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## THE INVENTION OF FRENCH-LANGUAGE LITERATURE IN WESTERN AND NORTHERN CANADA

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### ABSTRACT

This article traces the emergence of French language literature in Western and Northern Canada, a vast prairie and boreal region largely absent from international literary maps. It examines how francophone writing developed in this minority setting, far from Québec and France, and how distance itself became a creative resource. Through archival research, close readings, and dialogue with postcolonial and world francophone theory, the study follows the arc from eighteenth century missionary chronicles and Métis oral poetry to the modernist breakthroughs of Gabrielle Roy and the polyphonic experiments of contemporary poets and playwrights. Central concepts such as François Paré's "inhabited distance" and Lise Gauvin's "literatures of restlessness" frame the analysis, revealing how linguistic unease, hybrid identities, and institutional supports (presses, journals, anthologies) have shaped the field. Rather than a story of isolation, this literature emerges as a node of unexpected connections, where Cree, Michif, French, English, and migrant languages intersect. The article argues that its vitality lies not in overcoming marginality but in transforming it into a poetics of restless belonging, offering insights relevant to global debates on language, migration, and minority creativity.

**Keywords:** Francophone Literature; Minority Writing; Prairie Canada; Postcolonial Studies.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

I have been writing poetry in Manitoba for more than twenty-five years. Each line I have ever placed on the page carries, in some way, the cold clarity of prairie winters, the silence of northern lakes, and the persistence of a language that is both inherited and unsettled. To write in French from this place, which already feels like an elsewhere within Canada, is to navigate a geography of distance: distance from Paris, distance from Montréal, distance even from the centres of francophone scholarship that have long overlooked these western and northern voices. It is also, more profoundly, to inhabit a history that remains unresolved, one marked by conquest, displacement, and fragile endurance.

Few statements capture this tension as bluntly as filmmaker Pierre Falardeau's uncompromising remarks in his conference *Portrait du colonisé* (2007). Recalling the Conquest of 1760 and the annexation of 1840, Falardeau insists that Quebec, and by extension, all francophone communities within Canada, exists in a state of continued colonial subordination. His rhetoric is abrasive, yet the provocation remains instructive: if Quebec itself can be understood as a space shaped by conquest and neocolonialism, what does this imply for francophone communities in Western and Northern Canada, where marginalization operates doubly, vis-à-vis both the anglophone majority and the dominant narratives of Québécois nationalism?

This article examines the “invention” of French-language literature in Western and Northern Canada through this prism of distance and marginality. The term “invention” is used in a double sense: as the creative act of bringing into being, and as the critical construction of a field of study. These literatures are not “minor” merely because they emerge from small communities; they are minor in the Deleuzian sense, deterritorialized and written in a major language from a minor position (Deleuze & Guattari, 1975). Far from being a deficit, this minor condition has fostered some of the most innovative forms of linguistic and cultural experimentation in francophone Canada.

The theoretical framework guiding this article bridges foundational postcolonial insights with recent Indigenous and Métis scholarship. Édouard Glissant’s *Poétique de la relation* (1990) and Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih’s concept of “minor transnationalism” (2005) first opened a space to think francophone literatures beyond national paradigms, privileging relation, hybridity, and lateral connections among minority cultures. François Paré’s notion of *distance habitée* (2003; 2020) deepens this approach by reframing exile and marginality as intimate relations to place rather than simple absence, while Lise Gauvin’s *littératures de l’intranquillité* (2023) foregrounds the linguistic restlessness characteristic of minority writing in French. Recent Indigenous and Métis perspectives both extend and challenge these frameworks. Elizabeth Caron’s analysis of decolonial poetics (2023) highlights how contemporary Indigenous writing transforms collective histories of dispossession into personal narratives of love, grief, and land-based healing, shifting attention from the political to the intimate without losing its critical force. Similar dynamics appear in the works of Métis poet Katherena Vermette (*North End Love Songs*, 2012) and in Jo-Ann Episkenew’s seminal *Taking Back Our Spirits* (2009), which argues that Indigenous literatures enact community healing and cultural resurgence. Together, these perspectives suggest that the “invention” of francophone literatures in Western and Northern Canada emerges at the intersection of inhabited distance, linguistic restlessness, and decolonial intimacy, a process that simultaneously dialogues with and departs from earlier postcolonial paradigms.

This study draws on a corpus that is both historical and contemporary, chosen to capture decisive moments in the evolution of francophone writing in the West and North. It begins with missionary narratives and Métis oral poetry, moves through the modernist breakthroughs of Gabrielle Roy and Maurice Constantin-Weyer, and examines later poets such as Lise Gaboury-Diallo, J.R. Léveillé, and Charles Leblanc. These figures trace a shifting grammar of prairie and northern narratives, from frontier survival and intimate engagement with landscape to diasporic, urban, and Métis reframings of that inheritance. The article also considers the critical and institutional frameworks that shaped this field: the creation of publishing houses like Les Éditions du Blé (1974), the role of journals such as *Les Cahiers franco-canadiens de l’Ouest*, and landmark anthologies that both document and construct the canon. Among these, *Poésie franco-ouestienne 1974-2024* stands out for consolidating fifty years of poetic production while inviting renewed critical attention to questions of continuity, rupture, and self-definition. Rather than presenting a fixed canon, these voices and institutions reveal a literature in constant reinvention.

Methodologically, this article adopts a hybrid approach. It weaves historical contextualization with close readings of key texts, situating recurring motifs such as distance, restlessness, and exiguity within their sociolinguistic and political environments. The analysis is comparative, positioning Western and Northern francophone literatures not only alongside Québécois writing but also within a broader constellation of minor francophonies worldwide. Archival materials, including anthologies, parish bulletins, and critical essays, underpin this inquiry and reveal how institutions have both preserved and shaped these literatures.

This dual perspective, speaking as both scholar and poet rooted in the region, acknowledges the contradictions of writing in French from the margins. It confronts the pride of cultural survival intertwined with what Hubert Aquin famously described as *la fatigue culturelle du Canada français* (1962), the exhaustion of having to justify one's existence in every gesture of creation. Local idioms offer intimacy yet remain shadowed by the weight of normative French; community resilience flourishes even as solitude persists. In this tension lies not merely a challenge but a generative force, a restless energy that animates the poetics emerging from the prairies and the North.

