

Weronika Suchacka / Hartmut Lutz (eds.)

Land Deep in Time

Canadian Historiographic Ethnofiction





unipress

Passages – Transitions – Intersections

Volume 11

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Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie;
detailed bibliographic data are available online: <https://dnb.de>.

Publication co-financed by the University of Szczecin.

© 2023 by Brill | V&R unipress, Robert-Bosch-Breite 10, 37079 Göttingen, Germany,
an imprint of the Brill-Group
(Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands; Brill USA Inc., Boston MA, USA; Brill Asia Pte Ltd,
Singapore; Brill Deutschland GmbH, Paderborn, Germany; Brill Österreich GmbH, Vienna, Austria)
Koninklijke Brill NV incorporates the imprints Brill, Brill Nijhoff, Brill Schöningh, Brill Fink,
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Cover image: © Andre Furtado: Castro Verde. Photograph in Portugal, Alentejo of a misty sunrise in
the cork trees montado.

Printed and bound by CPI books GmbH, Birkstraße 10, 25917 Leck, Germany

Printed in the EU.

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlage | www.vandenhoeck-ruprecht-verlage.com

ISSN 2365-9173

ISBN 978-3-8470-1633-5

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Hartmut Lutz (University of Greifswald / University of Szczecin)

Preface

When Weronika Suchacka first developed the idea for a collection of invited articles to discuss Janice Kulyk Keefer's concept of 'historiographic ethnofiction,' she asked me if I would like to co-edit such a volume with her. I was reluctant. While Weronika had already addressed Ukrainian Canadian literature and the works of Keefer with great scholarly acumen in her study "Za Hranetsiu" – *"Beyond the Border": Constructions of Identities in Ukrainian-Canadian Literature*, my own connections with the topic seemed too subjective and marginal. A conversation two decades earlier with Janice Kulyk Keefer at a conference in Vilnius about "ethnic cleansings" in Eastern and Central Europe after WWII, my general interest in CanLit and ethnicities, and my obsession with Holocaust Literature and transgenerational traumata, seemed all I could bring to the topic. But I was also intrigued by the coincidental parallels in our personal family histories: Weronika, a Polish Canadian Studies scholar working at the University of Szczecin across the border in Poland has pre-WWII ancestry in today's Ukraine, and I, a German Canadian Studies scholar, retired from the University of Greifswald on the German side of the border, have pre-WWII ancestry in today's Poland and the Russian exclave Oblast Kaliningrad. Now, we both could work together on a project involving national and ethnic migrations (as experienced within our own families), and based on a theory developed by an internationally known Canadian author, who had been exploring her own ethnicity within her family's history of migration from Ukraine. Such a collaboration seemed to fit the post-Soviet atmosphere of overcoming territorial conflicts and thinking beyond borders. Those were my thoughts when I agreed to embark on Weronika's project. However, I asked her to stay at the helm and let me travel along as second, in a supportive position. And that is how we went along for almost two years, now.

Putin's attack on Ukraine, and the foreseeable gradual escalation of his war, has radically changed the context of our book – not forever, we hope. A peaceful and even cordial visit to ancestral territories in Oblast Kaliningrad, former *Ostpreußen*, which my wife Ruth and I enjoyed only five years ago, would be impossible today. There's even the danger, as the war drags on, that we slip back into

war rhetoric of denying the humanity of Russian soldiers – “like animals!” – and thereby losing our own. We feel that in this context, a humanitarian, non-violent, transnational project like historiographic ethnofiction in Canada, the original conception of which resulted from Janice Kulyk Keefer’s historical and personal involvement with Ukraine, is more than timely.

In a poem kindly offered to us by Janice Kulyk Keefer, which we include below and which is set in a museum in Ukraine’s capital, Janice Kulyk Keefer celebrates an unlikely exchange from Venice to Kyiv, which took place in the pre-Soviet past. We hope such transfers not of weapons but of pieces of art will be possible again in the future. When sending us her poem, Janice explained: “I wrote this years ago, on a visit to Kiyv during which I discovered the Khanenko Museum, a perfect gem. I hope and pray it survives this horror.”

A Bellini in Kyiv **by Janice Kulyk Keefer**

1. Provenance

Bellinis belong in Venice,
or any other western-European habitat.
Are no oddity in Manhattan, or in any of the insanely
endowed Gettys in Miami or L. A. But what
miracle brought this Bellini to Ukraine; lodged it
in a Renaissance-style palazzo built
on syndicates, peasant sweat and
sugar beets?

