

Maria Löschnigg

The Contemporary Canadian Short Story in English

Continuity and Change

Ansgar Nünning, Vera Nünning, Norbert Finzsch (Hg.)

CAT
Cultures in America in Transition

Band 7

Maria Löschnigg

**The Contemporary Canadian
Short Story in English**

Continuity and Change

 Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier

Löschnigg, Maria: The Contemporary Canadian Short Story
in English. Continuity and Change / Maria Löschnigg.-
Trier : WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2014
(CAT ; Band 7)
ISBN 978-3-86821-526-7

Die Drucklegung dieses Werkes erfolgte mit Unterstützung der Universität Graz,
der Stadt Graz und des Centre of Canadian Studies Graz.

KARL-FRANZENS-UNIVERSITÄT GRAZ
UNIVERSITY OF GRAZ



Umschlaggestaltung: Brigitta Disseldorf

© WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2014
ISBN 978-3-86821-526-7

Alle Rechte vorbehalten
Nachdruck oder Vervielfältigung nur mit
ausdrücklicher Genehmigung des Verlags

WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier
Bergstraße 27, 54295 Trier
Postfach 4005, 54230 Trier
Tel.: (0651) 41503, Fax: (0651) 41504
Internet: <http://www.wvttrier.de>
E-Mail: wvt@wvttrier.de

*To my sons, Paul and Jan,
who have taught me that there are things beyond academia,*

and to

*Martin,
the most essential character of my story.*

CONTENTS

| | | |
|--------|---|-----|
| 1. | Introduction | 1 |
| 2. | Alice Munro: A View on her Stories Published since the 1990s | 17 |
| 2.1. | Alice Munro's Murder Mysteries | 30 |
| 2.2. | "I and the Village": Negotiations of Otherness in "Soon" and "Family Furnishings" | 41 |
| 2.3. | "Deep-Holes", or the "recognition of the unknowable" | 47 |
| 3. | Munrovia Resonances and New Impulses in Stories by Contemporary Canadian Women Writers | 52 |
| 3.1. | Playing with Configurational Modes: Carol Shields and Elisabeth Harvor | 54 |
| 3.2. | Narrative Revisions of the Mother-Plot: Dede Crane and Caroline Adderson | 67 |
| 4. | 'New Regionalism' and the Canadian Short Story | 85 |
| 4.1. | Female Prairie Voices: Sharon Butala and Gloria Sawai | 89 |
| 4.2. | Re-textualizing the Atlantic Coast | 96 |
| 4.2.1. | Laments for a Lost 'Paradise': Alistair MacLeod and Lesley Choyce | 97 |
| 4.2.2. | Newfoundland, Newly Found: Michael Crummey and Lisa Moore | 108 |
| 5. | Canadian Short Fiction in the Context of Globalizing Tendencies | 122 |
| 5.1. | Transcultural Spaces | 124 |
| 5.2. | The Globalisation of Canadian Literature: the Case of the Chinese Canadian Short Story | 144 |
| 6. | The Native Canadian Story in English | 157 |
| 6.1. | Thomas King's Shifting Shades of Humour | 162 |
| 6.2. | Multiple Native Voices: Drew Hayden Taylor, Lee Maracle and Eden Robinson | 179 |
| 6.3. | Native Canadian Stories vs. Stories Composed by Native Canadian Writers: a Re-Consideration of Definitions | 198 |

| | | |
|--------|---|-----|
| 7. | Crossing Boundaries: Unusual Voices and Genre Transgressions | 200 |
| 7.1. | Experimenting with Second-Person Narration | 200 |
| 7.2. | 'Margaret Talks Back': Margaret Atwood's Appeal to the Reader in Her 'Fiction Flashes' | 221 |
| 7.3. | Social Commitment and Postmodernism: Brian Fawcett and George Bowering | 235 |
| 8. | New Developments within the Canadian Short Story Cycle | 250 |
| 8.1. | The Short Story Cycle as a Medium of Life Writing, or: the 'Munrovia Pattern' | 257 |
| 8.1.1. | The Continuation of the 'Munrovia' Pattern: Isabel Huggan's <i>The Elizabeth Stories</i> | 262 |
| 8.1.2. | Experimenting with the 'Munrovia' Pattern: Frances Itani, Margaret Atwood and Connie Barnes Rose | 265 |
| 8.1.3. | Urban Settings: Linda Svendsen and Debbie Howlett | 273 |
| 8.1.4. | New Contexts for the 'Munrovia Pattern': Makeda Silvera, Shyam Selvadurai and David Bezmozgis | 281 |
| 8.1.5. | New 'Munrovia' Patterns: <i>The View from Castle Rock</i> | 292 |
| 8.2. | Polyvocality and the Rendering of the Experience of Migration | 298 |
| 8.2.1. | A Polyphony of Voices: Rohinton Mistry, M. G. Vassanji, Nalini Warriar, Rachna Mara and David Waltner-Toews | 301 |
| 8.2.2. | Collective Characters: Terry Watada's <i>Daruma Days</i> and Judy Fong Bates's <i>China Dog and Other Tales from a Chinese Laundry</i> | 324 |
| 8.3. | Contemporary Short Story Cycles of Place: Michael Winter's <i>One Last Good Look</i> and George Szanto's <i>The Underside of Stones</i> | 331 |
| 9. | Instead of a Conclusion: 'Loose Ends' | 345 |
| | Works Cited | 349 |
| | Index | 374 |

