
**THINKING FROM WINNIPEG'S EXIGUITY: A SITUATED ECOLOGY OF
RECOGNITION IN FRANCO-MANITOBAN LITERATURE (A PIERRE MICHON
RECEPTION CASE)**

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<https://doi.org/10.59009/ijlllc.2026.0182>

Received Date: 07 December 2025 / Published Date: 17 January 2026

ABSTRACT

How can a small literary milieu set its own pace and value without folding into defensive identity? Starting from Winnipeg, this essay develops exiguity as a method rather than a deficit: a way of reading how texts, presses, classrooms and media fabricate legibility at the right scale, using the Pierre Michon reception case to make visible the mediations of recognition. Drawing on Foucault's 'specific intellectual', it describes page-level ecologies where form follows the means of production and where recognition is earned through intensive readerships and local critical archives. The point is modest and exportable: to replace the mirage of central consecration with patient proof-making. The case is Franco-Manitoban; the stakes concern minoritised literatures everywhere.

Keywords: Francophone Canada; minor literatures; recognition; sociology of literature; translation flows; world literature.

Caesar was right to prefer the first place in a village to the second in Rome. Not by ambition, nor by vain glory, but because a man in second place has only the choice between the dangers of obedience and those of revolt, or those still more serious dangers of compromise.

Marguerite Yourcenar, *Memoirs of Hadrian*, trans. Grace Frick (1954), p. 63.

1. INTRODUCTION

I live with a simple worry: what is the point of intellectual work when one writes in a minority milieu, without the consecration "relays" that serve as the bloodstream of the world republic of letters? The experience is concrete: publishing without Gallimard, Grasset, or Seuil; not receiving major literary prizes; being only rarely reviewed by influential media; having no paperbacks; not entering syllabi; living and writing from Winnipeg; not joining the university as a place for long-term thinking. I write, few read me, and yet I continue, not out of sacrifice, but because a text must invent its own supports when the apparatus of recognition does not recognise you.

This worry is not personal; it names a condition. In the wake of François Paré's work on exiguity, Mourad Ali-Khodja speaks of "societal exiguity": the minority public sphere is narrow, its institutions are fragile, and its hierarchies of visibility are misaligned; analytic categories should be recalibrated rather than imported from the "great nations" (Ali-Khodja 2013: 48; Paré 1992; Paré 2003). In the same piece, Ali-Khodja diagnoses the rise of a dominant figure, the "scholar-expert," who, installed in a university under entrepreneurial constraint, tends to substitute deliverables for critical thought (2013: 49).

The problem is thus double: on one side, an economy of recognition structured by centres defining thresholds of visibility; on the other, local institutional frames that, under a mandate of efficiency, leave little space for forms of writing and thought that are not immediately “useful.” The result is not only reduced diffusion; it is a shaping of the intelligible that predetermines what we expect from a “legitimate intellectual.”

Michel Foucault helps here:

For a long time the 'left' intellectual spoke and was acknowledged to have the right of speaking in the capacity of master of truth and justice. [...] For some time now, the intellectual has no longer been called upon to play this role. A new mode of 'connection between theory and practice' has been established. Intellectuals have become accustomed to working not in the character of the 'universal', the 'exemplary', the 'just-and-true for all', but in specific sectors, at precise points where they are situated either by their professional conditions of work or their conditions of life (housing, the hospital, the asylum, the laboratory, the university, familial and sexual relations). Through this they have undoubtedly gained a much more concrete awareness of struggles (Foucault 1977: 11).

The ‘universal intellectual’ has ceded to the ‘specific intellectual’. Thinking from Manitoba’s francophone community is not an apology for distance; it is a way to claim a specificity that invents its norms of value and protocols of address, as close as possible to the dispositifs where one acts. In Foucault, this shift goes with a refusal of prophetic stances: the intellectual does not speak ‘for’ others; their knowledge is partial in relation to theirs; the task is to help other knowledges circulate, to contest the power-effects of institutions while acknowledging being both object and instrument of those institutions, even to the point, at times, of preferring anonymity. Concretely, it obliges us to speak near things and to ground claims in materials: publishers’ catalogues and editorial policies, prize lists and press coverage, the ecology of bookshops and local stages, school and university usage, teaching dossiers and reading guides, diffusion metrics and other paratextual traces, alongside a close reading of Michon¹. It is also an ethics of proof: to substitute situated demonstration for the grand style of the universal, to show how a text works its language, its inheritances and readers, rather than to invoke tokens of consecration. In short, Foucault invites a move from a politics of emblems to a politics of operations: fewer proclamations, more analyses; less aura, more attestations; less invocation of the centre, more patient assembly of mediations that make a work legible and durable.

