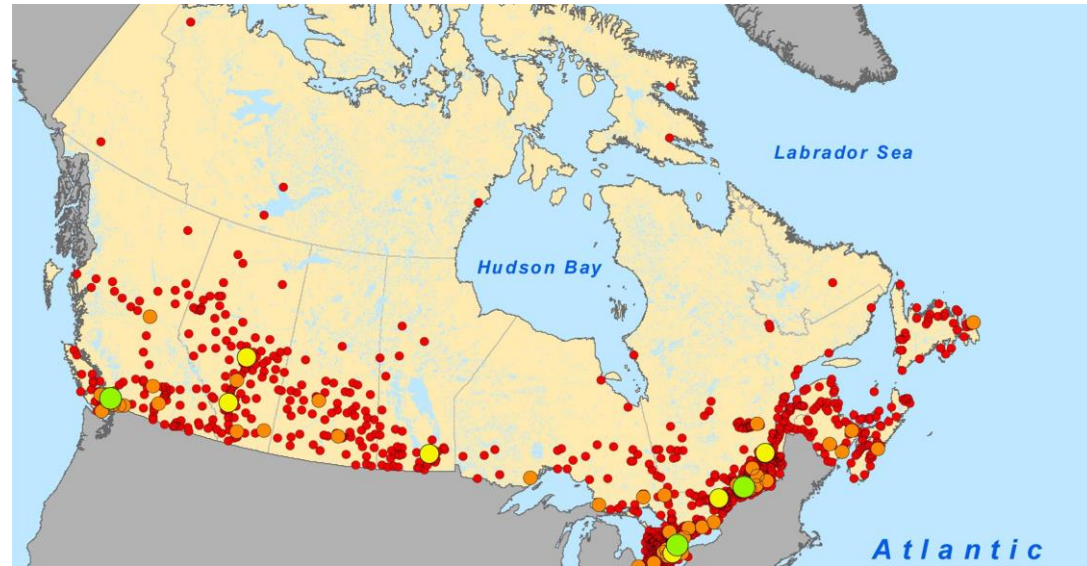




Literary Regionalism

- Canada's vast distances, natural barriers, diverse patterns of settlement since the 1600s, and locally specific histories have led many scholars to see **regionalism** as a defining feature of Canadian culture.



- Regionalism refers to the distinctive local character of a geographic area, or to a people's perception of and identification with such places.
- Why is there no great Canadian novel like *The Great Gatsby* or *Of Mice and Men* in US?



Literary Regionalism

- George Woodcock in the 1970s articulated a widely held view when he asserted that Canadian literary traditions have always been fundamentally regional, developing differently in different parts of the country.



- The nature of Canadian settlement and the spatial structure of the Canadian economy have ensured the persistence of a complex regional texture that is part of Canadian life.
- Different patches were settled at different times by people of different backgrounds who depended on different technologies and economies.

How do we define and configure *regionalism*?

In its strictest sense, *regionalism* is a defined location based on geography, politics, climate, and/or economics. Ethnic origin and class may also play a role in *regionalism*.

What is the regional environment in which Canadian literature is produced?

How do we define and configure *regionalism*?

Generally the phrase "Canadian regionalism" refers broadly to the vitality of regional differences within Canada, and can be both literary and otherwise.

Here are some ways of thinking about regionalism:

IMMIGRATION

GEOGRAPHY

ECONOMICS

POLITICS

CULTURE

RELIGION

IMMIGRATION AND GEOGRAPHY

- The process of Canadian settlement had imparted striking discontinuities. Canada did not expand westward from the Atlantic in a wave.
- Different patches were settled at different times by people of different backgrounds who depended on different technologies and economies.

ECONOMY

- The spatial structure of the Canadian economy also worked to strengthen Canadian regionalism.
- In the late 19th century an industrial technology with the capacity to integrate the bulky products of a large area within a single market was superimposed on the patches of Canadian settlement.
- Such spatial integration could create metropolitan centres where there were clear economies of distribution, and extensive resource and market hinterlands.

- Railways and factories would impose this economic structure on Canada; the only issues were at what scale and in what direction.
- The pattern of Canadian settlement and the tensions between core and periphery inherent in a national economy are sufficient to account for a strikingly regional Canada, but factors such as distance, the varied physical geography of a vast land and, in many parts of Canada, the considerable, growing presence of native peoples, also contributed.

