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William H. New, ed. *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002. 1347p.

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Canadian writers have increasingly attracted an enthusiastic international readership in the last half century, and William Toye's *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* was the sole guide to the breadth and depth of that literary heritage when it appeared in 1983. A second edition was published in 1997, with over a thousand entries by around three hundred contributors, and a concise version in 2001. Positively reviewed globally, one wondered about the need for another such encyclopedic text on this topic.

Wonder no longer. William H. New and his several hundred contributors have thoroughly superseded the Toye volumes with a completely impressive reference volume of awe-inspiring scope. With nearly double the number of entries found in the second edition of *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*, there is no question about which is the more comprehensive volume. But apart from the sheer bulk of New's *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada*, what is most valuable is the rigorous re-conceptualization of what constitutes Canadian literature. Part of the task of any guide to this literature is to do justice to the linguistic diversity of Canada. Here is a literature written in English, French, and various aboriginal languages. It has been classified within the academic world under various rubrics. During one semester in one university in one nation it may be part of a Post-Colonial Literature course. Somewhere else on the map at another time it might be offered to students as part of Commonwealth Studies. Its Francophone heritage may be part of a French language program. The Native American, or (to use the Canadian term) First Nations, literature could likely be a part of an anthropology course. All of this is to suggest that there are a daunting number of ways to analytically slice the pie of Canadian writing, and New is a wide-ranging pluralist. Proof of this are entries never conceived by Toye as being needed for a literary reference to Canada.

Toye molds his efforts around the notion of a literary guide being chiefly entries on individual authors interspersed with historical overviews of genres, literary movements, and publishers. New's *Encyclopedia* does the same in an equally readable and informative style for the most part, but takes the additional leap of including entries on core concepts outside of literature that have sparked literary development. For example, the articles on the concepts of "North" and "Landscape" are compelling cross-disciplinary pieces that could serve as an imaginatively

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novel introduction to reading any Canadian writers. These have been generative ideas for New in his books of literary criticism; he has been long fascinated by the metaphoric implications of the vast northern Canadian landscape. And they are clearly ideas that can help cohere impressions of writers operating from any number of languages and cultural settings. The concept of “North” also allows a place to mention a major creative figure who would never appear in a conventional literary encyclopedia, the pianist/composer Glenn Gould, whose sound collage of voices in “The Idea of North” is arguably a major poetic achievement.

And speaking of Gould, New’s volume also offers the richest perspective ever of the large number of literary figures writing popular song lyrics. Toye’s book does little in this arena, offering the expected recognition to Leonard Cohen, but doing little justice to his Francophone compatriots.

Perhaps the only downside of New’s desire to come up with new concepts for entries is the unintentionally humorous entry on “Finland” which begins with a line a Monty Python script writer might envy: “FINLAND figures rarely in Canadian writing” (368). But giving credit where credit is due in the humor department, Roy MacGregor’s article on “Sports Writing” pokes some witty but good-natured barbs at Canada’s hockey obsession. Dozens of articles are by scholars who take some useful liberties from the coolly dry literary reference book style. Particularly attractive is the affectionate tone of Steven Scobie’s article on the experimental poet Barrie Phillip Nichol, noting how Nichol aided the efforts of many other Canadian artists while producing a substantial body of boundary-busting literature. The oral literature of various First Nations is sensitively examined by Robert Bringham, a poet outside of that heritage who has translated a large body of that literature with painstaking care. Only Misao Dean’s article on the artist/writer Emily Carr seems to betray an unappreciative eye. Much ado is made about the well known fact that Carr was not always factually accurate in her autobiographical writings, and Dean acts as if her knuckles should have been rapped for such a transgression, all the while acknowledging that “Autobiographical writing is always in some senses a fictional project” (183). But sour notes like this are few and far between, and to have such uniformly well written contributions in so massive a literary reference volume is rare indeed.

Writers most familiar to U.S. readers—Margaret Atwood, Robertson Davies, Michael Ondaatje—are well served, but the excitement readers of this book will experience are the hundreds of lesser known literary figures ripe for discovery. Now that the University of Toronto Press has so fulfilled the need for a comprehensive guide to Canadian writing, perhaps they can be encouraged to create a one-vol-

ume literary anthology that as well serves the literary heritage of our northern neighbor. ✱