What remains is the ideology of the end. Henri Raczymow wryly notes the recurrent tale of the “death of literature” and of the “great writer,” a discourse of lament that haunts late modernity, with Roland Barthes to the fore. The catastrophe is announced at regular intervals, as though the end of literature were the stage on which it survives (Raczymow 1994). The tenacity of this rhetoric signals how much the regime of recognition in the centres, ribbed by a few houses, prizes, and sanctuaries, still sets the implicit metric. Olivier Bessard-Banquy, reflecting on the “recognition of Pierre Michon,” takes the term recognition literally and anatomizes its editorial, critical, and media dispositifs; he reminds us that “encountering a writer” presupposes unfolding the symbolic apparatus that manufactures the recognised writer (Bessard-Banquy 2013).

Recognition in small francophone fields is secured not by proximity to metropolitan centres but by operations that can be constructed and repeated: demonstrations of value, relays across institutions and media, and intensive readerships. Using the ‘Michon case’ as a lever, I model how these operations are assembled and how they unsettle centre–periphery logics. Methodologically, this turns exiguity from a deficit into a way of working that scales to other

¹ Several critics and journalists have cast Pierre Michon as “the ultimate figure of the *grand écrivain*”; see Bessard-Banquy (2013). I invoke “Michon” here strictly as a reception case that makes visible the mediations of recognition (publishing house, press, pocket series, peers, university), not as a close reading of *Vies minuscules*.

minoritised contexts. The article moves from diagnosing marginality to modelling a practical ecology of recognition that small fields can enact; *in one line: a replicable, operation-first model of recognition that turns exiguity from a condition into a method.*

Two founding presses made the field legible. Without Éditions du Blé (1974) and Éditions des Plaines (1979), J. R. Léveillé notes, “we would not be speaking of Franco-Manitoban literature”; their creation yielded roughly four hundred titles and functions as a “Big Bang from which everything radiates” (2005, 16). From that gesture follows a workshop logic: making, distribution and sociability organise the very conditions of writing as much as the texts themselves. In what follows I therefore stay close to operations (catalogues, periodicals, stages and classrooms) rather than emblems, reading a page-level ecology in which form and address emerge from the milieu’s material economy.

2. EXIGUITY: GENESIS OF THE CONCEPT

We should recall that the word ‘exiguity’ enters the critical lexicon through François Paré’s *Les littératures de l’exiguité* [*Exiguity: Reflections on the Margins of Literature*] (1992), which invites us to read small literatures from their minoritised position and the apparatuses that shape their visibility. I treat exiguity not as a label but as a method: small, repeatable operations that sustain texts over time in sparse environments. By ‘exiguity’ I do not mean a lack to be remedied but a concrete milieu in which the political, the ethical and the epistemological interlock. It is a shift in gaze that moves us beyond the nomenclature of ‘minorities’ and asks what that term does to knowledge and practice when one writes from a small-scale space. From there, the claim sharpens: the ‘minority fact’ is not an exception but a central datum of contemporary analysis because it reconfigures these dimensions together.

In that wake, exiguity appears to me less a category than a method. It invites us to follow closely the social relations of knowledge: the way “Great Traditions” attract and hierarchize; how local scenes adjust (or not) their tools; how scientific and symbolic dependencies install themselves... and how one exits them. Practically, it discourages decontextualized readings (which too quickly classify by deficit or quaintness) and, above all, rejects the illusion of a sovereign knowledge hovering above disciplines (Ali-Khodja & Boudreau 2009: 79). Exiguity is not a backdrop but an operator: it helps us read how a text, a journal, a press, a course or a seminar hold within a restricted space and fabricate a readable commons at small scale; it lets us objectify both long-standing dependencies and fragile local inventions. Most of all, it forces us to tune our instruments to the actual size of our milieus, not to resign ourselves to them, but to test their power. As the epigraph reminds us, better the first place in a village than the second in Rome.

In his “Reflections” of 2013, Ali-Khodja names what is still missing: a history of intellectuals in minority milieus that reconstructs conditions of emergence, maps commitments and influences, and thereby enables a lucid appropriation of learned memory, to the point of recovering an existence on its own terms (2013: 53). For me, that translates simply: I no longer compare Winnipeg to Paris by scale; I compare Winnipeg to Winnipeg by operations. Who does what, where, with which relays? What archive is being built? What kind of intensive readership is being invented? At that granularity, exiguity ceases to be a complaint and becomes a heuristic.

3. THE “SPECIFIC INTELLECTUAL” (FOUCAULT): METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

To this frame I attach Foucault’s figure of the ‘specific intellectual’. The shift is well known: the intellectual is no longer a master of justice speaking from the universal, but someone who works from precise points: the laboratory, the hospital, the university, the family

and language, and in so doing gains an immediate consciousness of struggles. This is not a mere moral update; it refashions the link between theory and practice, writing and public speech. The intellectual need not speak for others; their knowledge is partial in relation to theirs; the task is to help circulation; to struggle against the power-effects of institutions while knowing oneself to be their object and instrument.

