issued in support of writers and artists during those pre-controversy years—also highlights what a nation can do when it supports its writers and artists. Regardless, his work was evidently at odds with what his critics—including the very politicians who supposedly represent the Canadian status quo—believed should comprise Canadian literary culture.

These encounters with Canadian public officials and established writers, and the setbacks they caused, were significant; however, poets like Nichol and bissett persevered. Much like the editors and publishers who sought to establish a recognizable Canadian literary tradition, they, too, saw publishing as a powerful tool for formulating a distinctive literary paratradition. As bissett put it to Twigg, "We started it in the 60's cuz no one else would print us. Visual writing was just too weird for other magazines. I guess that's the way most presses start. You get a bunch of people who are organically together and no one else will print them. It just grows and grows."[52] And it did grow and grow and inspired many similar endeavours—including many of the small presses and little magazines mentioned above—in the process of building a small but receptive audience. These struggles to define Canada's literary culture suggest that the efforts made by borderblur poets to create a literary paratradition were meaningful and significant, making both an impact in the community and national news, and illustrating these artists' political subversiveness.

Readers who are unfamiliar with these poets' exclusion from an emerging Canadian literary hegemony in the latter part of the twentieth century may find the anecdotes recounted above somewhat surprising. From the perspective of the twenty-first century, intermedial literature has been celebrated, albeit as a niche form, to such an extent that disparaging opinions of Nichol's and bissett's poetry have largely vanished from literary discourse. In fact, intermediality, despite Glassco's complaints, has become an increasingly common mode for poets in recent decades. This is a result of these poets' perseverance and their success as grassroots cultural organizers. Today, they are recognized as exemplars of small press publishing, community leadership,

and alternative poetic forms in Canadian literature. bissett and Nichol, for example, are often taught in post-secondary literature classes, featured in Canadian literature anthologies, and are the subjects of many articles, chapters, dissertations, and essay collections analyzing their work. This has led several critics and educators to sensibly locate them within the Canadian literary canon, positioning them as emblematic of a particular subset of the 1960s countercultural zeitgeist, as indicated perhaps by Nichol's inclusion in two major Canadian Literature anthologies, volume 2 of Laura Moss and Cynthia Sugars's *Canadian Literature in English: Texts and Context* (2009) and Russell Brown and Deanna Bennett's *Anthology of Canadian Literature* (2019). This is at least partly a reflection of Canadian literature's historical tendency to absorb dissident voices so as to nullify critiques of literary nationalism. But as I argue throughout this book—and despite this introduction's predominant focus on bissett and Nichol—borderblur formed a concerted avant-garde paratradition comprising identities, positions, and texts that do not tidily fit into nationalist literary discourse.

Bordering the Book: Critical Parameters

In *Designed Words for a Designed World: The International Concrete Poetry Movement, 1955–1977* (2016), Jamie Hilder criticizes nationalistic analyses of concrete poetry, suggesting that the "movement had no geographical centre."[53] While *Borderblur Poetics* does not solely engage concrete poetry, and instead looks to other and related borderblur forms, Hilder's point is worth considering here since I have indeed adopted a nationalist framework. Hilder might contend that my approach "prevents readers from discussions of how the very concept of nationhood was being challenged and transformed at mid-century, especially in relation to the re-drawing of borders after World War Two."[54] I agree with Hilder; as this book argues, internationalism and transnationalism inflect the principles of borderblur poetry, whose practitioners in turn see their work as a paratradition that conflicts with the dominant Canadian literary tradition that emerged in the 1960s. In other words, it is in some senses an aspiration toward internationalism that characterizes borderblur in Canada.

This study begins in 1963 and concludes in 1988, a twenty-five-year period during which Canadian literature underwent numerous significant transformations. These temporal parameters may at first seem surprising since critics often contend that enthusiasm for consolidating a national literary

identity was maintained from approximately 1967 to 1974. The former was, of course, Canada's centennial year, a significant milestone for Canadian culture, as indicated by Webb's *Extension* program, major events such as Expo 67, and Canadian historian Pierre Berton's subsequent history of the time, *1967: The Last Good Year* (1997). The latter year, 1974, is generally acknowledged as the peak of this activity. For critics like Mount, this serves as the end point of a period that had seen the publication of several field-defining treatises with a thematic focus on archetypes and the nature/culture divide, notably Northrop Frye's *Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (1971) and Atwood's *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972). While this seven-year span marks a significant phase in the establishment of a predominantly white, anglophone, and traditional literature, this study investigates borderblur as a distinguished paratradition that emerged concurrently and then continued beyond these developments.