The article unfolds in six sections. The first reconstructs the historical and sociolinguistic conditions that shaped francophone writing in the West and North, from the early chronicles of explorers and missionaries to the oral poetry of the Métis. The second traces the emergence of a literary consciousness in the mid-twentieth century, focusing on Gabrielle Roy's pioneering role. The third and fourth sections explore contemporary poetry and prose, highlighting the interplay of inhabited distance, intranquillity, and hybrid identities. The fifth examines the institutional dimension, including the role of anthologies such as *Poésie franco-ouestienne 1974-2024* in canon formation and cultural memory. Finally, the conclusion reconsiders the notion of "invention," suggesting that these literatures continually reinvent themselves through acts of remembrance and relation, negotiating colonial legacies and global horizons.

## 2. HISTORICAL AND SOCIOLINGUISTIC CONTEXTS

French-language literature in Western and Northern Canada has never followed a straight line of development. It emerged far from the recognized centres of francophone culture, shaped as much by isolation as by resilience. Rather than a continuous tradition, what we find is a series of reinventions. François Paré's idea of *distance habitée* (2003) is helpful here: distance is not merely absence but a lived condition, one that writers transform into a source of meaning. In the West and the North, to write in French has often meant carrying the weight of marginality while discovering in that very remoteness the raw material for new stories.

The earliest traces of this literature appear in the eighteenth century in journals and letters of explorers and missionaries. Figures such as Pierre de La Vérendrye, Norbert Provencher and Alexandre Taché recorded their journeys along the Red River and into the northern plains. Their prose was pragmatic and devotional, but it also captured wonder and fragility, as if the act of writing itself anchored them in vast and unfamiliar landscapes. Ismène Toussaint's historical synthesis (2014) highlights how these texts were less about self-expression than about survival and communication, yet they planted the seeds of a francophone imaginary shaped by movement and negotiation.

This early writing also challenges the strict hierarchy Roland Barthes described between the "writer" (*écrivain*), associated with enduring artistic ambition, and the "scribe" (*écrivain*), whose work answers immediate needs (Barthes 1964: 147). In dominant literatures, that division often pushes occasional writing to the margins of what is considered "true" literature. In minority contexts, as François Paré observes, these *écrits transitifs* such as newspapers, parish bulletins, pioneer chronicles, commemorative poems and serialized family narratives occupy a central role (Paré 1993 : 140). Because book publishing remained rare and precarious well into the twentieth century, these transient forms provided both cultural cohesion and literary apprenticeship. They nurtured local readerships, carried oral histories into print and offered one of the few spaces where francophone identity could be affirmed in everyday life. Early newspapers in Manitoba and Saskatchewan frequently published poems and vignettes addressed to families, children and parish life, showing that literary expression

often entered community life not through the novel but through columns and feuilletons that merged the ordinary and the poetic.

Parallel to these print practices, oral traditions flourished. The songs of the Métis bard Pierre Falcon, notably *La Chanson de la Grenouillère* composed after the Battle of Seven Oaks in 1816, exemplify this early poetic voice. Sung in French inflected by Cree and Michif, Falcon's verses celebrate resistance and collective memory. They also anticipate what Lise Gauvin later conceptualized as *littératures de l'intranquillité* (2023): works that arise from linguistic unease, where the dominant code carries traces of other languages and refuses to remain fixed.

The nineteenth century saw settlement intensify and written genres diversify. Migrants from Québec, France, Belgium and Switzerland produced pioneer narratives, devotional chronicles and, eventually, historical novels. Writers such as Maurice Constantin-Weyer (*Un homme se penche sur son passé*, 1928) and Georges Bugnet (*La Forêt*, 1935) transformed the hardships of prairie and northern life into allegories of endurance and moral struggle. Their books oscillated between the mythic and the starkly realist, reflecting a community negotiating faith, language and belonging in a demanding environment. Literature often emerged in snatches, appearing in parish bulletins, serialized in local newspapers, or circulated in family chronicles. Despite limited publishing infrastructure and the pressures of isolation, these modest texts became anchors of cultural continuity and quiet testimony to the resilience of francophone life in the West and North.

A decisive shift occurred in the mid-twentieth century with Gabrielle Roy. Her novels, from *Bonheur d'occasion* (1945) to *Rue Deschambault* (1955) and *La route d'Altamont* (1966), brought francophone voices from Manitoba to an international audience. Roy's prose transforms local childhood memories into universal meditations on poverty, migration and quiet dignity. Annette Saint-Pierre's studies, including *Gabrielle Roy sous le signe du rêve* (1975) and *Au pays de Gabrielle Roy* (2005), have shown how Roy both embodied and transcended the conditions of minority writing, turning the constraints of distance into a distinct aesthetic.

The 1970s mark another watershed with the founding of Les Éditions du Blé in 1974, soon followed by Les Éditions des Plaines in 1979 and the launch of *Bulletins of Centre d'études franco-canadiennes de l'Ouest* the same year. Together, these institutions established durable platforms for francophone voices across the Prairies and the North, ensuring that creative production and critical reflection developed in tandem. While Les Éditions du Blé focused primarily on poetry and experimental prose, Les Éditions des Plaines opened parallel avenues for fiction, children's literature and historical writing, expanding both audience and genre. The *Cahiers*, for their part, fostered a dialogue between writers and scholars, allowing Western francophone literature to theorize itself rather than remain dependent on frameworks imported from Québec or France.

Anthologies have played a pivotal role in consolidating and transmitting this literary memory. Roger Léveillé's *Anthologie de la poésie franco-manitobaine* (1990) mapped a first genealogy of prairie francophone poetry, tracing a line from early pioneers to the experimental voices of the 1970s and 1980s. More than three decades later, *Poésie franco-ouestienne 1974-2024* (2024) extends this mapping across half a century, documenting evolutions in linguistic registers, aesthetic strategies, and thematic concerns. Rather than simply gathering poems, this new anthology functions as a living archive that stages both continuity and reinvention. Its inclusion of Indigenous and Métis poets signals more than token presence: it participates in a critical reorientation. As Jo-Ann Episkew (2009) argues, true decolonial work requires moving beyond symbolic inclusion toward narrative sovereignty, granting

Indigenous writers the authority to articulate belonging and resistance on their own terms within, and sometimes against, colonial literary frameworks.

Language itself remains at the centre of this story. Writing in French from the West means navigating a polyglot terrain where French coexists with English, Indigenous languages and diverse migrant variants. This environment produces what Gauvin calls *surconscience linguistique*, a heightened awareness of language as contested ground. Writers respond in different ways: some cling to normative French as a bulwark of identity; others embrace vernacular play, code-switching and hybrid forms that mirror lived linguistic realities. This linguistic restlessness intersects with Paré's inhabited distance, generating a literature that is both intimate and estranged, rooted yet perpetually in motion.