I keep two traits above all. First, a radical modesty of enunciation: for Foucault, notoriety is not an argument; he can even prefer anonymity, consistent with a practice that refuses to sacralize the signature and the author-person (Foucault 1977: 11). Second, precision of terrains: speak near the things, from within the dispositifs where one works, with the proofs they require. In my case, this brings us back, concretely, to the catalogues of small presses, decisions of reading committees, available radio formats, archives of local periodicals, bibliographies taught in schools. Here the heroics of the “great author” matter less than the patient transshipment of knowledges.

This figure has methodological consequences for an article like this one. It obliges me to situate every claim within a layered set of indices: paratexts, editorial policies, colloquium invitations, grant pathways, local media dispositifs. It obliges me to prefer the clarity of operations (what a text does to language, to memory, to dialogue with its peers) to abstract weighing of “tokens of consecration.” And it obliges me to ask nothing of the Universal it is not ready to pay: that is, to let practice correct theory in proportion to the scenes where it intervenes.

Some will say this posture “reduces” ambition. I think the opposite: in minority milieus, it equips the gaze and protects it both against melancholy (complaints against the centres) and against prophecy (the illusion of speaking for all). It makes audible a voice at the right distance: one that knows itself situated yet does not renounce shifting what passes for self-evidence.

4. THE SCHOLAR-EXPERT AND THE CONSTRAINED UNIVERSITY

Now the institutional angle, which is decisive. Ali-Khodja (2013) describes a trend we know well: the university becomes a “provider of services and sociotechnologies,” absorbed by an entrepreneurial mentality where performance, measurement, and “impact” impose themselves (2013: 49). From this environment there emerges, tendentially, the figure of the “scholar-expert,” entrenched in techno-professional hyperspecialization, proximate to powers, drawn towards media echo chambers; in the name of a primary pragmatism, this ends up slighting critical concern as well as any exercise of thought. Let us be prudent: this is an ideal type, not an indictment. The problem, to my eye, lies in overflow, for when the ethos of expertise presents itself as a general model for relating to knowledge it crushes other temporalities and other gestures: the essay, critique, slow inquiry and writings that do not ‘serve’ at the outset. It produces scarcity in formats vital to us: long-form journals, essay series, research notebooks, open archives. It compresses intellectual conversation into quick explanations at the expense of strategic moments when a text takes time to shift categories. This pressure is felt more sharply in small milieus. Because the public space is exiguous, media resources limited, and every institution must justify means, the demand for immediate visibility bears on the very form of discourse. We see it even in assessments: what is attributed in recognition (budgets, invitations, relays) often depends more on the capacity to “deliver” than to “think.” Paradoxically, the university that should shelter long durations sometimes struggles to host forms of writing that do not promise upfront benefits outset.

What does this change for essay and critique? First, temporality: a worthy essay does not merely “popularize” technical knowledges; it stages a conflict of categories, another relation to the true, a reading experience that cannot be pre-calibrated. Then, address: the minority essay

speaks to restricted but intensive publics that demand time and fidelity; it needs places (journals, series) that support that slowness. Finally, the archive: recognition here will pass through building a fund (critical dossiers, bibliographies, annotated corpora), not through a string of quick appearances.

I return to the specific intellectual: his strength is to hold in this configuration. Between two bread-and-butter posts that have nothing to do with academic work, he does not oppose expertise; he re-places it. He does not repudiate the university; he asks the impossible of it: to preserve forms that do not fit prescribed productivity. He does not despise the media; he cultivates formats where one can think aloud without having to conclude in three minutes. And he remembers that literary recognition is never pure notoriety: as the Michon case shows, it depends on a patient apparatus of peers, booksellers, editors, and mediators, a network that works the *œuvre* and carries it (Bessard-Banquy 2013).

I read our scenes in the Canadian West and North from this triangulation: exiguity as heuristic, the specific intellectual as posture, and a critique of the scholar-expert as diagnosis. The aim is not to hunt for ‘local exceptions’ but to show how, at small scale, texts, presses and readers invent utterances that hold, endure and shift.

5. AN ECONOMY OF RECOGNITION

I write from a place where you can still hear boots in the snow and the wind across the plain. That can keep the world at arm’s length. But it is not distance that gnaws at me; it is the economy of recognition, its logic of fetishes (houses, prizes, press) and its blind spots. I want to unfold it without caricature, following a few lines of force: from the ‘last great writer’ (Michon), as a now-ritual rhetoric has it, to the melancholy of the centres (Raczymow), and then towards situated reading policies. I speak from experience and from documents. Set against Casanova’s geography of consecration, my wager is operation-first rather than place-first. If ‘capitals’ concentrate credit and institute world literary time, small fields still build recognition by repeatable sequences: proofs, relays, intensive readerships. The point is not to deny capitals but to convert them into technical platforms one plays when needed, while organising durability at home (Casanova 1999).