From the Urals to the Caucasus,
Petersbourg to Tashkent:
an empire of sweet teeth. And at the root,
Kyiv's sugar barons, among them
the Khanenkos (Bohdan and Varvara)
with tastes beyond Worth or Savile Row.
Zurbaran, Velazquez,
Guardi, Bellini: crated and shipped
from Adriatic to Aegean; through
the Dardanelles, then north
to the Black Sea coast. Rowdy stevedores
loading crates marked *fragile* onto barges,
past the Dnipro's rapids all the way to Kyiv.

Palazzo still smelling of sawdust and putty,
each window swagged with velvet heavy
as a baby elephant. Up a rainforest's worth of stairs,
the servants tote them: a still life, an Infanta,
the Grand Canal, and a stern Madonna
with her sleepstruck son.

2. God and His Mother

Refugees, owning nothing
 but the clothes on her back, the cushion
 under his head. Banished
 from a city built on salt to one
 propped up by sugar.
 Kidnap victims, or even
 slaves, you might say, dragged off
 from the auction block.

Naked under a gauze of holiness:
 the blindly sumptuous sleep
 of a well-fed child. She holds him
 the way you'd grasp a precious, borrowed thing:
 too huge to carry, too delicate to drop. Behind them
 crimson curtain, sword-edged mountains,
 storm-slashed sky.

3. Damage

Imagine the Khanenkos
 on winter afternoons in the snow-hushed house
 conjuring Venice from gold-pricked
 blue, or the splurge of spotless linen
 round the Virgin's face; trying to read
 the future from fictive battlements round a
 phantasmal city clinging to the mountains,
 from the warmth of a child's bare skin.

A world war, a revolution, a death.
 In her husband's memory, Varvara,
 forced from her palazzo to the lodgings
 of her maid, gives forty years of art-collecting
 to the city of Kyiv in the new Ukrainian SSR.

The bitterness of loss feeds
 the cracks halving
 the Virgin's eye; splits
 her elbow. Wood, like faith
 being prone to warp
 and all too often
 flame-consigned.

4. *mirabile dictu*

Though its owners die
 the palazzo remains,
 a cloth of honour, backdrop
 for the puzzle of this homebound stray:

no commissar flogged it abroad,
 no prankster drew moustaches on it
 in an Atheists' Museum.
 No gallery director or attendant, starving
 on the Occupation's sawdust bread
 bartered it for horseflesh; no looters
 molested it, no Nazi connoisseur
 packed it off to Dresden or Berlin.

Still housed in Kyiv--that reborn nest
 of oligarchs, some of them
 sugar barons, still--this refugee Bellini.

The Khanenko's palazzo still
 a museum, studded
 with babushka'd dragons garding
 their trance--this child,
 this mother--trance
 of witnessing; withstanding,
 embodying a beauty
 scarred
 yet undefaced.

Weronika Suchacka (University of Szczecin)

Introduction

The definition of ethnicity, just like identity in general, has always been elusive (Suchacka, “Za Hranetsiu” 23–44 and 60–76). But much as “unsettled and ill-defined” or even “self-subverting” (Brubaker 807) it is proclaimed to be, ethnicity is not solitary in this respect, for one can easily state the same about other concepts. As Gilman suggests, “ethnicity generates as complex a series of definitions as any other critical term does, or more accurately [...] the concept is sometimes clearly defined and ambiguously applied and at other times clearly applied and ambiguously defined” (25–26). This is, however, not “to say that anything goes in defining ethnicity. Thus, Linda Hutcheon’s maxim, “Context is all” (*Poetics* 54), applies also in this respect because the meaning of ethnicity is highly contextual – as Gilman confirms, “each cultural context constructs its own sense of ethnicity” (20). And if such a culturally relational understanding of ethnicity were to be transferred within a literary realm, we could again agree with Gilman who declares that ethnicity “is a concept (or set of contradictory and interlocking concepts) that enables literary scholars to reflect on how they and their culture tell stories” (26). Consequently, with this volume we would like to draw attention to how and why stories can be seen as an important vehicle through which ethnicity can be understood. Therefore, in the following, this introduction will first situate the discussion of ‘historiographic ethnofiction’ within the contemporary state of so called CanLit and the significance of ethnic minority writing in Canada, presenting an overview of academic discourses about conflicting nationalism(s) and intersecting identities in CanLit within the last half century, before focusing on ‘historiographic ethnofiction,’ the overarching topic of this collection.