Poetic experiments initiated by J.R. Léveillé, Paul Savoie, Alexandre Amprimoz and Charles Leblanc in the 1970s and 1980s opened the way for a new wave of francophone voices. Writers such as Laurent Poliquin, with *La Métisse filante* and *Voyageur des interstices*, and Bathélemy Bolivar, with *Mangiers têtus* and *Tempo*, continued this trajectory by weaving Métis memory, Caribbean rhythms and prairie imagery into hybrid poetic forms. At the same time, Lise Gaboury-Diallo expanded these explorations through collections like *L'Envers et l'endroit* and the short story cycle *Lointaines*, where themes of displacement, intimacy and multilingual resonance emerge. Together, these authors transformed linguistic restlessness from a marker of marginality into a conscious creative principle. In parallel, playwright Marc Prescott extended this experimental impulse into theatre. His works, notably *Sex, Lies et les Franco-Manitobains* and *L'année du Big Mac*, combine irreverent humour, bilingual code-switching and sharp social critique, offering a performative counterpoint to the lyric traditions of the prairie poets. Prescott's dramaturgy demonstrates how the same restlessness that animates francophone poetry also permeates the stage, transforming questions of identity and belonging into embodied dialogues with the audience.

Yet marginality remains an enduring feature of this field. As Toussaint observes, Western francophone literature has often been excluded from national literary narratives and dismissed as provincial. Even with the rise of local publishers, journals and university programs, it continues to occupy a liminal position, overshadowed by anglophone Canada on one side and by Québec's dominant francophone culture on the other. This double periphery, however, has also fostered resilience. It compels writers to continually reinvent their relationship to French, to their own histories and to each other.

Yet marginality remains an enduring feature of this field. As Simon Harel has argued in his reflections on cultural peripheries and symbolic foundations, dominant narratives often obscure the role of minority voices, inviting a rethinking of how francophone literatures are conceptualized beyond traditional centers (Harel 2017 : 10). This insight resonates with the position of Western francophone literature, long excluded from national literary narratives and dismissed as provincial. Even with the rise of local publishers, journals and university programs, it continues to occupy a liminal position, overshadowed by anglophone Canada on one side and by Québec's dominant francophone culture on the other. This dual marginality, while structurally challenging, has also nurtured a distinct resilience. It compels writers to renegotiate their relationship to French, to memory, and to place, giving rise to a poetics grounded in reinvention and solidarity.

Recent developments hint at a shift. The publication of *Poésie franco-ouestienne 1974-2024* coincides with broader scholarly conversations about decolonization, Indigenous resurgence and minority-majority relations in Canada. These debates invite us to read Western francophone writing not as a provincial footnote but as an integral part of the francophone mosaic. The texts emerging from the prairies and the North participate in what Édouard

Glissant (1990) describes as a *poétique de la relation*: a practice forged in contact zones, attentive to both local memory and global circulation.

Seen through this lens, the “invention” of French-language literature in the West and North is less a single founding moment than an ongoing process. Each generation must discover French anew, wresting it from silence or indifference and reimagining it for their time. From the songs of Pierre Falcon to the polyphonic experiments of contemporary poets, this literature persists not by permanence but by continual beginning. Its history is one of reinvention, each act of writing an insistence that French belongs here, on these prairies and northern frontiers, no less than anywhere else.

### 3. EARLY NARRATIVES AND THE INVENTION OF AN IMAGINARY

French-language literature in Western and Northern Canada was born in circumstances where exile and survival were inseparable from storytelling. Long before contemporary voices turned these prairies and boreal expanses into spaces of poetic experimentation, the first texts emerged from settlers, missionaries, and migrants negotiating an unfamiliar land. These narratives were rarely written with the explicit ambition of founding a literature; they were travelogues, memoirs, sometimes novels loosely anchored in personal experience. Yet they performed a foundational gesture: they inscribed francophone presence onto a territory that official histories, dominated by British colonial discourse, had often rendered invisible. The seeds of what François Paré would later call an *inhabited distance* were already there, embedded in accounts that oscillated between awe and alienation.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the settlement of the Canadian West accelerated. Francophone communities, Métis and immigrant alike, faced profound upheavals: the Red River uprisings, the suppression of French in schools, the pressures of agricultural colonization. The literature that grew out of these tensions bears the marks of this frontier condition. It does not celebrate conquest in the triumphalist mode often associated with settler narratives; rather, it documents precarious lives lived in a liminal zone between cultural memory and new beginnings. The harsh winters, the vast horizons, and the isolation of prairie homesteads permeate the earliest poems and novels, shaping an ethos of endurance that would echo in later generations.

Maurice Constantin-Weyer epitomizes this pioneer literature. A Frenchman who emigrated to Manitoba in the early 1900s, he drew on his experience as a farmer, soldier, and wanderer to craft novels that straddle memoir and fiction. His *Un homme se penche sur son passé* (1928), awarded the Prix Goncourt, is often cited as the first major francophone novel of the West. The narrative recounts a return to the prairies and a reckoning with personal and historical upheavals: Métis rebellions, harsh winters, and the alienation of newcomers in a landscape that refuses romantic domestication. Constantin-Weyer’s prose oscillates between lyrical descriptions of vast skies and unsentimental portrayals of poverty and death. He does not idealize the frontier; rather, he exposes its contradictions, the mingling of hardship and beauty that defines prairie existence.

Equally significant is Georges Bugnet, whose *La Forêt* (1935) captures another facet of Western francophone experience: the confrontation with the boreal wilderness of Alberta. Bugnet’s novel chronicles the struggles of a young couple attempting to settle in the forest, their dreams gradually eroded by isolation and the unforgiving climate. While the narrative draws on realist conventions, its descriptive passages verge on the poetic, offering one of the earliest literary articulations of what would later be termed *nordicity*: the idea that northern landscapes carry symbolic and existential weight beyond their physical characteristics.

Bugnet's forest is not merely backdrop; it is an active force, shaping characters' fates and inviting readers to consider the psychological impact of vast, silent spaces.

Both Constantin-Weyer and Bugnet exemplify the dual impulse of early Western francophone narratives: to document and to mythologize. Their texts preserve lived experiences of migration and hardship while simultaneously crafting enduring images of the West as a place of testing and transformation. These authors were not Métis themselves, yet their narratives unfold in spaces deeply marked by Métis histories and geographies, particularly along the Red River and northern trade routes. The near-total absence of Métis voices in these early works is not a neutral omission but reflects structural exclusions of the time, shaped by prevailing prejudices and the economic marginalization that Métis communities endured following the Red River Resistance and the dispossession of their lands. In this sense, silence operates as both symptom and instrument of erasure: Métis figures appear as background or folklore rather than as narrators of their own experience. Later generations of Métis poets and novelists would confront these gaps directly, reclaiming narrative authority and reframing prairie history from within the communities once relegated to its margins.