6. PATIENTLY UNMAKING THE FETISHES

Michon’s trajectory is often told as an unlikely rise from an unknown from La Creuse to a “great writer,” boosted by the release of *Les Onze [The Eleven]* and tens of thousands of copies, with the idea that quality has again become a sales argument. The landmark study underscores the media framing that casts him as “one of the last” of a lineage, and shows how that idea seeps into the mainstream press, from *Le Monde des livres* to the weeklies, to explain the public reach (Bessard-Banquy 2013).

Once we watch the economy of that recognition, the fetishes unfasten. House: Gallimard furnishes the symbolic capital that gets overworked gatekeepers to open *Vies minuscules [Small Lives]*. Press: a front-page slot triggers a chain of attention. Prize: France Culture reaches heavy readers and installs duration. Allied editor: Verdier commits to the long term; as if in agreement with Caesar via Yourcenar, Michon prefers the village to Rome. Read together, the stations form a sequence in which each relay leverages the next (ibid.).

The role of peers is decisive. Reputation is measured by the calibre of professors and leading literary figures whose writings have promoted Michon (Jean-Pierre Richard, Pierre Bergounioux, Michel Deguy, among others) rather than by raw numbers. The paperback follows through ‘pressure from below’ (teachers and universities), and academic study stabilises the backlist by ‘giving grist to the mill’ (ibid.).

On the media side, nothing angelic: the press was “dithyrambic,” but carried by a few signatures with residual credibility. Michon says he played the media, which “sell characters,” and judges it suicidal to snub them, if only because the university itself is often alerted by the press (*ibid.*).

Two principles for small fields follow. First, seek fervour rather than mass: better to have ten ardent readers than a hundred lukewarm ones. As I note elsewhere, in a small market a Winnipeg bookseller may call three copies a ‘bestseller’ (Poliquin 2019: 300). Second, desacralize the international: translations depend on operations (fairs, agents, press officers) more than on a transcendent verdict. None of this subtracts from the work’s inner demand; it frames it. With Blanchot (1955), we recall that renown illuminates without grounding. Practical rule: treat recognition as a necessary mediation without confusing it with the measure of the work.

6.1. Text-level evidence: ‘Vie d’Antoine Peluchet’

In *Vies minuscules* [*Small Lives*], the ‘Vie d’Antoine Peluchet’ stages recognition at page level through a choreography of traces: a life that first appears as residue and only later as readable form. A single named object — the ‘Relique des Peluchet’ [the Peluchet Relic] — acts as a relay. The prose tightens around it: long sentences dilate to gather rumours and memories, then contract to pin down a verifiable sign (Michon 1984: 34). What looks lyrical is procedural: the page rehearses a chain by which a life becomes legible: object, trace, attestation, narration; each step is small, repeatable and accountable.

The object’s itinerary links private memory to an institutional frame (school, parish, office) and then to print. This is recognition as sequence, not aura; it consists of operations that small fields can build: a proof that something happened, a relay that carries it across settings, and an intensity of reading that consolidates it (see the section ‘For situated recognition’ below). Cadence here is not ornament but structure; it organises attention so the reader can follow how the sign moves from hand to hand. Read this way, ‘Antoine Peluchet’ clarifies the model proposed here. Exiguity is not a lament but a working method: compose proofs, arrange relays and cultivate intensive readerships. With this page-level ecology in view, I turn to the broader rhetoric that frames reception: the melancholy of the centres.

7. RHETORICS OF THE END AND THE CENTRES’ MELANCHOLY

If Bessard-Banquy sketches the gears of a possible consecration, Raczymow provides the counter-song: an age that no longer sacralises. After the classical ‘birth’ of the writer and the romantic ‘anointing’, comes, he says, the democratic age that observes the death of the great writer and the end of literature as transcendence (Raczymow 1994). Put bluntly: the problem is not a shortage of major writers but a shortage of credible instances of legitimation: Racine’s King, Voltaire’s Nation, Hugo’s People and Sartre’s public opinion. What endures is the passive public and a carousel of notorieties (Raczymow 1994: 27).

Here we feel the centres’ weight: when the Café du Commerce gave way to France Culture and a Todorov can say on air that Romain Gary’s *Promise at Dawn* surpasses Sartre’s *The Words*, “something flips,” not the scale of value, but the evidence of that value (Raczymow 1994). Elsewhere he points to another collapse: once, a warm review by Gide, Mauriac, Camus, or Sartre made a career; today neither the generosity of the greats nor even their existence yields consecration: “there are no more ‘great’ writers” (1994: 23).