Eschewing these expected parameters, this study begins five years before Canada's centennial, in 1963, a significant year for the development of experimental and avant-garde writing in Canada, especially on the West Coast.[55] It was in 1963 that bissett, along with his then partner Martina Clinton and friend Lance Farrell, began publishing *blewointment*, the same magazine that was denounced by Conservative politicians in the 1970s. As Michael Turner notes, *blewointment* signalled the birth of a new literary spirit that was largely unseen in Canada up until this time.[56] The arrival of *blewointment* proved to be formative for concrete, sound, and kinetic poetry in Canada, beginning as a forum for bissett and likeminded writers who struggled to find their footholds in Canada's established literary forums. It was also a catalyst for poets like Nichol, who felt compelled to promote this kind of work in Toronto, where he channelled it into a publication named *Ganglia*. *blewointment*, Ganglia Press, and the related *grOnk* were crucial forums on the international level, since, as will be detailed in the next chapter, they provided necessary connections to an international avant-garde network, including communities of writers in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe, and South America.

Ending in 1988, this study follows and then exceeds *blewointment*'s lifespan as a literary magazine and press, concluding instead at a crucial point for Ganglia Press. During this time, many other significant publications had started and ceased; in addition to those mentioned above, these included projects organized by Copithorne, UU, McCaffery, and others. Most tragically, however, Nichol died on 25 September 1988 as a result of complications

during a surgery to remove a tumour from his back. As evidenced by this introduction, Nichol was an early and central actor for borderblur poetics, helping to open writers and readers to its powers and remaining committed to expanding the poetic field throughout his life. In the wake of Nichol's death, friend and composer R. Murray Schafer wrote to UU on 12 September 1992, confessing that "It has been different without Barrie around, I think we all feel it."[57] Nichol's death left a tremendous feeling of loss in the avant-garde literary community that he participated in. During his lifetime, he directly motivated and supported, and shared a creative life with, many if not all the poets mentioned in this book. He also influenced a younger generation of writers such as Stuart Ross, Gary Barwin, Margaret Christakos, and jwcurry, among many others—all of whom would develop complementary poetic trajectories.

The year 1988 signals a variety of interpersonal and communal shifts in Canadian literary culture. However, this year is also notable for its social and political significance. Borderblur emerged from the fervour of the sixties counterculture, a movement predicated on the ideals of individual freedom, nonconformism, free speech, and grassroots organizing in the service of social, political, and cultural change. With the formation of their alternative poetics, small presses, and little magazine networks, the practitioners of borderblur undeniably emerged from a countercultural ideology. However, 1988 marks roughly the midpoint of Progressive Conservative prime minister Brian Mulroney's years in office, during which he adopted a neoliberal agenda in kind with that pursued by Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom and Ronald Regan in the United States. Neoliberalism's oppressive marketization and normalization of human experience are among the issues that borderblur poetics worked against. However, the advancement and subsequent adoption of these principles in the 1980s is a consequence of neoliberalism's co-optation of countercultural rhetoric and its promises of freedom. It could be said, then, that the perspective of borderblur poets, whose works were animated by the spirit of the sixties, represented a major turning point in the late 1980s, when the countercultural ideology espoused by many members of their generation had been largely nullified and absorbed into a dominant system they had once opposed.