Contemporary CanLit

At the point of compiling and publishing this volume about “historiographic ethnofiction” in Canada, the current state of Canadian literature has come to be described by means of various terms expressing its deeply troubling condition. Phrases, which range from more euphemistic ones, such as “a sense of unease or discontent” (Rzepa 273), to very straightforward and even strikingly graphic ones like “a raging dumpster fire” (Elliott)¹ or “[s]omething [...] rotten” (Rak et al. 9), clearly communicate that “CanLit’ currently lies in ruins” (McGregor, Rak, and Wunker 9). For a freshman unaware of historical, social, and political intricacies implicated in the development of Canadian literature, such statements may be quite disorientating, to say the least. Yet, the same cannot be stated in the case of more immersed observers and scholars of Canadian literature, to whom there is nothing surprising about the statement that “dissatisfaction with the state of CanLit [...] is [...] [its] current state” (Elliott). More than that, it should come as no surprise to them that the said dissatisfaction has determined, in fact, the existence of what has come to be known as CanLit. This is of course not to deny the shocking particularities of what has caused the turmoil over the last couple of years,² but rather to emphasize that “the nervous state” (Kamboureli, Preface viii) has defined, together with other factors, “[t]he specific trajectories” (Kamboureli, Preface viii) of Canadian literature since, at least, the 1990s (Rzepa 273).

To understand this uneasy “specificity” (Kamboureli, Preface viii) that characterizes CanLit one needs to see the development of Canadian literature as concurrent with the development of Canada as a nation-state. The “CanLit’ boom” taking place in the 1960s and 1970s (Rzepa 275) concurred with the introduction of Canadian multiculturalism which, for many, has turned out a highly contested notion that has nonetheless significantly influenced Canadian literary expression. Yet, the legacy and connections between Canada’s literature and nationhood can be found earlier in their history.³ As Rzepa states, “As a

1 Elliott’s article is both referred to (27) and included in full (93–98) in McGregor, Rak, and Wunker. See also Rzepa 274.

2 The recent scandals within CanLit are discussed, for example, by McGregor, Rak, and Wunker; and Rzepa. They will be briefly referred to below in the discussion of the current state of CanLit.

3 McGregor, Rak, and Wunker mention, for example, the following: “the contemporary version of CanLit can be linked to the Cold War anxiety about American political annexation, and the resulting Royal Commission on National Developments in the Arts, Letters and Sciences (commonly referred to as the Massey Commission) that clearly articulated the need for a distinct national culture as a bulwark against our ravenous neighbours to the south” (19). The fear of US hegemony resulted in putting much combined effort of “the government and writers and publishers and academics” (19) into establishing and asserting Canadianness within various sectors of national life, such as the “Canadian publishing industry,” the educational

cultural institution CanLit has been closely related to and shaped by the Canadian colonial project of nationhood and the discourse of the nation, and has therefore been accused of replicating the exclusion of the national project itself” (274).⁴

One of the most recent publications that has sprung up precisely because of the degree to which this nationally-inscribed exclusion has seeped through CanLit is the 2018 anthology edited by Hannah McGregor, Julie Rak, and Erin Wunker, who in their introduction confirm that

CanLit as an industry and cultural formation is bound up with the history of Canada as a settler-colonial nation-state. Like the country its writing is supposed to reflect, CanLit is supposed to be tolerant, liberal, a place where we can imagine our future together. Recent events in CanLit underscore that this is not the case. It has never been the case. *CanLit is in trouble, and it is the trouble.* (12–13; emphasis in source)

With the mention of “[r]ecent events in CanLit” that reflect the troubled state of CanLit, the editors refer to the series of “current controversies in CanLit” (23), i. e. the 2016 UBCAccountable, also known as “the Galloway Affair” or “CanLit Firestorm” (24), the 2016 scandal around Joseph Boyden’s identity, “the [2017] ‘Appropriation Prize’ controversy” (25), and the 2018 scandal at Concordia University’s Creative Writing Program (26). While the nature of each is different – the former and the latter are connected with sexual harassment, whereas the other two scandals refer to the identity and cultural issues⁵ – they all pinpoint the grounds of the “trouble” that characterizes today’s CanLit, which McGregor, Rak, and Wunker specify as “[t]he intersections of rape culture, anti-indigenous violence and cultural appropriation, and anti-blackness [that] seem to permeate CanLit in the twenty-first century” (26).

Yet, what McGregor, Rak, and Wunker also clearly pronounce is that the current state of CanLit is processual because “problems with colonialism, racism, and sexism, are *not new* to the writing, production, and study of Canadian literature” (10; emphasis added), and what is more, that “CanLit, to some extent, may even depend on the existence of such problems” (10). Following the editors’

system including schools and universities, and academic scholarship (19). Within the area of national literature, this meant specifically “build[ing] a cultural institution that could sustain itself in the face of the greater canonical prestige of British literature (the ‘classics’), the greater market forces of American publishing (and other forms of popular culture), and a small and dispersed population that is a constant bane to an industry that thrives on scale” (20).