Nostalgia? Perhaps. For someone writing in Winnipeg, the argument is useful: it desacralizes fetishes without denying their effect, and names the lack of instances instead of replaying exile’s complaint. The centres are no longer capitals in the same sense; they are technical platforms (houses, prizes, press) to be played, if one has a network, patience, and

above all, a text. Read with Casanova, the “melancholy of the centres” marks a shift from capitals as founts of value to capitals as hubs whose credit must be translated into local sequences of action (Casanova 1999).

By another path, we return to the Foucauldian demand: beware notoriety as authority. Against the “great man” speaking for a “divinized humanity,” Foucault values specific knowledges, even prefers anonymity to celebrity; the signature as sacralizing mark disappears. Not a politics of retreat, but of rightness, a guardrail in my situation: no dream of a central anointing, but working at conditions where specific thought can be transmitted and can act.

8. FOR SITUATED RECOGNITION: INTENSITIES, PEERS, ARCHIVES

I frame these levers within a field logic in which recognition converts specific capital through regulated games: catalogues and the press make works legible, teaching dossiers consolidate readerships, and prizes convert visibility into transmissible credit. The ‘field’ matters because it sets the constraints and pay-offs of each operation (Bourdieu 1992; 1993). For situated recognition, I emphasise three small-scale levers, each repeatable and measurable:

(1) **Intensive readerships.** Not mass but density: classroom cycles, workshop formats and reading groups that concentrate attention on a short file (extracts, notes, paratexts) and leave traces (reviews, teaching guides). Such intensities convert occasional readers into carriers who extend a book’s duration (Rivard 2012).

(2) **Peer relays.** Editors, reviewers, booksellers and curators as go-betweens. The point is not to mimic metropolitan circuits but to stage sequences where each relay leverages the next (Bessard-Banquy 2013). Small fields can orchestrate these chains deliberately. Relays localise what Casanova assigns to capitals: they assemble credit without supposing a single metropolitan source (Casanova 1999).

(3) **Local archives.** Self-documentation that mixes interviews, prefaces, catalogues and teaching files. In a small milieu the archive is not a deposit; it accelerates circulation by giving proofs and context (Ali-Khodja 2013).

In passing, let us desacralize prizes. In field terms, prizes convert visibility into transmissible credit; they are triggers and indicators within the game, not final sanctions (Bourdieu 1992; 1993). In minority milieus, they should be treated as indicators and triggers among heavy readers, not as final sanctions; that was already the discreet but real function of France Culture’s prize for *Vies minuscules* (Bessard-Banquy 2013). As for the press, let us accept that it “sells characters” and treat it as a tool to be turned by guile, not for disguise, but to create demanding conditions of reading. Locally, our books pages too often reduce to celebratory reviews of new titles. Criticism, in the strong sense, rarely does its work. It needs to be reinstated: in-depth dossiers and argued analyses; adversarial readings rather than panegyrics; occasional outside readers for independent assessments; clear training and mandates for critical reviewers in community media; calendars for following backlist works beyond the week of release. Only then will recognition cease to be a spasm of topicality and become a durable labor of reading.

Lastly, let us not fetishize abroad: working far should not replace working here. As noted, translations are an economy (fairs, agents, press officers); they are an effect more than a proof. Conversely, a regional policy of publishing (small strong houses), patient journals, residencies, and readings can do for others what Verdier did for Michon: organise duration, win booksellers, spark critical companionships.

I return to my own situation: writing on the margin is not to die in the margin if one turns exiguity into a discipline of address. By *discipline of address* I mean the craft of calibrating voice, paratexts and circuits of transmission to the real scale of a milieu, from catalogues and

teaching dossiers to bookshop circuits and local periodicals. The local ecosystem already knows how to do this: Éditions du Blé and its mission to ‘broaden horizons’ (Léveillé 2014) show how our places build transmission lines that reach beyond the province, through the book, the stage, the archive. The task is simple: intensify readerships, organise peer recognition, equip memory with archives. The rest (prestige houses, prizes, national press) may come or not; they are adjuvants, not guarantees.

Here Blanchot stays my hand: fame adds nothing to the being of the work (1955). Yet being without readers has no tongue. Between these truths lies our craft: to fashion situations of reading in which intensity circulates, alliances in which style is recognised, and archives in which memory gains tools. On those terms the margin ceases to be refusal and becomes a form that no longer waits on the centres. With that compass, I turn from principle to practice: Winnipeg, and the West and North.

