Introduction
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Introduction

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THIS ISSUE on paraliterary scandals is not itself offered as a scandalous gesture. It is not a question here of wrenching open the English Canadian literary canon, as if a national popular culture saturated with the illicit pleasures of the scandalous were at the doors of the academy and could no longer be overlooked. In any case, there is no need to move outside literature in search of scandal when critical readings of the most canonical literary texts are fixated on what is unsettling and transgressive within them. Nor is this issue intended to excavate long-suppressed histories of vice and scandal in order to overturn the image of dull propriety that, we are told, is characteristic of English Canadian culture. As David Cronenberg's *Crash* and Lynne Stopkewich's *Kissed* represent English-language Canadian film to the world, or as each new biography of an English Canadian literary figure seems to reveal or generate acrimony and bitter feuds, claims that the scandalous is buried or merely latent within the culture of English-speaking Canadians seem unconvincing.

My motives in pitching this issue to the editors of *Essays on Canadian Writing* were much less mischievous. Somewhere between the circumscribed concerns of literary studies and the ambitious purview of cultural studies, might one map some of the ways in which scandal has found textual expression across a range of English Canadian writings? In doing so, might one establish a forum (however temporary) that scholars from the disciplines of English, Canadian studies, and communications might cohabit? Might one also explore certain issues concerning the reception and adaptation within Canada of scandalous materials and ideas whose origins are elsewhere? My emphasis in this introduction on the migration of texts and forms across boundaries is meant partly to overcome my sense of being an imposter in these pages. My own discipline, communications and media studies, has traditionally been more at ease taking cultural artifacts as the tokens of social or geopolitical relations than at grasping their rhetorical operations.

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This issue collects studies of political rhetoric, pornographic writing, moral panic, and literary polemic. I have obstinately clung to a definition of the paraliterary that encompasses the different ways in which forms of writing might be said to exist "beside" literature. Some of the articles included here examine genres of writing conventionally taken to fall outside literature, such as journalistic exposé, political debate, and pornography (see the articles by Robbeson, Devereux, Randall, and Sullivan). Others study writing practices that circulate around literature and affix themselves to it, such as criticism, polemic, and gossip (see the essays by Leahy, Edwards, and Cavell). In certain cases, these different senses of the paraliterary are interwoven. Bart Beaty's study of the judicial response to a moral panic over American comic books, for example, is both an examination of one kind of popular "literature" within Canada and a study of the rhetorical forms of journalistic and political polemic. Patricia Whitney's biographical and critical treatment of John Glassco's pornographic writings is at once an analysis of the particular cultural space occupied by this form and an account of the ways in which his involvement in it shaped his critical stature and his biography.

1: The Institutions of Scandal

What might one say concerning the status of scandal within English Canadian cultural life? On those recent occasions when scandal has erupted in the cultural realm, it has rarely taken the form of a debasement, of the reduction of a creator to his or her personal life, or, more broadly, of the colonization of a zone of respectability by cultural institutions devoted to the sensational. Arguably, scandal is more likely to manifest itself in the wilfully transgressive moves made within their works by artists/practitioners, such as the filmmakers Atom Egoyan and David Cronenberg or the visual artist Jana Sterbak. In this respect, if only in the cultural sphere, the boundary between public accomplishments and private lives is usually respected and left intact. It is the dissolution of this boundary elsewhere — in the media culture of the United States, for example, or that of francophone Quebec — that has come to seem truly scandalous and the mark of a difference. Typically, in accounting for this difference, observers invoke the imagined distinctiveness of the English Canadian character, that complex of ethnic, religious, moral, and aesthetic attributes seen to render this culture one of reserve, ironic bemusement, and social-democratic earnestness. In fact, the status of scandal within

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the culture of English Canada is shaped in more concrete ways by the scale and substance of that culture's infrastructure of public discourse.