Politics

- Another important issue to consider is the regional political attitudes which are held toward Canada's central government. Does the design of Canada's political institutions affect the causes, content, and intensity of regionalism?
- Some would argue that Canada's federal system constitutionally divides powers and responsibilities between a central (federal) and regional (provincial) governments.

Politics

- This leads some groups to identify with (or seek protection from) the federal government, because their interests are national in scope, while other groups tend to attach themselves to governments at the provincial level.
- The result is that economic conflict, for example, between banks and farmers or between the producers and consumers of oil, often has become federal-provincial conflict, with provincial governments acting as the spokesman and advocate of particular regional interests.

Cultural and Religious

- Regional culture can become a truly powerful force when there is a broadly held belief that regional injustice exists.
- The alienation in the West and the rise of Quebec nationalism are examples of such political impact in Canada.
- The Upper Canadian Anglican tradition was not like the Catholics of Quebec nor the more evangelical western provinces.

Cultural

- Of course, one of the problems with thinking about the role of regional cultures is how to pinpoint them.
- They are just as likely to exist as sub-cultures within a political region (such as northern Ontarians or Cape Bretoners), or alternatively their boundaries can extend well beyond the borders of provinces, like Acadians, or Westerners, or English Canada, or some Aboriginal Nations.

Literary Regionalism

- Canada's vast distances, natural barriers, diverse patterns of settlement, and locally specific histories have led many commentators to see regionalism as a defining feature of Canadian culture.
- George Woodcock articulated a widely held view when he asserted that Canadian literary traditions have always been fundamentally regional, developing differently in different parts of the country.

Literary Regionalism

- In the preface to *The Bush Garden* (1966), Northrop Frye stressed the importance of regions to the creative imagination, arguing that an imagination conditioned by prairie stretching to the horizon would develop differently from one shaped by the huge mountains and trees of British Columbia or by the sea around Newfoundland.
- "What affects the writer's imagination ... is an environment rather than a nation. Regionalism and literary maturity seem to grow together."

Literary Regionalism

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- According to such literary critics, the experience of living in a vast country of strikingly different landscapes has inevitably led Canadian writers to assert a primary imaginative allegiance to specific regions rather than to the whole country.

Literary Regionalism

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- We would call this thematic criticism
- The problem with it would be that it requires a rather romantic, idealistic, unifying view of Canadian literature.
- Furthermore, some argue that this influx of new, non-European immigrants have changed the nature of thematically-based cultural criticism.
- We also now examine texts using deconstructive or postmodern techniques.

E.K Brown on Regionalism

- The main achievement of Canadian literature before WWII was finding the vocabulary, and some sense of appropriate forms, to articulate authentically a new place. Given the power of the imperial language and its literary tradition, the accomplishment was great but in itself could only be "superficial." (*On Canadian Poetry*, 1943)

- Regional literature in the more precise sense is tied to the conventions of realism because it attempts to distinguish accurately the features of a clearly definable region, either rural or closely linked to the land.
- As the works of William Faulkner show, the literary history of regionalism is not synonymous with surface detail and pedestrian style but with profound exploration of the shaping influence of particular regions on individual lives.

Regionalism and Realism

- Regional literature is tied to the conventions of realism because it attempts to distinguish accurately the features of a clearly definable region, either rural or closely linked to the land.
- Realism (1870s-1900s) in most English-speaking traditions attempted to show life as it really was.

Regionalism and Realism

- SEE WEBSITE FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND DEFINITIONS.

Some notes on literary realism

- Renders reality closely and in comprehensive detail.
- Character is more important than action and plot; complex ethical choices are often the subject.
- Characters appear in their real complexity of temperament and motive; they are in explicable relation to nature, to each other, to their social class, to their own past.
- Class is important; the novel has traditionally served the interests and aspirations of an insurgent middle class.
- Events will usually be plausible. Realistic novels avoid the sensational, dramatic elements of naturalistic novels and romances.
- Diction is natural vernacular, not heightened or poetic; tone may be comic, satiric, or matter-of-fact.
- Objectivity in presentation becomes increasingly important: overt authorial comments or intrusions diminish as the century progresses.