4 See also McGregor, Rak, and Wunker who state likewise: “Writing in Canada [...] has always been tied to a colonial project of nationhood” (19).

5 For their detailed explanation, see McGregor, Rak, and Wunker (23–27); additionally, see Rzepa who discusses the recent state of CanLit in the light of the scandals and critical responses to them, such as McGregor, Rak, and Wunker’s contribution to the debate in the form of their collection (274, 281–83). See also Elliott whose critical voice was among most immediate reactions to the circumstances in question.

line and referring to the development of CanLit throughout previous decades, one can see that the “trouble” with/in CanLit had already been voiced decades ago. For example, distrusting the Canadian nationally self-celebratory claim that the Canadian literary canon, unlike the US canon, is “colorblind” and that the Canadian mosaic is socially and ethnically all-inclusive, as early as in 1993, Hartmut Lutz conducted a five-week trip through Canada, visiting 11 universities, interviewing writers and teachers, and statistically checking their English course offerings and library holdings for the in- or exclusion of exemplary Canadian and American “Writers of Color.” His small survey clearly contradicted the Canadian nationalist myth, when compared to the US. The *International Journal of Canadian Studies* agreed to publish Lutz’s report, but only under the condition that comparative references to US Authors of Color be left out. Lutz found this condition unacceptable and withdrew. His paper was years later published in *Zeitschrift für Anglistik/Amerikanistik* (1996) and eventually in his own collection, *Approaches: Essays in Native North American Studies and Literatures* (2002), thus keeping Canada’s English departments blissfully unaware of the mosaic’s social blindness and ethnic selectivity. Lutz’s undertaking, just like other major anthologies of and/or collections on Canadian literature published in the past clearly point to the same key issues that have defined CanLit: instrumentalization, tokenization, selectiveness, and exclusion.⁶

6 As Rzepa points out, “the thorny issues within CanLit” are not any novelty (287), while the dissatisfaction resulting from its problematic state as well as criticism about it have already been widely expressed (283). According to Rzepa, voices opposing exclusion practised within CanLit have been heard “even since the publication of *Trans.Can.Lit*” (280). Indeed, such has been the case; if one refers to the preface by Kamboureli from her and Miki’s 2007 volume, what becomes immediately apparent is that the above quoted proclamation by McGregor, Rak, and Wunker about CanLit’s being “*in trouble, and [...] the trouble*” (12–13; emphasis in source) reverberates Kamboureli’s statement in her preface that “CanLit is [...] at once a troubled and troubling sign” (ix). The critic points to a number of CanLit’s intricacies resulting from this, but she also indicates the cause of such a state, which is again echoed in the statements by the *Refuse* editors. Kamboureli confirms already in 2007 that “CanLit has been subject to a relentless process of institutionalization. Sometimes subtly, sometimes crudely, it has always been employed as an instrument – cultural, intellectual, political, federalist, and capitalist – to advance causes and interests that now complement, now resist, each other” (Preface vii). The critic acknowledges the universality of such a practice, pointing out that generally speaking “literature is inextricably related to certain practices of polity” (viii). And yet, as she points out, it is specified by “incommensurability” in as much as it is both “[c]omplicit and compliant” and, at the same time, “purposefully defiant and joyfully insolent” (viii). Thus, CanLit can likewise be read in this way; while being “instrumentalized by and concerned with the Canadian state, [...] it also contests the stateness, and boldly points beyond it, to an elsewhere that is not yet legible, that defamiliarizes the tropes that produce transparency and its accompanying contentment and complacency” (x). However, CanLit’s particular concern, or, as Kamboureli suggests, “nervousness” or “a continuing anxiety” (viii) about “its own formation” (viii), which is obviously connected to Canada’s geopolitical, socio-cultural, and historical framework, is what specifically characterizes CanLit (viii). This observation, how-

These issues also explain the crux of the relationship between Canadian national and literary projects – what they expose is that the “neocolonial underpinnings” (McGregor, Rak, and Wunker 25) of the latter are consequential to the colonial past of the former. Hence, if “the literary production of/in/about Canada [has] become so centralized, so industrialized, so organized around a notion of national identity” (19), which, due to Canada’s active involvement in colonization