One structural feature of English-language cultures in Canada is the relative absence of those mass-market institutions and forms through which the scandalous might take form and circulate. Anglophones visiting Quebec are typically struck by the prevalence of such institutions within francophone culture — the supermarket celebrity tabloid, for example, or the gossipy television talk show. As I write this introduction, French-language tabloids in Quebec are full of special photo supplements covering the lives and recent deaths of the Elvis imitator Johnny Farago, the art-film director Jean-Claude Lauzon, and the television actress Marie-Soleil Tougas. There is little sense of these as private events, and they are covered alongside front-page stories chronicling the coronary by-pass undergone by a television-series star or the bankruptcy of a pizza outlet partly owned by the pop singer Mitsou. While the scale of such coverage in francophone Quebec is often traced to culturally distinct (because deeply rooted) relations between celebrities and their fans, we must remember that this journalism is produced within a media market relatively unthreatened by U.S. publications. If the linguistic barrier guarantees (at least for the moment) the economic viability of these publications, their unending circulation of photographs, news stories, and personalities perpetuates the sense of a cultural space saturated by scandal.

The rarity of such forms in English-speaking Canada is an easily diagnosed consequence of sharing a language with the United States and of having become, through a long historical process, part of its media market. We might wonder, nonetheless, about the ways in which the absence of these forms has nourished commonplace ideas about the character of anglophone Canadian culture. English-speaking Canadians read U.S. scandal magazines, watch daytime talk shows, and participate in a culture of celebrity and scandal in large numbers, but these forms are not part of the trajectories through which our own cultural figures enter the public realm. Without the institutions of celebrity, gossip, and scandal that might give them a public presence, English Canadian musicians seek to build their audiences through small-scale, grassroots performance circuits and interviews on the CBC; filmmakers seek success within the economic and critical institutions of the art film. Typically, the most serious francophone artists find their personal lives covered in locally produced scandal

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tabloids or serve as guest hosts of low-brow game shows. The most frivolous English Canadian performers, in contrast, are the subjects of CBC profiles that cast them in the mould of the literary author.

The immediate effect of these patterns of popularization is to endow much of anglophone Canadian culture with the veneer of the earnest and authentic, qualities then enshrined as the mark of a distinct national character. In fact, it might be argued, these characteristics of cultural celebrity are produced in significant ways as a consequence of living and producing in a North American media market divided by language. At the same time, the fact that our newspapers are primarily local rather than national means that distinctions between them are founded more often on geography than on real or imagined differences of taste. Newspapers must thus appeal to broadly defined audiences within single locales rather than to specific taste groups dispersed across the nation. This is one reason why we lack the scandal tabloids that are common in the United Kingdom and elsewhere.

II: The Lurid and Illicit

Arguably, this was not always the case. In isolated pockets of the academy, and in the vernacular scholarship of collector subcultures, there are ongoing efforts to recover some of the history of lurid, sensationalist cultural production in English Canada — the crime novels, comic books, scandal magazines, and exploitation paperbacks that persisted until that point, usually in the 1950s, when the economics and politics of continental trade made them no longer viable. Among these artifacts, and limiting ourselves to the period immediately following World War II, we may include the original paperback novels published by News Stand Library, Harlequin Books, or Collins White Circle; the scandal-mongering "yellow" newspapers published in Montreal; and the detective-story magazines (*Feature Detective Cases*, *Women in Crime*, *Special Detective Cases*, *Startling Crime*, etc.) issued in Toronto by publishers such as Magazine Publishing House and Alval.

At the least, paperback novels such as Ronald J. Cooke's *The Mayor of Côte St. Paul* (1950), David Montrose's *The Crime on Côte Des Neiges* (1951), Montrose's *Murder over Dorval* (1952), and Al Palmer's *Sugarpuss on Dorchester Street* (1950) — all of them set in Montreal — help to map the moral geography whose fictional elaboration and evocation comprise one mark of a popular culture's vitality (for a further account, see Straw). More profoundly, artifacts

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of this sort signal a level of cultural production in which a thematics of the sinful at the level of the texts themselves is inseparable from the broader image — conveyed through the look, texture, and secondary features of these publications — of a tawdry, urban commercial culture constantly offering the promise of sensation. (In the English Canadian editions of late 1940s detective magazines, the Toronto addresses given in advertisements for mail-order novelty toys and physical-culture aids help to convey a sense of the Canadian city as a source of the alluring and illicit.)