Between 1963 and 1988, the poets who championed borderblur poetics created a particular dynamic of rapid change that mirrored the many seismic social, political, and technological shifts that occurred throughout these

years, both nationally and internationally. This period is comprised of significant and often controversial episodes that repeatedly challenged the nation's faith in the possibility of a unified identity. The 1960s were a turbulent time for Canadian youth, many of whom partook in uprisings and protests prompted in part by the rise of the civil rights movement and the horrific violence of the Vietnam War. In the late 1960s, Liberal prime minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau tried and failed to advance the 1969 White Paper policy, which proposed an end to the legal relationship between the Canadian government and Indigenous peoples in Canada. Trudeau then declared in 1971 that Canada would adopt policies of multiculturalism and bilingualism to preserve individual cultural freedoms. There was also the 1970 October Crisis, which saw tanks roll through the streets of Montreal after Trudeau invoked the *War Measures Act* in response to the kidnapping of provincial cabinet minister Pierre Laporte by the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ) in the name of Quebec sovereignty. That same decade, younger baby boomers faced stagflation as they struggled to find work, and second-wave feminism began to gather force as middle-class women returned to the workforce in large numbers, seeking to define themselves beyond maternal roles. In the 1980s, Canada continued these transformations by acquiring its own constitution in 1982, and, under Mulroney's government, the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* was passed in 1988 (building on Trudeau's multiculturalist policy, introduced in 1971). As prime minister, Mulroney developed his neoliberal policies and negotiated the Canada–US Free Trade Agreement, which did much to affect the cultural and economic direction of the country and the flow of US culture and commodities into Canada. For Western countries more generally, this was a period when human life was being transformed on an international scale, typified by the proliferation of electronic telecommunication systems that circulate ideas, words, images, and sounds across disparate geographies; a rapid increase in consumerism; burgeoning military operations around the world; and the newfound ease with which products and services could be moved across national borders. McLuhan referred to this period as the "electric age," but theorists such as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri describe it as the rise of "*postmodernization*, or better, *informatization*," which accounts for the economic and social transition away from "the domination of industry" and toward the informatization of the economy and social life as well as the emergence of affective labour.[58] All of these conditions captured the imaginations of Canadians and, as this book demonstrates, inflected the proliferation

of Canadian borderblur poetics as an internationally conscious, intermedial paratradition.

Though this book articulates borderblur as a significant paratradition, thus making it recognizable as a substantial alternative to the established Canadian literary culture that formed in the mid- to late twentieth century, an encyclopedic inclusivity of all borderblur writers and their texts is not my intent here. Avid readers and scholars of Canadian experimental and avant-garde writing will likely find certain poets missing from these pages, or they might appear only a perfunctory fashion. On the other hand, I also anticipate that some readers may find my critical approach risks a degree of romanticism or hagiography, or that it tends to reinforce a canon of Canadian avant-garde writers—especially since, in the following pages, I frequently return to Nichol and bissett. Many other writers discussed in this book, however, have hardly been discussed within the field of Canadian literature. Thus, I dedicate much of the book to exploring these writers' statements and discussions of borderblur to offset this imbalance; I believe that these poets had intelligent and compelling things to say about their own work. Regardless, and despite the risks these strategies may hold, I concur with Betts, who claims "that until very recently Canada has not been a good or encouraging setting for avant-gardism."[59] Thus, in turning to borderblur as a literary subject, and by maintaining a critical focus on these poets, this book enriches the discussion of avant-garde paratraditions by turning to poets who have received scant critical attention in the past. In this way, my work attempts to expand our "history of diverse local narratives of emergence" by recognizing oft-overlooked writers who contributed to the development of borderblur as one node of poetic activity within a vast "alternative poetics network."[60]

By focusing on borderblur and the network that formed around that idea, I hope to make clear that my intent is not to romanticize or canonize a certain group of poets. Rather, it is to contribute to the discourse of alternative literary histories in Canada formed by the scholarship of Caroline Bayard, Derek Beaulieu, Charles Bernstein, Gregory Betts, Christian Bök, Pauline Butling, Stephen Cain, Frank Davey, Jack David, Johanna Drucker, Paul Dutton, Lori Emerson, Barbara Godard, Jamie Hilder, Peter Jaeger, Steve McCaffery, Roy Miki, Marjorie Perloff, Susan Rudy, Stephen Scobie, Dani Spinosa, Stephen Voyce, Darren Wershler, and many others. My work is significantly indebted in direct and indirect ways to their scholarship, without which none of this would be possible. Alongside this established discourse, my contribution

could be appropriately considered as one additional node that will continue to require maintenance, correction, expansion, and development.

