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Introduction: Crossroads – Canadian Cultural Intersections

Numerous metaphors have been employed to describe Canada and a state of ‘Canadianness.’ Writers and artists, scholars and critics, journalists, politicians, and other commentators – both from Canada and elsewhere – have coined images such as the “mosaic” (Gibbon 1938), the “garrison” (Frye 1971), the “butterfly on [a] rock” (Jones 1970), the “vertical man [on a] horizontal world” (Ricou 1973), or the “few acres of snow” (Voltaire 1966) featuring a puddle of blood disguised as an autumnal maple leaf (Atwood 1995). The editors of this special issue have chosen the metaphor of the “crossroads” to frame a collection of articles that approach, from various perspectives and disciplines, specific aspects of Canadian politics and culture.

Describing a place where two or more streets intersect, the concept of the crossroads provides a fruitful and suitable starting point for any study of intersections and overlaps in the broadest sense – whether between different disciplines, media, languages, cultures – or in the literal, geographic sense. In the case of Canadian Studies, two different yet interconnected understandings of the crossroads suggest themselves. First, the idea of ‘Canada *as* crossroads,’ which envisages Canada as a place where different cultures and traditions – for instance, English, French, First Nations, U.S.-American, Chinese, Ukrainian, and other immigrant cultures – “meet, clash, and grapple with each other,” as Mary Louise Pratt once said of “contact zones” in general (Pratt 2000, 575). In this context, the crossroads metaphor invites the study of the many inter-, trans-, and multicultural phenomena that have characterized Canada’s identity throughout its history, from the nation’s roots in colonial times through its political and cultural emancipation, particularly in the 20th century, but also in its present state in the context of a new millennium of “global realignments” (Ikas 2010). Second, the crossroads metaphor also imagines ‘Canada *at* a crossroads,’ studying it in a larger context and alongside other countries – for instance, its southern neighbour, the United States, its two founding nations, Great Britain and France, or other postcolonial countries. Here, the crossroads image may serve as a springboard for the investigation of Canada’s position in broader hemispheric or even global issues as well as its relations with other countries and cultures.

Incidentally, the essays in this volume also originated during a meeting at a crossroads. In June 2010 more than twenty young Canadianists from Germany and

Austria and from various disciplines came together at the University of Konstanz for the seventh graduate conference of the Association of Canadian Studies in the German-speaking Countries (GKS).¹ They were joined by distinguished scholars in the field of Canadian Studies, most notably keynote speaker Professor Sherrill Grace and Professor Larissa Lai, both from the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. Larissa Lai, who is both a scholar and a writer of literature, straddled yet another crossroads by giving a reading from her novels and poetry in the context of the conference.

Entitled “Crossroads: Canadian Cultural Intersections/Carrefours: Intersections culturelles au Canada,” the conference was jointly organized by the editors of this special issue and funded by the Canadian government’s Canada Conference Grant Program and the Association of Canadian Studies, as well as, at the University of Konstanz, the Cluster of Excellence “Cultural Foundations of Integration,” the Office for Academic Staff Development, and the International Office. The editors once again wish to express their gratitude to these institutions for having made this wonderful event possible through their generous support.

The articles collected in this special issue are extended versions of several talks given at the conference. The collection opens with Nina Fischer and her article “‘And I Did Want to Pass’: Reading Canadian Second Generation Holocaust Memoirs as Migration Texts.” Fischer looks at three Canadian Second Generation Holocaust memoirs through the lens of migration literature, which allows her to highlight the transnational and transcultural features of Holocaust memory. Coming to Canada in the 1950s with their survivor parents, and thus old enough to consciously experience and remember their families’ migrations, the protagonists of Eva Hoffman’s *Lost in Translation* (1989), Lisa Appignanesi’s *Losing the Dead* (1999), and Elaine Naves Kalman’s *Shoshanna’s Story* share the experience of dislocation and alienation. While aspects of migration may seem less important in the face of the ordeals of the parents, the feeling of loss and uprootedness in the lives of their children has a strong impact on members of the Second Generation and their narrative investigations into their parents’ past. Fischer analyzes and compares different forms of ‘cultural crossings’ by the protagonists, for instance with regard to language, the immigrant’s body, and religious identity.