Crime comics and detective magazines were immensely popular elsewhere at the time, notably in the United States, but their Canadian editions and imitators were often doubly degraded because the conditions of their production here were all the more impoverished. The status of the scandalous within Canadian culture is thus complicated by the ways in which certain cultural artifacts, particularly those from the past, appear illegitimate and debased at two levels. Canadian crime comic books and detective magazines are products of a culture of exploitation, but it is the falsehood of their self-presentation as legitimate (i.e., American), as much as their fraudulent promise of the illicit, that feeds the sense of valuelessness that has for so long surrounded them. *Mondo Canuck: A Canadian Pop Culture Odyssey*, published in 1996, brings together degraded phenomena in which we may allow ourselves to revel, but it reminds us how much our derision stems from the marginal, ephemeral character of most such phenomena rather than from their centrality as defining features of our culture (see Pevere and Dymond). Similarly, when browsing in a video store or watching pay television, we often confront the suspicion that a lurid thriller we believe, for a moment, to be a low-budget exploitation film from the margins of Hollywood is in fact a Canadian production disguised as such.

Writing from within the very different context of folklore studies, Orvar Lofgren has suggested that a sense of national belonging draws substance from the often minor ways in which commodities and cultural artifacts differ from one national market to another. When national differences at the level of material culture have less to do with the distinctiveness of indigenous craft traditions and more to do with minor variations in packaging and availability between globally distributed commodities, we use these variations to construct our hierarchies of legitimacy and desirability. These differences, Lofgren writes, are part of the "cultural thickenings of . . . belonging." They invite attention to "the nationalization of trivialities, of

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the ways in which national differences become embedded in the materialities of everyday life, found not only in the rhetoric of flag-waving and public rituals, but also in the national trajectories of commodities" (106). Canadian collectors of vinyl record albums or comic books learn, with experience, to distinguish the textures of Canadian imprints and to feel in those textures the signs of illegitimacy and reduced value. This axis of legitimacy is independent of the axis of respectability and moral uprightness that may also be invoked in the judgement of cultural artifacts. In the relationship between the two, we find something of the paradox of our relationship to scandalous materials from the United States. True-crime paperbacks or television programs from Canada seem to us to be less legitimate examples of their genres precisely because they typically appear to be less shamefully exploitative than their U.S. counterparts.

III: Paraliterature and Social Discourse

Over twenty years ago, Marc Angenot defined paraliterature as "the ensemble of modes of language-based expression of a lyrical or narrative character that, for ideological or sociological reasons, have been kept at the margins of literary culture" (*Roman populaire* 4; my translation). This definition is sufficiently rich to authorize two distinct approaches to the paraliterary. One such approach is grounded in a rethinking of textual integrity and in the development of theories of intertextuality. The other has closer affinities to a sociology of taste. The former, faithful to the term's sense of an opening, invites us to dissolve the literary within the broader terrain of *le discours social* (Angenot, *Glossaire* 63). Among other things, this definition asks us to find literary figures, forms, and effects in a wide variety of cultural forms. This project has been pursued with varying degrees of explicitness over the last twenty years (notably in the work of Angenot himself) as major currents within literary studies have become preoccupied with social identities and with analysing the variety of textual spaces in which these identities take form and circulate. It is difficult, for example, to imagine studies of colonial discourse that scrupulously respect generic distinctions between the canonical novel of exploration, popular adventure literature, and journalistic travel narratives. Similarly, the recent wave of writing on the city has been nourished by the sense that the naturalistic novel, the urban sketch, and the journalistic exposé are equally valid and rich forms of textual evidence (see Bernstein).