### 3.1 Gabrielle Roy: toward a narrative matrix

If Constantin-Weyer and Bugnet laid the groundwork for a francophone literary presence in the West, Gabrielle Roy transformed that presence into a fully realized narrative matrix. Born in 1909 in Saint-Boniface, Manitoba, Roy came of age in a community marked by poverty, linguistic struggle, and cultural hybridity. Her early novels and short stories draw intimately on this environment, yet their resonance extends far beyond local colour. Roy's work reframes the prairies not as periphery but as a microcosm of universal human tensions: belonging and exile, memory and modernity, hope and disillusionment.

*La Petite Poule d'Eau* (1950) offers a case in point. Set in a remote northern Manitoba community, the novel chronicles the life of the Tousignant family, whose existence on a tiny island epitomizes both isolation and resilience. The narrative voice, tender yet unsparring, renders daily hardships such as floods, bitter winters, and the absence of medical care, alongside moments of grace like a child's laughter and the communal rituals that punctuate the seasons. Through these details, Roy invents a literary north distinct from both colonial adventure tales and urban modernist narratives. The novel neither exoticizes nor sentimentalizes its characters; instead, it dignifies their quiet endurance and insists on the significance of lives lived at the margins.

In *Rue Deschambault* (1955), Roy turns to the urban francophone milieu of Saint-Boniface, portraying childhood memories with an acute sense of place. The collection of vignettes, though rooted in autobiographical elements, resonates with collective memory: immigrant families navigating linguistic tensions, the daily negotiation of poverty, the hybrid soundscape of French, English, and Indigenous languages. The narrative voice here is at once local and expansive; it captures the minutiae of prairie streets while inviting readers to recognize shared human experiences of longing, shame, and small joys. Roy's ability to transmute the particular into the universal anticipates what Lise Gauvin would later describe as *littératures de l'intranquillité*: texts that embrace linguistic and cultural restlessness as a source of creative vitality.

Roy's work also reframes landscape. Unlike the heroic vastness of earlier frontier narratives, her prairies are intimate, almost tactile. Wheat fields and muddy streets become extensions of the body; the horizon is less a symbol of conquest than of yearning. In *La route d'Altamont* (1966), journeys through the Manitoba countryside trigger reflections on aging, memory, and maternal bonds. The road itself, winding and imperfect, becomes a metaphor for

life's meandering path, far removed from the straight lines of settler teleologies. Here, the West is not merely a setting but a participant in the characters' inner lives, shaping emotional landscapes as much as physical ones.

The theoretical lens offered by François Ricard and Lori Saint-Martin brings renewed depth to Gabrielle Roy's contribution. Ricard, in *Gabrielle Roy : une vie*, highlights how Roy transforms the minutiae of prairie life, the daily gestures of rural Manitoba families, into a universal poetics of estrangement and belonging. He notes that Roy's narratives elevate domestic routines, such as tending animals or preparing meals, into symbolic acts that anchor her characters within a fragile cultural continuity while simultaneously exposing their marginality (Ricard 1996: 48). This echoes what later critics would term a "poetics of inhabited distance," where the experience of minority existence is not simply endured but transfigured into art.

Saint-Martin, in *La Voyageuse et la Prisonnière*, reads Roy through a feminist lens, foregrounding how her heroines navigate thresholds between constraint and autonomy. In essays such as "The Mother's Voice, the Daughter's Text," she argues that Roy's narratives destabilize patriarchal expectations by privileging the perspectives of daughters and mothers negotiating exile and longing (Saint-Martin 2002: 17). These insights illuminate how Roy's fiction anticipates later feminist and minority discourses: her stories neither resolve the tension between French and English nor between local and universal, but dwell in it, making ambivalence itself a mode of knowing and a condition of storytelling.

Historically, Roy's emergence marks a turning point. Her success, notably the Governor General's Award for *Bonheur d'occasion* (1945) and the international acclaim that followed, disrupted prevailing hierarchies in Canadian literature. No longer could Western francophone writing be dismissed as provincial; Roy's oeuvre demonstrated that narratives born of marginal spaces could speak powerfully to universal concerns. In doing so, she provided subsequent generations of writers with both a model and a challenge: a model of how to root literature in local realities without sacrificing complexity, and a challenge to continue interrogating the hybrid, unsettled identities forged on the prairies.

### 3.2 Toward an enduring imaginary

The early narratives of Constantin-Weyer and Bugnet, together with Roy's transformative storytelling, constitute more than isolated literary achievements. They invent an imaginary, a repertoire of motifs, images, and tonalities, that continues to inform francophone writing in the West and North. The motif of the vast horizon, first articulated in frontier novels, persists in contemporary poetry but is reframed through ecological and decolonial lenses. The intimate portrayal of childhood and community life pioneered by Roy reverberates in later short stories and memoirs, from prairie towns to northern reserves. The tension between linguistic survival and creative experimentation, already latent in early texts, becomes explicit in later authors who navigate code-switching and multilingual realities.

This continuity does not imply stasis. Rather, it underscores how each generation reimagines the West in response to new urgencies. Contemporary poets such as Laurent Poliquin and Lise Gaboury-Diallo inherit Roy's attentiveness to place yet infuse it with diasporic and Métis resonances. What began as chronicles of survival and exile evolves into a poetics of interiority and restlessness, where marginality is embraced and transformed into creative energy. This evolution opens the way for later writers who fragment, hybridize, and confront the inherited landscape with diasporic, Indigenous, and Métis voices, revealing that the invention of this literature is an ongoing process rather than a closed chapter. Moving from survival to affirmation also reframes how Indigenous and Métis voices are received within

francophone literary histories. As Jo-Ann Episkenew (2009) observes, Indigenous literatures do more than document trauma; they actively participate in healing and community resurgence. This insight helps reconsider how earlier silences in missionary and pioneer narratives resonate with later acts of reclamation, particularly in Métis poetry and oral histories that reinsert Indigenous presence into prairie and northern imaginaries.

#### 4. CONTEMPORARY MUTATION: PLURAL AND RESTLESS VOICES

Building on this trajectory, the poetics of restlessness that first surfaced in early narratives now takes new forms. What was once rooted in missionary chronicles or the intimate realism of Gabrielle Roy fractures into hybrid, multilingual, and performative modes. Contemporary writers inherit a memory of marginality yet transform it into an aesthetic principle that disrupts fixed notions of belonging. This marks not only a stylistic evolution but a deeper reimagining of what it means to write from the West and North in French.