ever, had been expressed by Kamboureli as early as in 1996. It was already then that the critic drew attention to the issue in question in another volume, i.e. *Making a Difference*, one of the first anthologies of multicultural writing in Canada. In her introduction to the anthology, Kamboureli states that “[s]ince its beginnings, the making of Canadian literature has coincided, in many respects, with the making of the Canadian state” (6). She again acknowledges that while this is a generally common role that literature fulfills because “like other cultural expressions, [it] measures the pulse of a nation” (6), it is “the kind of anxiety” about the constitution of both Canada’s literature and identity that becomes a specifically Canadian characteristic (6). Additionally, Kamboureli questions the ideal vision of Canadianness with its distinctiveness (10) and harmony (9), reading them rather as products of imagination (9), cultural mythologization (10), and wrong assumptions (10). As she confirms, “the unified image of Canadian identity has always exhibited fissures and shown itself to be fragile, full of anxiety to maintain, and redefine, its tenuous hold on power” (9). The critic points out that even visible attempts at its revision, such as the politics of multiculturalism applied to various areas of Canadian life, have continued, very often inadvertently, processes of marginalization (3). Within Canadian literary discourse, this has been effectuated by common practices of “tokenism” (3) or a selective approach to ethnic writers “by viewing them as representative of their cultural groups” (3) that resulted in essentializing their ethnicities as well as their work (4). In this context, it is visible how, as Kamboureli also suggests, “inclusion is synonymous with exclusion” (2), an observation that is again shared by the *Refuse* editors, who, twenty-two years later, refer to the same aspect when stating that “[w]e learn as much about CanLit from what it leaves out as we do from what is included” (19), showing the continuation of “tokenization and exclusion” (22) as practiced within CanLit past and present. The undeniable interconnection between CanLit and Canadian multiculturalism is also discussed by an even earlier anthology of Canadian literature, i.e. *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions*, the 1990 volume edited by Linda Hutcheon and Marion Richmond. Reflecting upon an observable effect that multiculturalism has produced on Canadian literature since the 1940s, the editors’ attempted at “explor[ing] the nature of our [Canadian] cultural diversity in the fiction of eighteen contemporary writers and in the conversations with them” (Richmond) that they included in their volume. Their intention was “to probe, to analyse, and to evaluate the experience of the ‘other solitudes’” (Richmond), the phrase that specifically marks their point already in the title of their anthology. Much as the editors also consider the positive sides of multiculturalism, their critical stance about the politics is made clear not only via their title but also in the first lines of their introduction, in which Hutcheon writes that “[t]he initial purpose of *Other Solitudes* was to break through [...] ‘the protective shell of Canadian-style tolerance: acceptance without concern’” (1). Consequently, while Hutcheon and Richmond see positive aspects of “this institutionalization of multiculturalism in Canadian society [that] has extended to its literature” (Hutcheon 15) and resulted in directing the public attention to ethnicity and ethnic writers so that they became recognized as “part of the literary mainstream” (15), they close their introductory statements with a call for ensuring the overall availability of “the material and cultural conditions” (16) that would make literary self-expression and public recognition of culturally diverse Canadian writers possible (16).

processes in the past, has been deeply implicated in colonialism, it should come as no surprise that “when we talk about writing in Canada, and CanLit especially, we are also always talking about the *legacy* of colonialism [...] on these lands” (19; emphasis added).⁷ This legacy translates itself into Canadian literariness in various ways, starting with CanLit’s apparent willingness to embrace diverse epistemologies, most primarily Indigenous ones (21), and blocking such voices in their literary endeavours of self-expression by ensuring “the very success of its mainstream authors within a complex cultural industry” (20); to sustaining the rules of this industry which operates along its firmly established

star system that is used to marker the most successful authors beyond Canada’s borders, [...] a high-profile system of awards and prizes, and very large multinational publishers, such as Penguin Random House and HarperCollins, that publish authors who are stars or might become stars. (20)⁸

Finally, this systematic and systemic exclusion also involves hampering the study of genres other than those considered to be of high “cultural value” (18), for example, the popular culture genres additionally unwanted because seen as a threatening “sign of Americanization” (18).⁹ Such practices bring CanLit to a point where, as McGregor, Rak, and Wunker conclude, “CanLit cannot help but be a profoundly exclusive category” (21) that blindly follows the “polic[ing of] the boundaries of who [and what] counts as Canadian and who [and what] does not” (21), clearly reverberating the same dismissing practices of the Canadian national project (21–22). The contributors to the volume by McGregor, Rak, and Wunker address these issues, discussing in their texts various types of exclusions practised in CanLit such as “the widely tolerated culture of misogyny and sexism, [...] homophobia, transphobia, and ableism of publishers, critics, and scholars” (Rzepa 282), not to mention “the persistent racism” (282).