9. CASE STUDIES: WEST AND NORTH

Winnipeg has never been a ‘centre’ in the cartography inherited from Paris and then Montreal; precisely that decentring makes it a workshop: a place of work, tool-making, fabrication and trial and error rather than a podium. Seen in light of Brisson’s account of decentring, the West and the North operate less as peripheries than as workshops: they organise durability through operations rather than await metropolitan verdicts (Brisson 2018). In a system where Montreal still polarises the most developed local field of francophone Canada (Doyon-Gosselin 2010), the West and the North organise themselves otherwise: through clusters of practice, community presses, venues of encounter and periodicals whose schedules may be capricious but whose energy does not flag. This material and symbolic economy, this ‘workshop poetics’, shapes the texts themselves: their form, rhythm and modes of address.

9.1 Winnipeg as Workshop

From the founding gesture of the two local presses follows a workshop logic: making, print and network organise the conditions of literature as much as singular works. Rather than repeating the origin story, I emphasise its concreteness. The meetings that led to Éditions du Blé gathered Dorge, Painchaud, Saint-Pierre, Savoie, then Aubry, Balcaen, Bohémier, Mulaire, among others; Éditions des Plaines began in 1979 with Saint-Pierre and Dampousse. The point, as Léveillé puts it, is that without Éditions du Blé (1974) and Éditions des Plaines (1979) “we would not be speaking of Franco-Manitoban literature” and that moment functions as a “Big Bang from which everything radiates” (2005: 16).

Around the presses, a material ecology takes shape: periodicals (*Le Courrier de Saint-Boniface*, *La Liberté*, *Frontières*) and venues (reading series, salons, bookshops). It evolves amid the frictions that modern form inevitably brings. Recall *La Liberté*’s refusal of a ‘too modern’ poem by Corbeil, more a shift in sensibility than a school quarrel. Small salons and personal libraries, far from anecdotal, structure initiation, critique and transmission; they are places of ‘reading in the course of writing’ where a community reads itself.

For the presses, programme is not a slogan. “Broaden literary horizons,” declares Éditions du Blé, a non-profit house devoted to francophone voices from Manitoba and the West, and more broadly to books “that have to do with the West” (Léveillé 2014). A motto like this fashions a readership by proposing other ways of seeing the world. In a workshop, the horizon is worked.

This weave connects to diffusion and recognition circuits across the country. Frontmatter in Canadian books often recalls the entire chain: federal and provincial subsidies, local printers, distributors, partner bookstores, so many elements confirming that the workshop is not closed

in on itself: it tinkers, but it plugs in. Distribution, for example, inscribes Saint-Boniface materially in Quebec's book market.

In this environment, textual form reflects the mode of production. Here, the writer often works with the institution in Alain Viala's full sense of "institutions of literary life" (houses, rights, networks, mediations), which are not mere frames but "prisms" refracting choices of enunciation, genre, and address (Viala 1985). The Winnipeg workshop does not prescribe a style; it modulates the repertoire of possibilities, from accessible fiction to poetic experiment.

Spurred by an economy of means, Franco-Manitoban literature assumes a procedural modernity. Léveillé argues that this literature "is born in modernity" and does not rest on "mimetic representation," but on a practice of writing that aims to inscribe the "named place in the world," from a regional experience that does not freeze into defensive identity. One then understands why so many books move between registers (poetry/essay), multiply prefaces, interviews, dossiers, and articulate works together with their own conditions of possibility. It is the workshop speaking.

This workshop poetics also has a deliberate popular dimension. When Jules Tessier underscores, about *Concerto rouge* (Éditions des Plaines), the importance of offering novels "addressed to a wide audience" so that "small literatures" are not deprived of readers, he describes a conservation and expansion strategy: occupy shelves, pass through hands (Tessier 2002: 220). In an exiguous milieu, the diversity of genres (from du Blé en poche to critical essay, from poetry to multilingual narratives) is not cosmetic; it is vital policy.

Finally, the workshop is tested on stage. In theatre, the Cercle Molière sets in motion a distinctly Franco-Manitoban dramaturgy (*Je m'en vais à Régina*, *Le Roitelet*, *L'Article 23*, *La Petite Poule d'Eau*), bringing together the local repertoire, history (Riel), and contemporary language crises. Again page and stage answer one another; the workshop fashions forms that are "half text, half milieu."

9.2 Close Readings: Poetry and Essay in Franco-Manitoba

From *Œuvres de la première mort* [*Works of the First Death*] to *Le soleil du lac qui se couche* [*The Setting Lake Sun*] and *Poème, pierre, prière* [*Poem, Stone, Prayer*], reading these markers through the prism of the workshop reveals a coherence that lies less in theme than in a will to inscribe. When Doyon-Gosselin notes that *The Setting Lake Sun* found relays in *Le Devoir*, *La Presse* and *L'Actualité*, he documents a passage from the local to a metropolitan instance of legitimation without denying the book's Manitoba origin. The book thus becomes a hinge: it passes through the centre without dissolving there, and reconnects publics. A rare phenomenon.