By the 1970s, francophone writing in Western and Northern Canada entered a period of profound transformation. The generation that had defined the literary landscape in the early twentieth century, writers such as Maurice Constantin-Weyer, Georges Bugnet, and Gabrielle Roy, had forged a grammar of prairie narrative grounded in frontier survival, devotional lyricism, and an almost reverential engagement with landscape. Their works often framed the West as both sanctuary and crucible, a place where human resilience and intimacy with the land converged in narratives of settlement and belonging. Yet as urbanization accelerated, francophone communities diversified, Indigenous voices re-emerged in public discourse, and diasporic arrivals reshaped demographic realities, the motifs pioneered by those earlier figures fractured into new configurations. What followed was less a clean rupture than a restless negotiation with inherited myths, a dialogue that confronted both the comforts and constraints of memory.

##### 4.1 From Frontier Narratives to Fragmented Voices

François Paré's notion of *distance habitée*, developed in his reflections on minority literatures, provides a valuable lens for understanding this evolution. Paré describes how small literatures, situated at the margins of dominant cultures, cultivate an intimacy with place that is paradoxically marked by estrangement. This paradox generates a fertile creative tension: these literatures germinate in the fissures of history, where absence and survival coexist (Paré 1992: 12). In the prairie francophone context, this tension manifests in texts that are rooted in local experience yet acutely aware of broader displacements, whether colonial, migratory, or linguistic. Lise Gauvin's concept of *littératures de l'intranquillité* complements Paré's insight by emphasizing the heightened linguistic consciousness that arises when French is lived as both intimate and precarious. In Western Canada, where French coexists uneasily with English, Cree, Michif, and increasingly global tongues, writers do not merely write in French; they interrogate it, stretch it, and allow it to absorb cadences from elsewhere.

The critical frameworks developed by Paré and Gauvin gain additional nuance when placed in conversation with the scholarship emerging from the *Cahiers franco-canadiens de l'Ouest*, the journal published by the Centre d'études franco-canadiennes de l'Ouest (CEFCO). For decades, this journal has quietly chronicled and shaped the evolution of francophone writing in the region, serving as both archive and laboratory. Robert Viau's *L'Ouest littéraire : visions d'ici et d'ailleurs* (1992) remains a foundational synthesis, tracing how themes of exile, nostalgia, and experimentation intersect in prairie narratives. Estelle Dansereau's contributions to the *Cahiers* extended this work by foregrounding women's writing, particularly that of Simone Chaput (2008), and by examining how domestic spaces unsettle the

heroic pioneer myth, recasting belonging in terms of intimacy and affect rather than conquest. Annette Saint-Pierre's bibliographic projects, such as the *Répertoire littéraire de l'Ouest canadien* (1984), continue to anchor the field, reminding scholars that literary innovation cannot be disentangled from the material conditions of minority life: parish schools, local newspapers, and, above all, publishing houses like Éditions du Blé and Éditions des Plaines that have provided the infrastructure for both creation and canonization.

Within this critical and institutional context, the poetic experiments of the 1970s and 1980s signaled a decisive break from earlier modes of expression. J.R. Léveillé's *Œuvres de la première mort* (1977) and *Le Livre des marges* (1981) exemplify this shift. His texts blur the boundaries between prose and poetry, narrative and fragment, silence and utterance. White space becomes as expressive as the words themselves, inviting readers into a contemplative encounter where meaning emerges from suggestion rather than declaration. This fragmentation is not merely formalist; it mirrors the fractured experience of francophone life in an overwhelmingly anglophone environment, where identity is assembled from partial affiliations and layered memories.

Charles Leblanc radicalized this impulse in later decades. His collections such as *L'appétit du compteur* (2003) and *Soubresauts* (2013) transform Winnipeg's inner city into a polyphonic stage where buses, rail yards, and back alleys become central sites of poetic invention. The vernaculars of the street, including English, joul and prairie idioms, erupt into Leblanc's French, producing what Louise Ladouceur (2015), in her studies of bilingual theatre, calls a destabilizing code switching that simultaneously challenges and invites. Rather than presenting a purified French, Leblanc renders the language as it is lived: permeable, contested, inventive. Read through Gauvin's notion of *intranquillité*, his work embodies the restless negotiation between intimacy and estrangement that runs through much of the region's contemporary writing. This linguistic porosity resurfaces in the dramaturgy of younger creators such as Katrine Deniset, whose *Je m'en vais/Débâcle* (2022) stages familial rupture and personal exile through hybrid registers, and Stéphane Oystryk, whose film-novel *FM Youth* (2015) captures the rhythms of bilingual adolescence in Winnipeg's urban core. Marc Prescott's plays, notably those collected in *Big Bullshit Sex, Lies et les Franco-Manitobains*, similarly exploit code switching as both comic relief and critical lens, reflecting the lived realities of prairie francophone youth.

Paul Savoie offers a quieter yet equally radical counterpoint. His prose poems, collected in *À la façon d'un charpentier* (1984), linger on micro-gestures: the weight of snow on a cedar branch, the echo of a hammer in an empty workshop. As Kenneth Meadwell observed, Savoie's work stages "the quest for a stable life that might respond to the needs of the isolated human being," oscillating between the longing for intimacy and the awareness of life's uncertainties. The collection evokes, in Meadwell's words, a "personal tone" that communicates both melancholy and a fragile hope, as if the very act of writing were a way to construct "a small, enclosed, and comforting world" (Meadwell 1985 : 160). This restrained sensibility, expressed through precise and evocative language, elevates the small and the local against heroic postures. Savoie's silences, like Léveillé's fragments, articulate Paré's inhabited distance in miniature, marking the subtle thresholds where belonging and estrangement meet.

#### 4.2 Plural Horizons: Diaspora, Gender, and Performance

As poetic forms evolved, fiction writers probed new subjectivities. Simone Chapat's *La Vigne amère* (1989) turns inward, exploring the quiet violences of rural family life and the gendered silences that haunt francophone communities. Her narratives unsettle the nostalgic veneer of prairie life by foregrounding the tensions of bilingual households and the constraints

placed on women's desires. Lise Gaboury-Diallo extends this inquiry into transnational terrain. Her poetry collection *L'Envers et l'endroit* (2009) and short stories in *Lointaines* (2010) weave Manitoba's prairies with Senegalese landscapes, reframing the West through a diasporic lens. Gauvin's concept of *francographie*, a writing that foregrounds crossings between languages and cultures, finds vivid embodiment in Gaboury-Diallo's work, where prairie French interacts with diasporic imaginaries while maintaining a constant awareness of elsewhere.