The self-/destructiveness of contemporary CanLit caused by its implication in the construction of Canadian national identity is even more evident in the effects that this burdened relationship brings about. The first example that comes straightforwardly to mind is the very collection by McGregor, Rak, and Wunker, which was created in direct response to the recent developments in CanLit. With

7 Such a belief can already be found in Kamboureli’s introduction to her 1996 *Making a Difference*, in which she likewise states that “the prevailing notions of Canada as a nation, of Canadian identity, and of Canadian literature are still sequestered within this legacy of colonialism” (8).

8 See also Rzepa who discusses “the problem of [...] the CanLit ‘stars’” (280) and the system of awarding them, referring also to other critical responses to such practices, expressed by, e.g., Ashok Mathur or Alex Good (280–81).

9 Among the genres disregarded by the public, and even more so by educators and scholars, the editors mention, e.g., “works of journalism, or memoirs, or mass-market mystery writing, or writing for children, or graphic novels,” and “Harlequin romances” (18).

its poignant title, *Refuse: CanLit in Ruins*, the editors succinctly convey their mutual disagreement with what currently defines, and has come to define throughout the past decades, the literary establishment in Canada. However, their group decision “to refuse CanLit, to say no to what it stands for” with their simultaneous willingness “to re/fuse or fire up a different kind of writing by different kind of writers” (27),¹⁰ echoes the individual voices that had previously been raised to express their opposition to discriminatory practices in CanLit. One of these voices, which McGregor, Rak, and Wunker also refer to, belongs to Rinaldo Walcott, Black and cultural studies scholar, who acted upon his words of dissent to CanLit’s continued exclusion of Black authors, famously quitting it during a conference in 2017.¹¹

The dismissive grounds on which CanLit has been founded have also met with a point-blank refusal from Indigenous writers and scholars who, as Rzepa observes, “more and more often it seems, [...] tend to ‘opt-out’ of the CanLit context perceived still as a colonial project” (285). Rzepa illustrates her point by quoting Indigenous writers across generations, which again clearly proves the deep-rootedness of the problem. Among these voices, Rzepa quotes Jeannette Armstrong’s statement from her 2006 keynote address, in which Armstrong declares that “it gives [her] great joy and solace, not being placed in their literature” (qtd. in Rzepa 285). Finding “great joy to be in the margins” has become then, as bell hooks would call it, Armstrong’s “site of resistance” (153), but more so, a matter of her conscious and even satisfactory decision.

For authors of younger generations, “remov[ing] themselves from CanLit” (Rzepa 285) has also become a straightforward re/action to the circumstances of CanLit’s current state – their marginalization is no longer an enforced condition but a consciously chosen as well as openly and proudly declared location. As Rzepa shows, it is directly visible in the statement by Gwen Benaway, Two-Spirit trans Anishnaabe/Métis poet, who asserts the centrality of marginalized writers and their pivotal role: “We’re here to give CanLit street cred, to be the Other in their dance of whiteness and desire” (qtd. in Rzepa 285). This act of withdrawal from CanLit by Indigenous writers does not however indicate a simple change of sites, which would involve a mere reconfiguration of one into another. What we witness is far from it; Rzepa refers to another important voice, the Oji-Cree Two-

10 In their efforts to do so, the editors clearly delineate their understanding of CanLit, distinguishing its role as an academic field (17), “[a]s an industry” ruled by its marketing forces (17), and “‘Canadian literature’ [which] means literature written and published in Canada” (17–19).

11 Walcott’s withdrawal is widely quoted as having resulted from no change that, in his eyes, has taken place regarding racism in Canada and its literary world since the appearance of his *Black Like Who? Writing Black Canada* in 1997 and the famous “Writing Thru Race” conference in 1994 (Rzepa 282–83; see also McGregor, Rak, and Wunker 26; and Elliott).

Spirit writer, Joshua Whitehead, who proves this point when stating, “I am not CanLit, I am Indigenous Lit” (qtd. in Rzepa 286).¹² Being firmly grounded in his Indigenous culture, Whitehead pronounces his “Writing as a Rupture,” as a “[b]reakup”¹³ with CanLit and its influence, questioning its status as a sine qua non condition for Indigenous literature, and instead recognizing the inevitability of the reverse: “Indigenous Lit will survive without CanLit, we have already, but I am not sure if CanLit can do the same” (Whitehead 197; in Rzepa 286). Clearly, acknowledging their own centrality from their marginal sites, Indigenous writers are doing it on and in their own terms, rejecting both the signified and the signifier of CanLit.