Sylvia Langwald, in “The Self and the City: Narrating ‘Glocal’ Spaces and Identities in Dionne Brand’s *What We All Long For*,” defines the crossroads as a central image of Brand’s novel, arguing that it serves to describe Toronto as a space of intercultural encounters. She points out that Brand uses the city to reflect on notions of belonging and the connections between identification, urban space, and intergenerational conflicts, for instance by aligning first and second generation immigrants with metaphors of stasis and fluidity, respectively. In connection with the use of metaphors, Langwald also examines Brand’s elaborate techniques of narrative transmission. She finds that by combining different narrative positions and shifting focalizers, Brand emphasizes the complexity of her story world, which reflects the multilayered and dynamic space of Toronto.

¹ Gesellschaft für Kanada-Studien e.V. (<http://www.kanada-studien.org/>).

The article by Christina Kannenberg, “The North Comes South: Seasonal Nordicity in Montreal in the Short Stories of Monique Proulx and Clark Blaise,” continues to explore urban space and issues of identity by concentrating on the multicultural city of Montreal in Quebec, and its characterization by “nordicity”/ “nordicité.” Kannenberg grounds her analysis in a comparison of English-Canadian and Québécois concepts of and literatures on the North, describing the latter as one of Canada’s central national myths that cuts across the English-French cultural and literary divide. Focusing on the short story oeuvres of two eminent voices from each cultural and linguistic environment, Québécois writer Monique Proulx and English-Canadian writer Clark Blaise, Kannenberg compares Proulx’s “Banana Chaudfroid” and Blaise’s “Words for the Winter” for their representation of the concept of “seasonal nordicity” in Montreal.

Grit Alter explores the genre of children’s literature in Canada. In her article “From Finding a Voice to Being Heard: Overcoming Current Challenges of Canadian Children’s Literature,” Alter first delineates the troubled history of literature for children in Canada. For decades, Alter argues, the genre struggled with three major stumbling blocks: publications abroad and adjustments to foreign markets, the lack of Canadian children’s literature in Canadian educational environments, and instances of censorship. This is all the more surprising, Alter finds, since governmental guidelines, and educators had long demanded the inclusion of Canada-related content in Canadian children’s literature in and beyond the classroom. Against this backdrop, Alter focuses on the analysis of a particularly innovative book series for young readers entitled “In the Same Boat,” which came out with the Canadian publishing house Coteau Books in the early 2000s. “In the Same Boat” pays tribute to Canada’s rich multiethnic and multicultural heritage and is therefore a paradigmatic example of Canadian children’s literature’s recent developments and promising future.

Taking up issues of “cultural diversity” and migration, Annamária Tóth in her article “Official Languages and Multiculturalism: The ‘Other’ Languages” examines a complex case of linguistic politics at a crossroads. She delineates the problematic intersection between Canada’s policy of multiculturalism, its official bilingualism, and its multilingual society, in which a rapidly growing group of immigrants speaks neither English nor French as their mother tongue. Tóth portrays multilingualism as a constitutive element of multiculturalism for political, economic, and cultural reasons, and argues that, while official bilingualism is justifiable at the federal level for pragmatic reasons, at the regional level the linguistic diversity of Canada’s multicultural society should receive greater recognition. To this end, she suggests different measures for the creation and support of a multilingual environment that meets the needs of the Canadian linguistic mosaic.

From the politics of language rights to Canada’s engagement in world politics: In his article “The ‘Old Peacekeeper’ Confronts the ‘New World Order,’” Karsten Jung analyzes and compares “Canadian Power and Purpose from Suez to Afghanistan.” Jung highlights the similarities and differences between Canada’s involvement in the international conflict over Suez in 1956 and the nation’s current engagement

in Afghanistan. Canadian interests and goals in both crises, Jung argues, are remarkably similar in their orientation towards the promotion of Canada's national security and global influence and the preservation of the international order. The outcome of Canada's intervention then and now, Jung finds, is strikingly dissimilar, however: while successful at Suez, Canadian politics have not yet found an adequate strategy in Afghanistan. Jung thus sees Canada's international politics currently at a crossroads, engaged in the process of preparing a response to the security challenges of the 21st century. In this, Jung argues, Ottawa may learn from Suez, which saw a fortunate combination of credible operational commitment and convincing strategic leadership.

The present collection of articles from young scholars in the field thus testifies to the fact that in Canadian Studies crossroads are busy, exciting, and highly engaging places indeed.

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