The arrival of Haitian Canadian poet Bathélemy Bolivar further expanded this horizon. His collections *Mangiers têtus* (2008) and *Tempo* (2015) infuse Caribbean cadence into prairie imagery: mango trees haunt winter streets, drum patterns reverberate through grain silos. Bolivar resists assimilation into a single narrative of "francophone West," layering diaspora upon diaspora and creating what can be read as a post-migratory poetics, where identities are forged at the crossroads of multiple displacements. Similar dynamics appear in the work of Amber O'Reilly, a poet from the Northwest Territories whose *Boussole franche* (2020) navigates northern and Manitoban landscapes. Her verse situates the prairie within broader Arctic imaginaries, challenging southern conceptions of the "West" and expanding the field's geographic and affective scope.

This pluralization of voices is inseparable from transformations in canon formation. The 1990 *Anthologie de la poésie franco-manitobaine*, edited by Roger Léveillé, provided the first sustained mapping of prairie francophone poetry, foregrounding figures such as Savoie, Corbeil, Vien, and early Leblanc. Thirty-four years later, *Poésie franco-ouestienne 1974-2024* reframed the canon on broader and more inclusive terms, bringing diasporic and northern voices to the forefront and revisiting Métis and feminist contributions long marginalized in earlier histories. The growing prominence of intimate and fragmentary modes reflects what Elizabeth Caron (2023) describes as a decolonial turn grounded not in manifesto but in personal memory, the body, and land-based intimacy. This perspective complicates earlier postcolonial frameworks by foregrounding vulnerability and everyday experience as spaces of resistance, a dynamic also visible in Métis poets such as Katherena Vermette and in Gaboury-Diallo's diasporic lyricism. In this sense, the evolution of anthologies not only expands the canon geographically and thematically but also signals a turn toward aesthetic and ethical paradigms rooted in lived experience rather than heroic narratives. As Paré warns in *Les littératures de l'exiguïté*, the hypertrophy of anthological discourse in small literatures: "Les petites littératures souffrent très souvent d'une hypertrophie du discours anthologique [qui] occupe, dans ces littératures, une place démesurée" (Paré 1992: 85). His comment reveals how anthologies both document and actively shape the field, negotiating tensions between Métis and settler narratives, rural and urban poetics, feminist and masculinist imaginaries.

The emergence of performative and hybrid forms in recent decades adds another layer to this complexity. Slam, spoken word, and bilingual theatre have carved new spaces for francophone expression, particularly among younger generations who navigate multilingual realities as a matter of course. Winnipeg has seen the rise of regular slam competitions at venues like The Handsome Daughter in West Broadway, where artists such as Rob Malo, Sébastien Gaillard and Amber O'Reilly perform regularly, and the city hosted its first francophone slam festival at La Maison des artistes visuels francophones on March 27, 2025. These performances often blend French, English and Cree in rhythmic alternation, challenging the notion of fixed linguistic boundaries and transforming vulnerability into creative energy. The reflections of Gilbert, Landry and Pâquet on memory and place (2009: 7) further illuminate this phenomenon by showing how cultural events function as lieux de mémoire, anchoring collective identities in specific spaces while remaining open to new migrations and transnational resonances. Ladouceur's analyses of bilingual dramaturgy likewise demonstrate

how code switching on stage disorients audiences while simultaneously inviting them into intimacy; the resulting unease becomes generative, fostering new modes of listening and participation.

Underlying these aesthetic evolutions is a persistent negotiation with memory and landscape. The prairie and northern settings remain central, yet they are no longer imagined as empty frontiers or timeless sanctuaries. Instead, they appear as palimpsests layered with colonial histories, Indigenous presence, diasporic arrivals, and environmental anxieties. Writers grapple with what it means to belong to lands marked by both dispossession and beauty, by histories of violence and ongoing acts of care. In this sense, the intranquillity Gauvin identifies is not merely linguistic but ethical: a restless reckoning with what it means to write, love, and claim space on contested ground.

This reckoning inevitably spills beyond the page. As authors interrogate belonging, the frameworks that preserve, circulate, and teach their work come into focus. The negotiation is no longer solely aesthetic or ethical but institutional. How do journals, schools, and publishers mediate these tensions and, in doing so, participate in shaping the canon itself? At this juncture, the critical studies of Estelle Cambe (2012) and Michelle Keller (2019) become crucial, revealing how literary creation and institutional memory evolve in tandem. Cambe's doctoral research on the legacy of Louis Riel shows how memory of the Métis leader became a symbolic fulcrum around which later writers, including Roy, Léveillé, and Chaput, negotiated both local belonging and global francophone affiliations. Keller's study of French-language schooling in Manitoba and Saskatchewan adds another dimension, demonstrating how educational institutions such as parish schools, immersion programs, and university departments, function not as neutral backdrops but as active producers of minority identity. Literature in this account grows in symbiosis with school boards, cultural centers, and local publishing houses such as Les Éditions du Blé, whose catalog serves simultaneously as archive and springboard.

To acknowledge these interconnections is to recognize that literature in the francophone West has always been more than a collection of individual texts. It is also the sum of reading networks, classroom anthologies, public readings, and community debates. The *Cahiers franco-canadiens de l'Ouest* illustrate this dynamic vividly: for decades, the journal has functioned as a forum where poems, short stories, and critical essays circulate among scholars, teachers, and writers, allowing the field to comment on itself and redefine its own borders. In this recursive process, creation and criticism intertwine. The same authors who appear in anthologies often write prefaces, reviews, and historical syntheses that solidify the very canon they inhabit.

Such entanglements raise crucial questions for the next stage of this inquiry. How do critical and institutional actors, like publishers, journals, schools, and archives, shape the horizons of francophone writing in the West and North? To what extent do they reproduce or challenge the colonial narratives embedded in concepts like "nation" and "minority"? Drawing on Dominique Combe's reflections on the invention of national literatures in French (2013), the following section examines how the pact between language and nation is renegotiated in these contexts. The focus will shift from individual authors to the infrastructures that sustain them, mapping the role of the *Cahiers*, key poetic anthologies, and institutions like Les Éditions du Blé in articulating a collective literary project. In doing so, it will also engage with Cambe's and Keller's insights to show how memory and education converge in the making of a field where survival and creativity remain inseparable.