Ethnicity in Contemporary CanLit and Canada

The examples of “refusing” or “opting-out” of CanLit are quoted here precisely because they are indicative of the meaning of ethnicity in Canada and its literature that this volume is so much concerned with. If CanLit is so undeniably linked with Canadian nationhood, then what we witness is the complete failure of Canada’s national project. As Alicia Elliott states in her much-quoted article “CanLit Is a Raging Dumpster Fire,” written as one of the first responses to the “Galloway Affair” conundrum, “this sudden anger at CanLit is the inevitable result of Canada’s own national identity crumbling.” The writer continues explaining her perspective of the fiasco of Canadian nationhood, asking, “What words have traditionally been employed to describe CanLit? Polite. Liberal. Progressive. Welcoming. Aren’t these the exact words consistently used to describe Canada? And if CanLit’s really none of these things, can we honestly believe that Canada is?”

What Elliott’s and other writers’ expressions of “opting-out” clearly show is that none of the two major Canadian projects, whether we are talking about Canada as the colonial project or Canada as the multicultural project, have been successful. In the case of the former, we see that ethnicity has never been wiped out, but rather, kept and pronounced in the face of the ever-looming WASP dominance; while in the case of the latter, the much-promised unity has never been fulfilled as the contribution of its diversity has always been questioned, which brought the many to the rejection of Canadian national identity altogether. We see it plainly in Elliott’s statement, in which she declares,

12 Whitehead’s statement (197) can be found in his contribution (191–98) to McGregor, Rak, and Wunker’s volume.

13 The quoted phrases constitute the title of Whitehead’s contribution to *Refuse*, i. e. “Writing as a Rupture: A Breakup Note to CanLit.”

I'm a Haudenosaunee woman and, therefore, have never felt any particular fondness for or identification with Canadian nationalism. It's quite difficult to feel nostalgic for the country that has been trying to systemically destroy my nation since before it was considered a proper nation itself. That said, this lack of patriotism does permit me a very necessary perspective; after all, if I'm not attached to Canada's national identity, I have no stake in maintaining it, and I feel no pain dismantling it.

What can also be concluded in the face of such statements as Elliott's is that not only has Canada failed in establishing its national identity, but also that it has never moved anywhere near its "post-identity" or post-ethnicity stage, or with respect to its literary expression, "beyond autoethnography."¹⁴ This perhaps could be said if ethnicity is defined in the way that, for example, Eleanor Ty and Christl Verduyn show Asian-Canadian writing and experience to have "mov[ed] away from" (4), i.e. "questions of 'authenticity,' essentialist identity politics, and a view of a cultural group that is static, rather than evolving" (4–5). Yet, if ethnicity is read in an intersectional way, i.e. in a way which recognizes its dynamics, multifacetedness, and primarily its inclusiveness, it would require recognizing that the meaning of ethnicity is no longer to be limited to its cultural and/or racial situatedness, but rather, it should be seen as overlapping with other categories.¹⁵

Such a reading then would lead us inevitably to understanding ethnicity also as a result of the intersecting structures of oppression (Collins in Dhamoon 238).¹⁶ Hence, not only does "the exposition of one's ethnic identity" (Ty and Verduyn 4) in the twenty-first century Canada involve "Song and Dance No More,"¹⁷ but it should primarily entail the exposure of violences against it. It is thus no coincidence that, having expressed her doubts about Canada's self as "[p]olite. [l]iberal. [p]rogressive. [w]elcoming," Alicia Elliott continues talking about Canada in the context of "rape culture [that] is built into the Canadian justice system [...] [or] policing," about racism continuously experienced by Indigenous and Black people, which with respect to the former includes Canadians' historical ignorance unremittingly expressed towards Canada's Native inhabitants, and with respect to the latter, about "racist carding policies that

14 The quoted phrases are taken from Lee (in Zacharias 5); and Ty and Verduyn (4), respectively. Their meanings will be elaborated on further in the text.

15 The intersectional reading as applied here is primarily based on Vivian May's understanding of the concept developed in her study *Pursuing Intersectionality, Unsettling Dominant Imaginaries* (2015). For May's conceptualizations of intersectionality used as a theoretical backbone for a literary interpretation of diasporic writing, see Suchacka "'Alimentary Assemblages,'" "The Crossing of Borders," and "Intersectionality."

16 See also Valentine 12; Bastia 238–39; Brah and Phoenix 78; Dhamoon 231–32, 234–35, 239; May 3, 5, 21–28.

17 The quoted phrase constitutes the title of Laura Moss's article "Song and Dance No More: Tracking Canadian Multiculturalism over Forty Years."

specifically target black men” or generally about “Canadian institutions devalu[ing] and dehumaniz[ing] black Canadian lives.”