I feel inclined to issue one final note regarding the exclusion of certain writers from this book. Although any recovery of neglected poets or texts is often subject to the contingencies of individual taste and experience, and, in this case, circumscribed by the ephemeral nature of avant-garde literary production, I am troubled by the way my omissions and exclusions may be read. Indeed, though this study includes women such as Copithorne, Rosenberg, Kemp, and McMaster, whose works have been eclipsed by dominant masculine personalities, it lacks representation of Indigenous poets, whose works have similarly been overshadowed by white anglophone writers in Canada. Illustrated prose works such as *Song of Raven, Son of Deer* (1967) and *Potlach* (1969) by visual artist and writer George Clutesi, as well as *My Heart Soars* (1974) and *My Spirit Soars* (1982) by Chief Dan George (both with illustrations by Helmut Hirnschall), are notable works published during the period studied here. These books feature illustrations that factor into the process of meaning-making. As tempted as I have been to include these books in this study, Clutesi and George were not evidently part of borderblur's avant-garde network. To my knowledge, there is very limited correspondence between the intermedia writers discussed in this book and writers working within Indigenous traditions and networks.

This book also engages with certain writers and performers who are connected to the borderblur network in somewhat perfunctory ways. Caribbean-Canadian dub poet Lillian Allen, for example, is only briefly mentioned in these pages, despite her close affiliation with Nichol and her own intermedial practice, which brings together song, dance, poetry, and spoken word. Though comparisons between Dub poetry and the sound poetries of borderblur are certainly profitable, I ultimately decided not to include Allen in the sound poetry chapter out of respect for the distinctive features that comprise the Canadian-Caribbean Dub tradition that she has pioneered. A related issue emerges with poet Maxine Gadd, whose typographically playful poetry, some of which was published by Blew Ointment Press, is well-suited to my discussions of concrete poetry. However, when poet Daphne Marlatt asked Gadd about concrete poetry, she responded, "It's boring. I see the compellingness of it, especially if you've got to put out a book. . . . But it's boring to read for me."[61] Thus, I have circumscribed my study with a sensitivity, whenever possible, to the specific ways some writers have explicitly located themselves.

My approach is historically contextualized and focused on poets who worked with intermedial forms and shared an avant-garde network.

From Here to There: A Brief Chapter Outline

The turbulent and transformational qualities that characterize the twenty-five years of Canadian avant-garde activity studied in this book inflect many of the texts that were published during this time, as well as the attitudes and view of their authors. We will see, for example, how an increasing sense of the world's interconnectedness encouraged borderblur poets to find an international community of like-minded avant-garde practitioners with whom they would achieve recognition on the world stage. I will also explore how the women's liberation movement of the 1960s underpins the hand-drawn concrete poems of Copithorne, or how feminism motivates Rosenberg's fusion of concrete poetry and prose narrative in *The Bee Book.* What will become apparent over the course of this study is that borderblur, while always maintaining its aesthetic openness, intermediality, and penchant for creative risk taking, is inflected by ongoing events, and that certain decades saw significant developments for each form.

Chapter 1 explores borderblur in terms of avant-gardism, emphasizing the term's implications and limitations, and attending to the ways that this paratradition manifested in Canada within a broader avant-garde network. In addition to working through poetic statements, I further identify some of the specific conditions—local, national, and international—that contributed to borderblur's intermedial formation. In theorizing borderblur as an intermedial and avant-garde form, I also reconsider its particular strain of avant-gardism amid a highly contested field of historical and contemporary avant-garde theories. The next three chapters highlight three specific forms of borderblur: chapters 2–4 examine, respectively, concrete poetry, sound poetry, and kinetic poetry. These chapters present a survey of literary and related activities associated with each form, identifying the implications of each for the formation of this intermedial and cosmopolitan paratradition. Specific exemplary texts are explored in each chapter—sometimes in-depth, sometimes in a perfunctory manner—to tangibly demonstrate the specific contributions these diverse forms have made to the paratradition. Finally, the conclusion will recapitulate my main arguments before turning to consider the ways that borderblur's intermediality lives on today with specific emphasis on recently published works by Nisga'a poet Jordan Abel and feminist-anarchist

poet Dani Spinosa. Taken together, these chapters provide a critical history of borderblur that captures the shared elements of this work while gesturing to the ways this poetic enforces, critiques, and questions notions of belonging within Canadian literature.