

**(In)Validating Borders:
Historiographic and Arctic Counter-Discourses in Contemporary
Canadian Fiction**

Project Summary:

Canadian fiction today is the site for a negotiation of borders between literary theories representing widely diverging agendas. The project sets out to problematise to what extent postcolonialism and postmodernism function as counter-discourses in contemporary Canadian historical fiction, the former working in conjunction with, and the latter in critical opposition to, the nation. The project will achieve this by studying the literary trope of the journey into the Canadian North and metafictional strategies of historical revisioning. While a postcolonial discourse in contemporary Canadian fiction uses the Canadian North and Canadian history as sources of identity in order to draw up and validate borders, a postmodern discourse, on the contrary, eradicates and invalidates them. Canadian history and the Arctic thus function as both denominators and destabilisers of the national narrative. They represent strategies for writing the nation into existence, while they simultaneously constitute a deconstruction and subversion of this process, and so unwrite the nation. The postmodern critique of history, identity and the nation as human constructs is well-trodden territory, but there has been little direct application of the theory to the actual effect it has had on postcolonial literature in Canada, something the project aims to remedy. The Canadian North has likewise been the focal point of much literary theory, but is underrepresented within postmodern studies, although it in similar fashion to history can be challenged as a social construction.