
The title of this highly readable volume refers back to the groundbreaking collection of essays *Gaining Ground: European Critics of Canadian Literature*, edited in 1985 by the German Canadianist Reingard Nischik and the late Canadian author and scholar Robert Kroetsch. Picking up on the momentum created by the 1985 publication, *Gained Ground* is an important contribution to the field of Comparative North American Studies, but first and foremost, it is a well-deserved *festschrift* celebrating the important work of Reingard Nischik in this field on the occasion of her sixty-fifth birthday. The two editors have brought together an international group of a dozen or so scholars and creative writers, colleagues and students of Reingard Nischik, contributing to the field of Contemporary North American (Literary) Studies, which—as the editors write in their introduction—Nischik “has established […] as a relevant and productive paradigm” (4).

The collection is subdivided into four parts, three of which deal with scholarly topics such as “The Genesis of Canadian and Comparative North American Studies,” literary case studies, “Comparative North American Studies beyond Print,” and—as a coda—two personal contributions by Canadian writers Aritha van Herk and Margaret Atwood as well as a “photo log” documenting Reingard Nischik’s *Canlit* activities. The first part includes an overview essay by Bettina Mack (Konstanz): “Mapping North America: Comparative North American Literature and Its Contexts.” As Mack states, the merit of a dynamic Comparative North American Studies approach “lies in addressing the ways in which the two nations differ but are nonetheless connected in a North American context” so that “in this context, the methods of approaching the literatures of Canada and the United States are situated in a transnational context and explore alternatives to the unquestioning acceptance of national myths” (20). Mack starts out by addressing the national dimensions involved in North American Studies as well as the international critical contexts into which Canada and the U.S. can be integrated such as continentalist, hemispheric, inter-American, postnational, or global approaches. She finally sees Comparative North American Literature especially in a transnational context: “While drawing its strength from American Studies and Canadian Studies, Comparative North American Studies transforms our understanding of the disciplines in a transnational present” (36). In the second contribution, a reading of Canada’s role in Scottish-born Canadian Governor General John Buchan’s literary works, Silvia Mergenthal (Konstanz) wonders if one can talk about “The Scottish Invention of Canadian Literature.” She draws attention to Buchan’s affinity for the Canadian North and traces Canadian features in his novel *Sick Heart River*.

The two larger sections of *Gained Ground* on Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies focus on single works or institutions from a Comparative North American Studies perspective. Jutta Ernst (Germersheim) draws parallels between the intertextual use of literary precursors in Edgar Allan Poe’s American classic *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* and in Yann Martel’s recent Canadian novel *Life of Pi*, positioning the texts within a “conundrum of originality, influence, or plagiarism,” or in the context of Haroldo de Campos’s concept of “transcreation” (60). Her conclusion is that “rather than charging Yann Martel with plagiarism, it makes sense to see *Life of Pi* as a typical product of twenty-first-century creative modes, for which originality is no longer of essence” (70).
Claire Omhovère (Montpellier) addresses the attempts of two Canadian writers, poet Robert Kroetsch in *The Hornbooks of Rita K* and short-story writer Mark Anthony Jarman in *19 Knives*, to respond literarily to a Canadian landscape that does not, as Canadian writers ever since Susannah Moodie have realized, respond to European tropes and rather represents “the edge, a liminal space where the precarious prevails over the permanent” (83). Interestingly enough, as Omhovère writes, “Europe, with its enduring tradition of close reading has been comparatively more hospitable to Kroetsch and Jarman in recent years, which leaves the door open, perhaps, for ulterior reappraisals at home” (89). In another contribution to the literary case studies section, Katja Sarkowsky (Augsburg) studies aspects of “transgenerational memory” in the writing of Japanese Canadian painter Roy Kiyooka’s *MotherTalk*, the transcription of his mother’s oral autobiography edited by Daphne Marlatt. Sarkowsky comments on “the relationality of life stories inherent in all autobiographical narration,” which in *MotherTalk* “is reflected in a complex interplay of form and content” (101). Marlene Goldman (Toronto) chooses a special aspect of Comparative North American Studies by analyzing Alice Munro’s Canadian short stories beside the autobiographical American graphic novels of Alison Bechdel by “underscoring the connection between mimesis and the theatrical re-staging of traumatic shame” (109). Sherrill Grace (British Columbia) concludes the second part of the collection by discussing names, symbols, and stories in Canadian fiction writer Timothy Findley’s short story “Stones” that deals with the impact of the fateful Dieppe raid during the Second World War and the role of stones as pieces of remembrance. As Grace puts it in her personal final paragraph, stones from the Dieppe beach “are real and symbolic. They have stories. For me they represent beauty, words, imagination, and life” (142).

The third part of the volume is entitled “Comparative North American Studies beyond Print,” and the essays in this part show that comparative approaches also address other narratives and cultural forms. Michael and Linda Hutcheon (Toronto) show this in their fascinating treatment of contemporary Canadian vs. American operas, *Louis Riel* and *Dr. Atomic*, in “Comparative North American Opera: Individualism and National Identity.” In their words, both Louis Riel and Robert Oppenheimer become representatives of their nations: “At seminal moments of national self-identification, Canada and the USA—like European nations a century earlier—both produced operas that reveal much about their respective senses of the relationship of the individual to the nation” (157). Florian Freitag (Germersheim) contributes a lively and highly interesting essay on the “metatouristic” presentation of national simulacra in theme parks, especially those of Canada in Orlando’s Epcot Center. Julia Breitbach (Konstanz) has a look at photographic perspectives in Margaret Atwood’s early poetry collection *The Door* and her recent *MaddAddam Trilogy* concluding that both “draw on a common understanding of photography and its ambiguity—across the analog-digital divide” (190). In an impressively learned and playful reading, Shuli Barzilai (Jerusalem) deals with a special case of transatlantic relations in another poem from Atwood’s *The Door*: “Cupidity, or Poetic Larceny in Transatlantic Contexts: Margaret Atwood’s ‘Stealing the Hummingbird Cup.’” Her references reach from sixteenth-century Central American art and classical Greek and Roman poetry to twentieth-century Canadian poetry.

While the scholarly essays included in the first three parts of the collection already show close connections with Reingard Nischik’s personal scholarly interests, especially of course her being one of the leading Atwood scholars worldwide, the contributions in the fourth part reflect her personal involvement with...
Canadian Literature Studies even more clearly. Based on the correspondence between Nischik and Kroetsch in the process leading up to the publication of *Gaining Ground* in 1985 and on conversations with Nischik herself (to which the late Robert Kroetsch himself seems to be contributing every now and then), Canadian author and scholar Aritha van Herk (Calgary) writes a very personal and engaging essay entitled “Across the ‘Ocean on the Page’: Nischik and Kroetsch Gaining Ground.” Margaret Atwood, on whom Nischik has written more than probably anybody else in Europe (and beyond), herself makes a visual contribution, a cartoon entitled “Reingard, Queen of the Night,” to this celebratory publication. The collection finds its conclusion in a six-page “Photo-Log” about Nischik’s “30 Years of Working in Canadian Criticism in Pictures” (225–30).

*Gained Ground: Perspectives on Canadian and Comparative North American Studies* is an important and entertaining collection that brings together lively and interesting contributions to an exciting field of studies to which Reingard Nischik has given so many pioneering impulses as a devoted scholar and teacher.

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