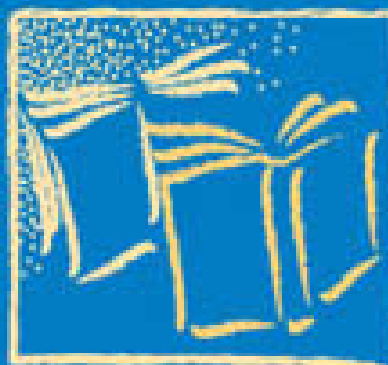


# RECONFIGURATIONS

Canadian Literatures  
and Postcolonial Identities /

Littératures canadiennes et  
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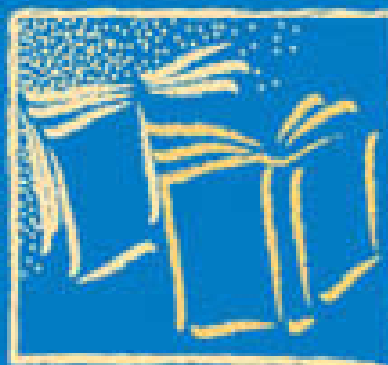


Edited by / Sous la direction de  
MARC MAUFORT  
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## **Introduction: Postcolonial Variations on a Canadian Theme**

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*Université Libre de Bruxelles*

The essays collected in this volume offer meditations on the reconfigurations of the meaning of “Canadianness” at work in contemporary Canadian Anglophone or Francophone letters. The elusiveness of Canadian identity and the concomitant quest for such identity have been repeatedly underlined by critics as a defining characteristic of Canadian literature. Since the 1960s and 1970s, abundant reformulations of this search for selfhood have emerged in the Canadian literary landscape. The lack of identity and the victim status, deplored by Margaret Atwood, have been superseded by the multicultural diversity of the last decades of the century. Even more recently, in what Uma Parameswaran has termed a post-postcolonial age, it would appear appropriate to speak of diasporic Canadian identities and literatures, which further points to the ever-shifting nature of “Canadianness.” Being Canadian consists in a process of constant renegotiations of cultural boundaries. The essays published here, therefore, consider the concept of “Canadian identity” as a site of contestation, suggesting re-definitions of the commonly accepted paradigms not only of Canadian literature in particular, but also of postcolonialism in general.

Taken together, the contributions to this volume explore this much-debated issue from a comparative perspective while seeking to abandon the Eurocentric bias of traditional comparative literature studies. These articles analyze and compare late-twentieth-century reconfigurations of what Hugh MacLennan termed Canada’s “two solitudes.” They also shed light on recent postcolonial reconstructions of Canada’s “other solitudes,” to borrow Linda Hutcheon’s well-known designation of Canada’s diverse multicultural fabric. Hence the decision to use the plural “identities” in the subtitle of this volume, thereby indicating the contributors’ efforts to illuminate the multi-faceted literary developments that have affected the Canadian mosaic in recent years. These essays examine the complexity of the literary representations of

Canada's many "Others" in a pattern evocative of the musical genre of variations.

The study of marginal hybridity is launched by Francophone novelist Marie-Célie Agnant's testimony. In it, she discusses the dilemma of being a Caribbean Canadian author, who is regarded by the two societies to which she belongs as a "marginal" writer. Agnant's autobiographical account is supplemented by Lucie Lequin's scholarly treatment of her literary production to date. Marta Dvorak's essay extends this discussion into a wider analysis of contemporary Canadian autobiographical writing. Reverting to Quebec literature in particular, Janet Paterson introduces the motif of multicultural fiction, so central to the book as a whole. Marie-Linda Lord's contribution focuses on an all-too-often neglected aspect of the Canadian mosaic design, i.e. the Acadian literature of New Brunswick. Robert S. Schwartzwald's essay deals with the theoretical issue of the definition of postcolonialism in the context of contemporary Quebec literature. This theoretical thrust is prolonged in Uma Parameswaran's own testimonial about the pedagogical challenges of teaching Canadian minority literatures. Her "highway" metaphor, which she innovatively uses to point to the complex ramifications of Canadian postcolonialism, is subtly counterpointed by Diana Brydon's "roots/routes" metaphor in the latter's treatment of the Black Atlantic in Canadian literature. Gery Turcotte's essay focuses on a major text from the Asian Canadian constituency, Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*, on which it offers a fresh comparative perspective, suggesting parallels with Australian literature. Both Coral Ann Howells and Jeanne Delbaere follow in Turcotte's footsteps, providing illuminating close-reading considerations of writings by various South Asian artists. Reid Gilbert's essay echoes the theoretical debates introduced by Schwartzwald, Parameswaran, and Brydon, which he applies to formal innovations in the field of drama. Further, Lane's and Shackleton's articles shed new light on the novelistic and dramatic output of one of the most prominent of today's First Nations writers in Canada, i.e. Tomson Highway. Finally, Sherrill Grace reconsiders Canadian identity in connection with the seminal myth of the North, thus offering an apt, future-oriented conclusion to the whole volume.

The scholarly reconfigurations of this volume can be construed as unsettling postcolonial variations on a Canadian theme. In their transgressive re-interpretations of "Canadianness," they are comparable in intent, albeit on a much more modest artistic scale, to Beethoven's "Diabelli Variations." While the wonderful piano variations of the classical master boldly transmogrify an old-fashioned eighteenth-century waltz into a complex and innovative romantic construct, the

essays gathered here daringly challenge the conventional critical and theoretical assumptions of postcolonial studies to explore the territory ahead in Canadian literature.