“The exposition of one’s ethnic identity” (Ty and Verduyn 4) in Canada in the twenty-first century involves then directly the examples of its “lived experiences” (May 10, 46). Far from being a mere theory of ethnicity, these examples expose the reality of the majority of non-WASP Canadians – the reality that proves to the contrary of Canada’s ideal image. This is what intersectional understanding of ethnicity allows us to acknowledge, and what the CanLit controversies have exposed again – “that a CanLit – and a Canada – [...] was always an idea instead of a lived reality” (Elliott), and that “the imagination of what Canada and its literature would be was built on the same foundation of Indigenous genocide, anti-Blackness, anglophone dominance, racist immigration policies, eugenicist attitudes towards disabled people, and deep-rooted misogyny that the rest of Canada was built on” (McGregor, Rak, and Wunker 21).¹⁸

Understanding Ethnicity: Readings Against Historical Denial

What is also crucial to notice is that while much has been exposed by the most recent controversies, they are not the first momentous points that have indicated that this Canadian problem is of a deeply-rooted nature; as Elliott points out, “While a lot of this anger has crystallized post-UBC Accountable, it is ultimately part of something deeper – something that has been simmering beneath polite Canadian smiles for a very long time.” In defining what this “something deeper” is, it is worth paying attention to Elliott’s reference to the idea of Canadian politeness that covers up what “simmer[s] beneath” it because it is precisely this idea that Daniel Coleman develops as his thesis on “the Canadian trance of white civility.”

In its nutshell, Coleman’s suggestion points out that Canadians are immersed in their idea(l) of Canada as a civil society, which emerges from “the temporal concept of progress and the moral-ethical ideal of orderliness [that] have been demonstrated by cultivated, polite behaviour” (29). Prescribing thus a particular type of a social conduct and moral order, “[i]t projects an ideal social interaction” (29) to which all citizens “should aspire” (29). More specifically, it expects Canadians to be better than the rest of the world:

This trance [...] engages its members in the repetition of a mantra that [...] asserts that Canadians are more civilized than others on all levels – from large-scale international politics to everyday domestic arrangements. [...] Canadians think themselves more civilized than all other nations who don’t have a multiculturalism policy, Charter of

18 See also Lutz, “Is the Canon Colorblind?”, who expressed the same concerns in the past.

Rights and Freedoms, or federal provisions from same-sex unions. [...] It is what allows us to imagine ourselves as a community, and we become extremely touchy when anyone troubles our self-hypnosis. (25)

Clearly thus, this reiterated conviction, as Coleman suggests, “affirms membership and meaning” (25) of Canadian society; it defines the latter in terms of superiority and dominance by determining the specific criteria of the former. These criteria of the Canadian idea of civility, as Coleman puts forward, are essentially based on “White, British gentlemanliness” (27) that serves to safeguard the boundaries of social belonging, excluding those outside the prescribed categories (29–34).

Like all ideological dogmas, the construction of the White civility idea is highly elusive, and thus something not straightforwardly obvious, or recalling Elliott’s phrase, “something [...] simmering beneath” its outward mask. Coleman points to this fact by his consistent use of the term “trance” and his comparison of its nature to “other quasi-mystical states” (25), and it is precisely this “way in which [...] [the White civility] operates like a trance” (26) that Coleman sees as primary in “insula[ting] us [Canadians] from the realities in our midst” (26).¹⁹ Coleman’s thesis completes then the understanding shared by other critics like Elliott or McGregor, Rak, and Wunker that living up to a particular self-constructed ideal image of Canada obscures the conflicting realities of its members and their experiences, excluding all that would prove to the contrary of the preferred version of its society.

Coleman’s thesis is instructive in explaining one more aspect that both Alicia Elliott and the editors of *Refuse* have referred to in their commentaries on the current state of CanLit. In the introduction to their volume, McGregor, Rak, and Wunker ask, “How do the fissures that have riven CanLit always seem to be smoothed over and forgotten, as if all the problems are solved?” (16). In its essence, their question reverberates Elliott’s inquiry in her earlier essay:

How is CanLit continually making the same mistakes? Or, to put it more frankly, how do the writers, editors, publishers and agents that make up CanLit live through those mistakes, hear them pointed out, do nothing to address them, then still somehow manage to tell themselves that CanLit is diverse and progressive? And why are we suddenly – finally – willing to actually see these mistakes now?

19 As Coleman continues, “the trance of civility sedates us [Canadians] to the status quo, assuring us that we have already reached the ideals to which we so proudly aspire. In the process we disavow the incivilities and violences in our midst [...]” (36). Among these “incivilities and violences,” Coleman includes the years-long detention of “Muslim men [...] without trial”; disproportionately high rate of the imprisoned Indigenous people as compared to their general population number, or the significantly lower earnings of immigrants in Canada as compared to the citizens born in Canada (36).