In *Parade* [*Parade*] (2005) et *Sondes* [*Probes*] (2014), Léveillé theorizes the making himself. These books opt for exploration rather than explanation (2014: 5) and aim to "present an eclectic panorama" (7) of Franco-Manitoban modernity, that is, to weld critique and creation into one practice, as in workshops where one comments while working. This fertile blurring of genres, where the author becomes archivist of his milieu and the critic, a companion, constitutes an epistemic practice of the margins: one makes work with the tools of commentary.

Poetry, here, has often served as a test bench for this policy of form. Corbeil, whom Léveillé names "father of Franco-Manitoban poets" for having affirmed poetry as a "personal voice," not a mere "support of a minority," illustrates how the workshop also fabricates its constitutive quarrels: a "too modern" poem refused by *La Liberté*, detours through informal salons, patient inventory of a library (2005: 26). "Modernity" did not pass by decree; it was won in the press margins and through sociability.

Retrospectively, *Parade* proposes a thesis: our literature is "rigorously modern" by its industry, the diversity of its production, and above all "by the practice and work of its principal

authors” (2005: 47). Modern here means: not seeking to “defend an identity return” nor to “conquer” a country, but to “enter, through [its] specific expression, into the writing of the world,” to trace a place from a “named” site rather than to assign a terroir (*ibid.*). This aesthetic position leans on the workshop’s materiality (small presses, periodicals, stages) and translates into texts whose address is not given but worked, where sentence, cut, and montage stand in for “institution” when grand tribunes are lacking.

This articulation can be read with Viala: all production passes through “prisms” (readers, critics, institutions, genre codes) and the Manitoban workshop has had to jury-rig these on site. Hence the attention to paratexts (prefaces, notes, interviews), to artisanal criticism, to “anthologies” that compose publics as much as they assemble texts. Hence too the consciousness of teaching and research as relays (Presses universitaires de Saint-Boniface, CEFCO colloquia) that circulate literature beyond activist circles. The workshop fabricates mediations.

Finally, intermediality is practiced instinctively here (visual art, theatre, music), as *Sondes* shows, hosting “brief liaisons” with emerging artists and asking about the “return of narrativity” in Franco-Manitoban arts (2014: 77). This inter-art circulation unsettles any stable idea of “genre” and confirms that local modernity is not a derivative but an invention of use.

9.3 North–South Dialogues

Beyond Winnipeg, the West/North workshop speaks with centres (Montreal, of course, and Paris), and those conversations are neither dependence nor independence. Doyon-Gosselin (2010) proposes thinking an “interdependence” that is non-paternalist, acknowledging asymmetry but working it through targeted circulations (teaching, journals, presses, distribution). That is a mature hypothesis: we stop opposing “centre” and “periphery” to see what each bank makes possible for the other. This interdependence already has proofs... and limits. In periodicals and readerships, Quebec journals have given “appreciable space” (51) to Acadian works, while for the West mediation remains more fragile and begs for “statistics” to be produced (57). Conversely, francophone universities outside Quebec have built their own “centres,” “chairs,” and presses, so that legitimation no longer passes exclusively by Montreal (54). Again, workshop: local institutions choose “the works of the corpus that interest us” (55).

François Paré’s diasporic condition clarifies this North–South play (2007): “Minoritized cultures,” “cut off from institutional permanence,” think and deploy themselves over a “relative and shifting territory”; “Americanness” here is a risky belonging, made of linguistic and cultural gradients without neat borders (2007: 7). In other words: the West/North workshop is not an isolated islet; it is a temporary node in an archipelago of passages: a montage post. This spatial plasticity, far from weakness, is a motor of forms.

Thus speaking North–South does not mean aligning Manitoba with readymade “Southern” (Latin American, Caribbean) or “Northern” (sub-Arctic) paradigms. Rather, it is to locate corridors of resonance: Americanness, itinerancy, bilingualism, hybridity. In Paré’s perspective, the “diasporic conception” of French-Canadian culture obliges us to think openness (including southward) as an aesthetic resource: to learn to “live at the edges of a space assigned by the overabundance of the Other” (2007: 10) not to mimic that *Other* but to test regimes of address, voice, montage. Winnipeg, on that map, works as a workshop of the in-between.

Discreetly we return to the “economy” of the prior section. When *The Setting Lake Sun* crosses Quebec’s media borders, it is not just a book traveling; it is a proposal for reading minority modernity circulating North–South, a “novel-essay” on exiguity’s possible address. That circulation, backed by distributors, journals, festivals and a small-press policy, confirms

Viala's thesis: the value of a work is instituted in contested mediations, and in an exiguous milieu those mediations must be invented as close to the works as possible.