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This analytical dissolution of distinct forms within an "ensemble of modes of language-based expression" has been most common in historical work, and for reasons easy to grasp. With time, ostensibly nonliterary forms may come to seem saturated with forms of description, metaphor, and storytelling resembling — more obviously than is the case with present-day texts — those that mark the literary production of their time. Just as documentary films, in building to moments of high drama, draw ever more obviously on the codes of fictional-narrative cinema, so the rhetoric of scandal, as it rises, is fuelled by hyperbolic inflation and instances of figuration that seem highly literary. Moral panics, of the sort analysed here by Rebecca Sullivan and Cecily Devereux, offer striking examples of this. The melodramatic gestures, narratives of redemption, and moments of lurid textual sensation that mark these panics circulate easily between the forms of journalistic exposé, political pamphleteering, and popular fiction.

There is a polemical dimension to Angenot's discussion of the paraliterary, however, one implicit in the definition cited above but foregrounded in his subsequent characterization of paraliterature as that "which is tabooed, forbidden, scotimized, degraded . . . , but rich in themes and obsessions which, within high culture, are repressed" (*Roman populaire* 4–5; my translation). Here the literary and the paraliterary are no longer figured merely as regions on an intertextual map, the boundaries and distances between them to be denounced for their arbitrariness. Rather, the relations between the two are taken to mirror larger, fundamental tensions with political, psychological, and social roots. These tensions are sometimes imagined as conflicts between high and low, bourgeois and plebeian, superego and id, repression and transgression.

Angenot's characterization of high culture as the instrument of repression is one in a history of moves that overturn the long-standing view of mass-produced cultural forms as normalizing agents of social stability. Cultural studies have seized upon the claim that popular cultural forms are transgressive (for a discussion, see Morris). Importantly, however, this claim continues to have only limited appeal to Canadian scholars, for reasons that warrant exploration. If the resistant qualities of popular cultural forms are somehow intrinsic, grounded in the energies that fuel their flight from propriety and in their capacity to elicit "affective investments" (Grossberg 38), anglophone Canadians nonetheless make these investments in forms that typically come from elsewhere. As scholars and critics, we are almost

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inevitably drawn to a political economy of cultural forms — to a chronicling of economic dependency — not merely as a supplement to the more humanistic analysis of "affect" but because our affectual relationship to imported popular cultural texts may include the pleasures of noncomplicity, the uncertainties over possible exclusion, and a wide range of other responses that stem from our location in this elsewhere.

Just as frequently, however, analyses of popular culture undertaken within cultural studies involve the claim that the transgressive dimensions of the popular do not reside in properties of texts themselves but in the process of adaptation and negotiation that occurs at the moment of "reading." This claim, too, has been of only limited inspiration to cultural studies scholars in the English Canadian academy, for whom the privileging of individual strategies of reading at the expense of more broadly collective (and geopolitically situated) patterns of reception may often seem frivolous and abstract. More pointedly, the ways in which English-speaking Canadians are said to "read" popular cultural texts from elsewhere typically seem unheroic and of little transgressive force. We may relish the irony, moral superiority, and unspoken aesthetic revulsion that Canadians are said to bring to their reception of the most scandalous texts from the United States, but we can hardly claim that these values express some intrinsically transgressive quality of the popular and its energies.

IV: Scandal and Communications

Whatever we make of Angenot's conflictual model of relations between the paraliterary and the more respectably literary, the tensions it maps may prove useful for studying the circulation of scandal within and between nations. As a point of departure, we must acknowledge that scandal, as a property of texts, will always circulate in relationship to forms of textual control and contextualization. Writing of gossip, Patricia Spacks has noted how the novel is seen to occupy an ambivalent relationship to the scandalous. In its mapping of the social, the novel is shot through with the scandalous, but in its elaboration of a narrative voice, it labours to offer a vantage point from which stable, moral judgement may be made. As Spacks writes, "The novelist, often reliant on morally dubious raw material, may wish to justify it in fictional or in ethical terms. Narrative stance provides a mode of justification" (204). These operations of judgement and justification are, of course, internal to texts themselves, but