1. INTRODUCTION

*“Alice Munro’s Nobel win shows the short story is in rude health.”*¹

In the 1960s and 70s, the short story became what Wayne Grady has called “Canada’s healthiest and most versatile literary genre.”² In the 1980s, Michelle Gadpaille still saw the short story as an “exceptionally strong genre of Canadian literature”³, a view which was also held and extended by Helmut Bonheim, who regards the short story as the “most active ambassador of Canadian literature abroad.”⁴ A similarly emphatic statement concerning the importance of the short story for CanLit came from Aritha van Herk in the late 1990s, when she said that “[s]hort stories can truly call themselves the heartbeat of Canadian literature, in so far as they collapse the erratic, the elemental, and the reluctant into a version of multiplicitous and wildly contaminatory fiction.”⁵ The agreement about the prominent position of the short story in Canada, which is shared by critics within as well as outside Canada, also continues in the new millennium. In her introduction to *The Canadian Short Story*, a collection of essays on representative Canadian short stories, Reingard Nischik argues that “[t]he short story is today generally considered to be a particularly vital genre, if not the flagship genre of Canadian literature.”⁶ William H. New comes to a similar conclusion in his survey of the short story from the 1960s to the present for the *Cambridge History of Canadian Literature* (2009):

In 1965, recognizing that publishers had released relatively few short story collections during the previous decade, the *Literary History of Canada* predicted that the genre was dying. Instead, short fiction thrived, copious and flexible. By the first decade of the

¹ Louise Doughty (2013). “Alice Munro’s Nobel win shows the short story is in rude health”. *Telegraph* (11 October). www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/booknews/10372169/Alice-Munros-Nobel-win-shows-the-short-story-is-in-rude-health.html#disqus_thread. Accessed 12 October 2013.

² Wayne Grady (1980). “Preface”. In: W. G., ed. *The Penguin Book of Canadian Short Stories*. Harmondsworth: Penguin. vi.

³ Michelle Gadpaille (1988). *The Canadian Short Story*. Toronto: Oxford University Press. vii.

⁴ Helmut Bonheim (1980-81). “Topoi of the Canadian Short Story”. *Dalhousie Review* 60. 4: 659. Cf. also W. J. Keith (1985), who claims in his literary history that “[s]ome of the most notable fiction in Canada is now written in the short story form.” *Canadian Literature in English*. London: Longman. 170.

⁵ Aritha van Herk (1999). “Scant Articulations of Time”. *University of Toronto Quarterly* 68. 4: 925.

⁶ Reingard M. Nischik (2007c). “The Canadian Short Story: Status, Criticism, Historical Survey”. In: R. N., ed. *The Canadian Short Story. Interpretations*. Rochester: Camden House. 1.

twenty-first century approximately fifty collections were appearing every year, the increase in numbers coinciding with social growth, changes in the means of production, and extended critical attention. While markets for the genre remained fragile, short fiction nevertheless became more visible and more varied, with publishers seeking further ways to attract commercial attention and new writers keen to address readers in a different manner and voice.⁷

What is also noteworthy and further confirms the vitality of the short story form in Canada is the astonishing number of short story anthologies which have appeared over the past few decades.⁸ More recent examples would be *The Faber Book of Contemporary Canadian Short Stories* (1990) edited by Michael Ondaatje, *The New Oxford Book of Canadian Short Stories in English* (1997) edited by Margaret Atwood and Robert Weaver, *The Penguin Anthology of Stories of Canadian Women* (1997), edited by Denise Chong and followed in 2006 by *The Penguin Book of Contemporary Canadian Women's Short Stories* edited by Lisa Moore, Joan Thomas's and Heidi Harms's 1999 anthology *Turn of the Story. Canadian Short Fiction on the Eve of the Millennium* and Jane Urquhart's *Penguin Book of Canadian Short Stories* (2007). Apart from these more general anthologies, numerous collections have appeared which focus on specific regions, ethno-cultural backgrounds, gender and questions of individual identity, including sexual identity. Another indicator of the special position of the short story in Canada can be seen in the relatively large number of authors who have made short fiction their major genre, as illustrated by the oeuvre of writers such as Mavis Gallant (1922-2014), Norman Levine (1923-2005), William D. Valgardson and, of course, Alice Munro, the 2013 winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature. That the first Canadian writer to win this most prestigious literary award⁹ is a writer who has devoted herself exclusively to the short story must indeed be seen as an indicator that this form "is now having an undisputable renaissance."¹⁰ It moreover confirms the observations of so many critics (including myself) that the short story indeed holds a prominent position in Canada and that many of the foremost practitioners of the short story are women.

In the face of this ongoing and increasing significance of short fiction in Canada, the present study offers a cross-section of recent developments of this genre along narratological and thematic lines. By tracing narrative modes of mediation, recurring

⁷ William H. New (2009). "The Short Story". In: Coral Ann Howells and Eva-Marie Kröller, eds. *The Cambridge History of Canadian Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 381. New refers to Carl F. Klinck's (1965). *Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 704-706.

⁸ As Reingard M. Nischik observes, "anthologies of Canadian short stories have appeared at an unusual rate even by international standards, which testifies to the prominent position of the short story on the Canadian literary scene." Nischik 2007c. 19.

⁹ Saul Bellow, who received the Nobel Prize in 1976, was born in Canada but is largely considered a US-American author as he left Canada at the age of nine.

¹⁰ Doughty 2013.