Three practical ways to extend this situated dialogue: (A) intensive readerships: rather than chase diffuse audiences, multiply dense reading communities (clubs, public seminars, workshops) moored to libraries and university courses; modest but steady, these devices turn titles into reading habits and feed house criticism; they shift "recognition" from the big public to "attached publics." (B) peer networks: treat *Sondes* and *Parade* as models of practice: interviews, dossiers, satellite essays that document how works work and install horizontal circuits of speech among authors, editors, booksellers, teachers; a policy of proximity that does not fear the personal essay, the interview as critical genre, or the methodological self-portrait. (C) local critical archives: gently institutionalize collections, bibliographies, series (Blé en poche, anthologies), colloquium proceedings (CEFCO/PUSB). At the scale of an exiguous milieu, the archive is not a deposit; it is an accelerator.

If Winnipeg is a workshop, it is because literature is made there as a practice. It does not wait for top-down "recognition"; it composes its prisms, stages, and supports. With Viala, we can say it institutes itself by manufacturing its mediations. With Paré, we can say it advances through the "itinerancy" of a risky Americanness, hence inventive. With Doyon-Gosselin, finally, we can place this making within a vigilant interdependence with the centre, which no longer needs to deny the West/North to exist itself. The workshop is our political, aesthetic, and concrete answer to exiguity.

10. CONCLUSION

Arriving here, I do not offer a verdict but a provisional balance sheet, drawn from a precise place and from readings that have helped me see. I use the simple phrase 'autonomy of orientation' to name what matters: the capacity, at small scale, to set our steps by the conditions in which we live and work. This study reframes recognition as an ecology of operations and shows, through the Michon lever and the Winnipeg cases, how exiguity can be turned into a method with transferable effects. In Ali-Khodja's terms, 'appropriation of learned memory' names the discreet movement by which a community furnishes itself with supports without enclosing itself (2013: 53). That is the patience I aim for. It does not dispense with larger relays; it simply shifts the centre of gravity. Rather than waiting for consecration, we work to make legibility, duration and intensity possible. If recognition comes, it comes after. To widen the circle of readers beyond my milieu, I drafted this text in French and prepared an English version. This is not a claim to universality, only a way to bring these questions into conversation with other minoritised contexts.

I do not propose a model, still less recipes. Only a few gestures I try to apply here, which prolong what the text has brought to light. On the publishing side, the Michon study reminds us that a work installs itself through a patient conjunction of mediations: an allied house, booksellers who follow, meetings, critical companionship, sometimes a paperback. Even translations belong to an artisanship of fairs and press officers more than to any absolute verdict. At our scale, consolidating small strong houses, clarifying their horizon of openness, equipping diffusion towards classrooms and libraries seems sensible.

On the teaching side, Rivard reminds us that strong reading is born from a shock and a time granted to thought, not from endless lists (2012: 15). I imagine nearby public seminars, high-density book clubs, three or four books per year truly accompanied, with dossiers, read-aloud excerpts, meetings. The objective is not to cover but to harness readers, to circulate energy between classroom and public stage.

For media, Raczymow already described a landscape where old instances of legitimation erode and aura is replaced by a rotation of notoriety (1994). One can then favor formats that accumulate proofs: long interviews, writer's notebooks, series that return to a single work, check-ins six months later. I also note our local limits: the new-book review often stands in for criticism in a celebratory mode. We can gently reopen space for argued dissensus, invite occasional outside readers, follow backlist works beyond week one. These are proposals, not injunctions.

What remains is research, which engages the archive. Ali-Khodja insists on reconstructing conditions of emergence, dependencies, and de-alienations to enable a lucid appropriation of learned memory (2013). Even under constraint, the university remains a place where archival collections and competencies are woven. We can anchor digital repositories, annotated bibliographies, nearby scholarly editions in alliance with presses. Lèveillé's books, *Parade* and *Sondes*, show what an artisanal criticism can do when it documents its own scene by mixing interviews, prefaces, and talks.

All this presupposes a posture. Foucault spoke of the "specific" intellectual, working not in the universal but in bounded sectors, thus gaining "a much more concrete and immediate awareness of struggles" (1977: 11). That spirit matters to me: speak near operations, prefer proofs to proclamations, know when to step aside so the work can circulate. At the scale where we live, such gestures will seem modest. Perhaps that is their strength. Blanchot reminded us that renown illuminates without founding; the solitude of the work does not dissolve in topicality, yet it profits from meeting a sociability of proofs.

So Winnipeg. I do not make it a model. I see in it a place to try a few uses of exiguity. When a book from du Blé or des Plaines gathers not just a mention but multiple readings, a dossier, a classroom adoption; when a *Sondes* interview becomes a gateway to a work; when a neighbourhood bookseller programmes an evening that gets people truly reading, these are not trophies to brandish but continuities of care. Elsewhere, one has spoken of a "Michon case." Here, it is simply a matter of helping texts hold, without needless noise, with a measure suited to the places and the lives that are ours.

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