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as that scandal circulates elsewhere, encountering new forms of control and contextualization, we may begin to glimpse the workings of a broader system of differentiation. Canadian coverage of judicial trials in the United States requires their framing within the formats and rhetorical regularities of Canadian media and thus involves the elaboration of a narrative or journalistic stance that is at least marginally distinctive. In a broader sense, by following the circulation of scandal and gossip, we may begin to follow the line that leads from textual forms to the infrastructures of social discourse in all their dimensions. The novel itself, like other forms, is intimately bound up with the technologies of its production and dissemination, with regimes of copyright, and with the specific economic and geopolitical relations that shape its passage through social and across national boundaries.

Histories of scandal are, at one level, histories of media and their place in the traffic of sensations. As such, this issue of ECW should interest scholars of communications as much as those working in English Canadian literary studies. Cecily Devereux's account of the Canadian reception of "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" is just as useful for scholars undertaking technological histories of trans-Atlantic communications as it is for those tracing the history of moral panics over urban vice in the nineteenth century. Cultures partake of the scandalous not merely in those moments at which the outrageous or shameful erupts within them but more generally through the ways in which they are connected to circuits of gossip, observation, and rhetoric. The scale and intensity of this circulation are intimately bound up with the history of communications technologies and structures. It is a commonplace of communications history that forms of textual expression and dissemination function in contradictory ways vis-à-vis political power and moral authority. Just as the printing press has allowed for the complexification and solidification of legal authority, through phenomena such as the dissemination of legal precedents, so it has served to undermine power through the seemingly uncontrolled circulation of scandalous ideas. Jon Thompson has drawn attention to the ways in which the large-scale distribution of religious and devotional printed matter helped to create the literacy upon which the success of a scandal-oriented penny press depended (62). Similarly, just as the ongoing globalization of contemporary media structures has opened up Canada to the circulation of scandalous discourse from elsewhere, so it has encouraged the solidification of a sense of our own distinctiveness.

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In his contribution to this issue, Don Randall cites Roland Barthes's definition of scandal as that in which one does not participate. This sense of being excluded from the scandalous is, at one level, a by-product of modern relations between media and audiences, relations that sustain the voyeuristic structures from which scandal draws much of its interest. As suggested, we might also think of scandal in terms of the nationally specific vantage points from which we watch it unfold and of the ways in which these vantage points are shaped by a variety of economic, technological, and geopolitical factors. As well, the sense of exclusion described by Barthes might usefully be considered in terms of what Marta Savigliano has called a "political economy of passion." Ideas about national character partly take shape within the ongoing, international traffic of scandal. It is from within this traffic that writers have refined the sense of moral economy they take to be distinctively English Canadian. Typically, they found one sense of our distinctiveness in our response to scandals from elsewhere, or by imagining how our own scandalous phenomena would be dealt with in another national-cultural context (see Davey). A political economy of passion may be observed in the tendency, noted in this issue by Justin Edwards, for Canadian modernists to cast foreigners as effeminate, or in David Leahy's description of calls for a national poetry that would resist those sexualized forms of the poetic that were seen as somehow alien or threatening.

The cultures of English Canada are not naturally predisposed to nourish or resist scandal in unitary ways. They are characterized, nonetheless, by institutions of public discourse that shape the paths of scandal's circulation and the forms in which it is expressed. Arguably, the absence of certain such institutions (e.g., the scandal tabloid) has nourished the conceits upon which essentialist definitions of the English Canadian character (as inherently reserved, or with an aversion to the scandalous) are founded. At the least, we might begin to investigate the ways in which the infrastructures of public discourse in English Canada favour those marks of reserve that we then interpret as the substance of our distinctiveness. By charting the relationships between public discourse, technologies of media production, and practices of reading and reception, we may more usefully delineate the place of English Canadian culture within a political economy of passion.

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