## 5. CRITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CONSTRUCTION

The institutional and critical construction of francophone literature in Western and Northern Canada cannot be disentangled from the paradoxes François Paré identified in *Les littératures de l'exigüité*. Paré's reflections on how "small literatures" negotiate survival in contexts of spatial and demographic constraint remain a foundational lens: the very need to affirm existence generates an intensity of critical and anthological activity that, while productive, risks obscuring the diversity and dissonance within the field. Lucie Hotte's edited volume *Habiter la distance* further nuances this picture by foregrounding how exile, memory, and the intimate geographies of everyday life permeate the francophone narrative imaginary (Hotte & Poirier, 2009). Together, these perspectives provide the conceptual scaffolding through which subsequent critics have framed prairie writing—its negotiation between rootedness and openness, fragile survival and creative reinvention.

Building on this critical groundwork, institutional frameworks emerged that were decisive in shaping the field's contours. The *Cahiers franco-canadiens de l'Ouest*, founded under the auspices of the Centre d'études franco-canadiennes de l'Ouest (CEFCO), exemplify this process. Initially conceived as a scholarly journal, the *Cahiers* quickly became more than a venue for literary criticism: they functioned as a site of dialogue between writers, teachers, and scholars, documenting the evolution of a corpus even as they helped define it. Through bibliographies, thematic dossiers and critical essays, the *Cahiers* consolidated a vocabulary of *intimité*, *intranquillité* and *métissage* that permeates subsequent scholarship and informs classroom anthologies as well as community readings.

Parallel to this critical apparatus, publishing houses such as Les Éditions du Blé in Winnipeg institutionalized the literary field by providing a durable platform for francophone voices. Founded in 1974, Le Blé's catalog has served as both archive and incubator: early publications of Léveillé, Savoie, and Chaput later coexisted with more experimental voices like Charles Leblanc or transnational ones such as Barthélemy Bolivar. In recent years, the press has also embraced authors from Africa and the diaspora, including Babacar Léna Diamé Ndiaye (*Le temps en miette*), Guy Armel Bayegnak (*Poids plume, poids d'or*), Daouda Dembélé (*Rolihlahla Mandela*) and Eileen Lohka (*Déclinaisons masculines*). This widening of the catalog reflects Le Blé's editorial policy, oscillating between regional affirmation and formal experimentation, allowing prairie writing to assert its singularity while entering broader francophone and global conversations. The same dynamic underlies the anthologies the press has supported, from the 1990 *Anthologie de la poésie franco-manitobaine* to the 2024 *Poésie franco-ouestienne 1974-2024*, each signaling shifts in the field's self-understanding: from provincial to western, from homogeneous to plural.

Education systems, particularly immersion programs and francophone universities, also played a decisive role in consolidating literary production and readership. Michelle Keller's research on French-language schooling in Manitoba and Saskatchewan demonstrates how educational institutions were not passive backdrops but active producers of minority identity, integrating literature into curricula to reinforce linguistic and cultural belonging. Parish schools in the early twentieth century, later supplanted by public immersion programs and university departments, cultivated generations of readers for whom local francophone writing became both heritage and horizon. In turn, these programs fed back into the literary field: graduates became teachers, critics, and sometimes writers, sustaining a recursive cycle of production and reception.

Mélanie Curé's doctoral work (*Pas juste une question de langue*, 2012) expands this institutional perspective by examining how Franco-Manitoban and Acadian literatures articulate national belonging through everyday narratives of exiguity. Drawing on François

Paré's theory of small literatures and Anne-Marie Thiesse's studies of nation-building, Curé demonstrates that minority texts do not simply mirror marginality; they transform it into a space of cultural creativity. Her analysis foregrounds how schools, writers' collectives, and community festivals act as crucibles where literature and identity co-produce one another. By highlighting the micro politics of belonging, including family archives, bilingual dialogues and intimate geographies, Curé helps shift critical attention from heroic frontier myths toward the lived complexities of minority experience, offering a bridge between historical framings and the more transnational approaches now emerging in recent scholarship.

This interplay between critical and institutional frameworks is illuminated by Estelle Cambe's work on the literary afterlives of Louis Riel. Her doctoral research traces how Riel's figure, once marginal in Canadian national narratives, became central in Western francophone literature and pedagogy. By examining both literary texts and commemorative practices, Cambe reveals how the memory of Riel functions as a symbolic fulcrum around which issues of land, language, and belonging coalesce. The resonance of Riel's exile, trial, and execution continues to animate contemporary writing, from Gabrielle Roy's historical allusions to more experimental appropriations in Métis and hybrid poetics, demonstrating how memory and criticism evolve in tandem.

Recent scholarship marks a decisive turn from earlier frameworks focused on affirming existence and securing recognition toward more transnational and intersectional perspectives. Critics such as Kathleen Kellett (2016), Joëlle Papillon (2016), Carolina Ferrer (2019), and Marc Gontard (2006) situate prairie and northern writing within broader francophone and postcolonial networks, reflecting demographic shifts brought by writers from Haiti, the Maghreb, and sub-Saharan Africa. These new voices complicate older binaries of pioneer and exile, French and English, and invite readings attentive to circulation and multiplicity.

Robert Yergeau's study *À tout prix* illuminates how literary prizes function as catalysts rather than mere rewards, facilitating circulation and classroom adoption of otherwise marginal works. Though focused on Quebec, his insights apply to the West, where recognition plays a similar role. Alain Viala's concept of "instances of legitimation" (2017) complements this view, showing that literary value emerges through negotiations among authors, mediators, and audiences. His sociopoetic method, outlined in *Approches de la réception* (1993) with Georges Molinié, highlights the institutional circuits such as schools, journals and prizes that mediate reception and confer prestige. In the francophone West, journals like *Les Cahiers franco-canadiens de l'Ouest* and presses such as Les Éditions du Blé not only preserve texts but actively construct the field by framing works for recognition through anthologies, dossiers, and commemorations.

Taken together, these dynamics reveal a literature sustained by interplay between memory and reinvention, rootedness and migration, regional specificity and global dialogue, a field where the pact between language and nation is constantly renegotiated through both texts and the institutions that circulate them.

## 6. CONCLUSION: RESTLESS INVENTIONS

Studying francophone writing in Western and Northern Canada means stepping into a landscape that never stands still. These texts do not close upon themselves; they keep shifting with the winds of migration, memory, and contested belonging. Any conclusion, then, is less an ending than an invitation to dwell in this restlessness to read the fractures, the silences, and the unexpected convergences that make this literature alive.

