A Primer for the gradual understanding of Steve McCaffery

Lewis, Kent Richard Arthur

URL: http://hdl.handle.net/1828/8109
Date: 2017-05-15

Abstract:
Steve McCaffery is one of Canada's most prolific and innovative poet-theorists. Although he has attracted attention from major American critics, study in Canada has been limited to avant-garde journals, and occasional book reviews in mainstream media. Despite his important output of poetry, theory, performances, audio tapes, videotapes, prints and broadsides, McCaffery has never been the focus of a major study in this country, or elsewhere. It is the goal of this dissertation to provide the first complete overview of McCaffery's thirty-year career. Through close readings of selected texts, this dissertation classifies McCaffery's output into various chronological stages. These include an early concrete phase, a mid-career Marxist phase, and a late postmodern phase. The dissertation also classifies McCaffery's writings into various thematic endeavours. In particular, McCaffery recurrently foregrounds the materiality of language, defies utility, conflates reading and writing, and emphasizes writing as translation. Much discussion of McCaffery's writing has been unsympathetic, dismissive, and misrepresentative, largely because reviewers seldom understand McCaffery's writing on its own terms. Consequently, this dissertation provides a detailed explanation of McCaffery's poetics alongside his poetry. Frequently McCaffery's theory differs significantly from the poetry it purports to explain; at times, his poetics contradicts his poetry. Consequently, this thesis examines the disparity between McCaffery's stated aesthetic and his poetry, in order to test the viability and limits of his project. Having described McCaffery's own intentions, this dissertation critiques McCaffery's writing from theoretical positions outside his own project. Using various feminist methodologies, it examines the complex way in which McCaffery genders language, noting three different, inconsistent trends in his poetry. Moreover, this thesis begins to articulate McCaffery's position within the Canadian canon. Although McCaffery himself is hostile to the notion of nationalism, he can be seen, ironically, as part of a long-standing Canadian tradition which interrogates its own identity.

Show full item record

Files in this item

Name: Lewis_KentRichard ... View/Open
Size: 6.585Mb
Format: PDF

This item appears in the following Collection(s)

- Theses (English)
- ETD (Electronic Theses and Dissertations)

This collection contains theses and dissertations submitted in partial fulfillment of graduate degree programs at the University of Victoria.