Paré's notion of *distance habitée* has proven invaluable for understanding the paradoxical condition of minority literatures: rootedness and estrangement coexisting in a

single gesture. In the prairie context, French is simultaneously home and frontier, an intimate medium of memory yet always on the verge of vanishing amid anglophone hegemony. This duality structures the writing of Léveillé, Savoie, Gaboury-Diallo, and Bolivar, where poetic voice emerges less as proclamation than as tremor, carried by archival fragments, domestic whispers, or diasporic rhythms. Gauvin's concept of *intranquillité* complements and radicalizes this view. Where Paré emphasizes spatial tension, Gauvin foregrounds linguistic unease: a heightened awareness of French as fragile, contested, porous. In works from Leblanc's polyphonic street poems to Chaput's intimate fictions, this restlessness becomes an aesthetic engine, form fractured into shards, idioms colliding, silences heavy with unspoken histories.

Read together, these paradigms suggest that the vitality of the francophone West lies not in overcoming marginality but in inhabiting it creatively. Minority writing thrives precisely because it cannot pretend to wholeness. Its fragments, dissonances, and code-switching are not deficits to be corrected but signatures of a lived condition. This insight challenges earlier nationalist readings that sought to stabilize identity through heroic pioneer myths or coherent genealogies. Instead, it opens space for a literature understood as process, an ever-unfinished negotiation between memory and reinvention.

In my own analysis, the notion of "invention" proves central: the moments when a field acquires a name, is anthologized, or gains institutional visibility. While other critics have emphasized themes such as exile, intimacy or linguistic unease, this lens foregrounds the symbolic milestones through which a minority literature asserts its presence. In the francophone West, such milestones are often cited, the founding of Les Éditions du Blé in 1974, the publication of the *Anthologie de la poésie franco-manitobaine* (1990) and, more recently, *Poésie franco-ouestienne 1974-2024*. Yet the imaginative groundwork had already been laid decades earlier by Gabrielle Roy. Her novels *La Petite Poule d'Eau* (1945) and *Rue Deschambault* (1955) captured francophone prairie life with a depth and complexity that later poets and critics would inherit, challenge, and expand. Seen from today, Roy's oeuvre acts less as a closed origin than as a touchstone continually re-interpreted, a quiet milestone in a story still unfolding. Both Paré and Combe remind us, however, that such markers can be double-edged: they risk freezing into myth what is in fact an ongoing negotiation. Combe's notion of the pacte between language and nation underscores this dynamic: a bond that must be constantly re-forged in response to migrations, political ruptures, and new cultural dialogues.

In the prairie and northern contexts, invention is less a singular founding act than a continuous practice of survival. Each generation of writers, from Roy's exilic childhood scenes to O'Reilly's northern lyricism, must rearticulate what it means to write in French on contested land. This iterative invention is visible not only in texts but also in the infrastructures that sustain them: journals like the *Cahiers franco-canadiens de l'Ouest*, school curricula, community theatre, and public readings. These spaces do not simply reflect literary change; they actively produce it, enabling conversations across generations and between local and global francophonies.

The most urgent shift in recent years has been toward decolonial perspectives that foreground Métis and Indigenous voices and interrogate the colonial legacies embedded in both francophone and anglophone canons. The recovery of Louis Riel's writings, the prominence of Métis poetics in collections like *La Métisse filante* or *Boussole franche*, and the resonance of Indigenous authors such as Katherena Vermette and David Bouchard invite a rethinking of what "francophone West" signifies. No longer a homogenous settler narrative, it becomes a

site of entangled sovereignties, where memory of dispossession coexists with ongoing acts of care for land and language.

This decolonial turn coincides with a broader transnational reorientation. Francophone writing in the West is no longer solely shaped by local settlers or Métis genealogies but increasingly by voices arriving from Haiti, Senegal, Algeria, France, and beyond, whose migrations refract prairie and northern landscapes through unexpected cultural prisms. Nancy Huston, who grew up in Calgary and later wrote from Paris, embodies this circulation: her novels explore the psychic distances of exile, the negotiation between intimate memory and global belonging. Similarly, Ying Chen's francophone work, though rooted in Chinese migration to Canada, resonates with Western minority literatures through its preoccupation with displacement and the unstable ties between language and self. Such authors remind us that prairie francophone literature does not exist in isolation but participates in wider networks of francophone and migratory poetics, where belonging is constantly reimagined across multiple geographies and histories. Scholars like Mélanie Curé have shown how these diasporic crossings complicate simplistic binaries of center and periphery, demanding frameworks attentive to circulation, hybridity, and intercultural encounter.

Such approaches resonate with developments in comparative literature and world literature studies, where attention has shifted toward "minor transnationalisms", connections forged laterally between minority cultures rather than solely through metropolitan centers. The francophone West, in this sense, is not merely marginal but nodal: a meeting point of multiple peripheries where Cree, Michif, French, and English intersect with languages carried by global migrations such as Arabic, Mandarin, Spanish or Lingala, generating unexpected affinities.

Acknowledging the restlessness of this field carries methodological consequences. It requires critics to read across genres (poetry, theatre, memoir, performance) and across media, from printed anthologies to digital spoken word. It calls for archival work attentive to ephemeral forms: community newsletters, oral histories, school anthologies. It also invites ethical reflexivity, especially for scholars who, like many authors in this corpus, straddle creative and critical roles. As Ladouceur's studies on bilingual dramaturgy remind us, transparency about such hybridity strengthens rather than weakens scholarly engagement.

Institutionally, the challenge is to sustain spaces where this plurality can flourish. Les Éditions du Blé remains central, yet its mission increasingly intersects with digital initiatives, grassroots festivals, and academic programs at the University of Saint-Boniface, the University of Regina, and beyond. The *Cahiers* continue to document and theorize these evolutions, but future scholarship might further embrace comparative and collaborative models, linking prairie francophone studies to Indigenous studies, Black Canadian studies, and global francophonie.

What emerges from this study is not a tidy narrative but a constellation. Francophone writing in Western and Northern Canada is marked by simultaneity: intimacy and estrangement, survival and invention, rootedness and movement. The concepts of *distance habitée* and *intranquillité* capture this condition but also gesture toward its unfinished nature. These literatures remain in motion, continually negotiating their place in a post-conquest, multilingual Canada. In this sense, the "invention" of Western and Northern francophone literatures is inseparable from decolonial gestures. Caron's (2023) reading of Gill and Episkenew's (2009) work on narrative healing remind us that intimacy and resurgence are not opposites but intertwined forces: they transform minor literatures from spaces of survival into spaces of renewal.

Far from being peripheral, they offer insights of global relevance. In an era of mass migration, climate anxiety, and renewed debates over language and belonging, the prairie francophone experience speaks to broader human questions: how to inhabit a land scarred by

history, how to love a language that is never entirely one's own, how to imagine community without erasing difference. The answer, if there is one, lies not in resolving tension but in dwelling within it, in cultivating a poetics of restless belonging.

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