

Cynthia Sugars and Eleanor Ty, eds. 2014. *Canadian Literature and Cultural Memory*. Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford UP. xv + 512 pp. ISBN: 978-0-19900-759-2.

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As an emerging discipline, cultural memory studies has become a focus of critical attention over the past three decades, pointing to the importance of memory in the assessment of cultural movements and trajectories (Elrr 2008, 1). *Canadian Literature and Cultural Memory*, edited by Cynthia Sugars and Eleanor Ty, is a collection of essays oriented to the exploration of cultural memory and its representation in several forms of Canadian literature and other cultural productions. Canada emerges as a complex site of cultural and historical contestation from these critical approaches, which seems especially relevant since geography has been privileged over history in the Canadian context as signifier for cultural identifications. As Robert Fulford has put it, “[h]istory strives earnestly to teach us its enduring lessons, but in Canada geography is our real teacher, the one to which we must listen with the greatest care” (1995, 51). More recently, however, the uses and representations of historical pasts and memory have attracted the attention of Canadianist scholars. Erin Peters’ contribution to Russell J. A. Kilbourn and Eleanor Ty’s *The Memory Effect: The Remediation of Memory in Literature and Film* (2013) focuses on the tensions that emerge when Canadian collective memory (or lack thereof) is deployed to mediate constructions of Canadian nationalism. Also, works such as Cecilia Morgan’s *Commemorating Canada: History, Heritage, and Memory, 1850s-1990s* (2016) reflect on Canada’s contested relationship with its history and the diversity of approaches to the memorialisation of the past. These texts show a shift in ontological focus essential to the study of Canada as a coherent cultural unit, whereby notions of the past, history and memory need to be carefully reassessed. Several works concentrate on memory and place, for example *Placing Memory and Remembering Place in Canada* (Opp and Walsh, 2010), and both these aspects feature prominently in Sugars and Ty’s volume. However, in *Canadian Literature and Cultural Memory* both are approached from a literary stance, providing a novel and essential contribution to the ongoing academic dialogue between memory, history and identity in the Canadian context.

The essays in this collection are grouped into five parts, according to the theoretical axes of various critical concepts and routes within the field of cultural memory studies. The first part, entitled “Sites of Memory: Cultural Amnesia and the Demands of Place,” brings together papers focusing on the role of place in processes of memory reconstruction and forgetting, and in readings and counterhegemonic writings of history. Each engages with different notions of place. In chapter one, Tony Tremblay questions the marginalised position of certain rural areas within what he deems the amnesia of global de-territorialisation. Next, Kimberly Mair explores how spatiality produces meaning to the point that historical reproductions may be manipulated to privilege the coloniser’s gaze, even through the place factor in an art gallery devoted to Aboriginal culture. This is followed by Renée Hulan, who redresses Pierre Nora’s (1989) concept of *lieux de mémoire*—sites that serve as commemoration points in order to prevent the loss of historical memory—and transforms it into what he calls *lieux d’oublie*, to refer to the neglect of the Canadian north, inhabited as it is by Aboriginal peoples. In the fourth chapter, Candida Rifkind approaches the specific space of the Canadian company town, ephemeral, manufactured communities whose current disappearance is triggering the recovery, in different forms of art, of their physical and cultural traces. The final chapter of the section, by Brooke Pratt, describes, in a rather straightforward and uncomplicated way, the significance of making Canadian poet Al Purdy’s house part of a National Historic Site, and conserving it as a locus of cultural heritage and landmark for historical tourism.

Part II, “Memory Transference: Postmemory, Re-memory, and Forgetting,” has chapters dealing with different mechanisms of remembering, forgetting, and the inter- and trans-generational circulation of memories, often of memories which are burdensome or hard to handle. Robert Zacharias’s essay introduces food as a fundamental element in the way migrants and their descendants remember their homeland and cultural heritage. More specifically, he discusses how food is one of the last vestiges of their culture that Mennonites retain in urban settings, where almost all other markers of a Mennonite identity are gone. Chapter seven, by Marlene Goldman, turns to the rather complex concept of “transference.” Taken from psychoanalysis and connected to Marianne Hirsh’s ideas on postmemory—which refers to the experiences of subjects who have inherited, though not directly lived themselves, traumatic memories (2008)—it describes the processes of projection and displacement of traumatic memories within different generations. Likewise, in the following paper, Linda Warley analyses personal and familial transmission of memories and knowledge; and how these individual acts of remembering may influence the way socio-cultural paradigms of class divisions and capitalism are constructed. The ninth chapter, by J. A. Weingarten, also employs a theoretical framework of postmemory to shrewdly speak about a literary shift during the 1970s which involved moving from the construction of national narratives during the confederation centennial (1967), to the tendency of addressing microhistories

as repository of cultural memory. These microhistories were seen as an alternative reading of history to nationalist overarching discourses which failed to acknowledge particularity and difference. Tanis MacDonald's essay introduces another useful concept, that of rememory, first used by Toni Morrison (1990) to describe how the past, and especially violent or troublesome pasts, remains alive in people's memories. MacDonald explores the risks of appropriation and the intricacy of issues of authenticity, both of which are pervasive and contested elements in the writing and re-writing, forgetting and remembering of indigenous voices. Finally, Cynthia Sugars addresses questions of remembering, nostalgia and the transmission—or, at times, frustrated transmission—of transgenerational memories through the investment of memories, stories and history in tangible objects: memorabilia, heirlooms, etc.

Part III, entitled “Re-Membering History: Memory Work as Recovery,” comprises seven chapters framed around the retrieving of lost narratives or sections of history which have been neglected or erased from official or canonical versions. Mark Fortin's paper raises some issues that could enter in conversation with the ideas in Mair's chapter, regarding the Aboriginal figure as archived in the past tense. Also, like Tanis MacDonald, Fortin tackles questions of appropriation and the dichotomy of authentic/inauthentic knowledge; as well as the distinction between written and oral epistemologies and how the ever increasing loss of the latter affects the recognition of Aboriginal memory and history in legal contexts. In chapter thirteen, Peter Hodgins analyses Archibald Lampman's poetry (1861-1899), and connects his premature mourning for the loss of natural environments to later postcolonial involvement with the disappearance of First Nations peoples and their cultures. Next, Jesse Rae Archibald-Barber offers a twofold analysis of Pauline Johnson's poetry (1861-1913): she explores personal memory in Johnson's lyric poetry, on the one hand, and questions of cultural memory in her memorial odes on the other, thereby revealing how connections between these two aspects of poetry and memory have impacted Aboriginal peoples' representation in and exclusion from history. The next chapter, by Sophie McCall addresses the exceptional condition of the indigenous diaspora through reviewing the itinerant life of indigenous writer Anahareo (1906-1986). McCall aptly reconsiders a personal family story which was affected by Anahareo's diasporic status, her urban connections and in short, her non-conformity with expected patterns of indigeneity. Shelley Hulan's essay constitutes an unconventional approach to certain texts by Alice Munro, one that seeks to explore allusions, interpretations and inscriptions of Aboriginal peoples in her work. The last two chapters deal with the same contested subject: the Great War is considered in anglophone contexts as a historical event which marks the transition of Canada from colony to nation, and, consequently, commemorations of the war usually imply a celebratory mindset and the exultation of Canada's heroic participation, instilled with a sense of pride and patriotism. This contrasts with the 1918 Quebec Riots, which were forgotten as part of this process of nationalist encumbering. The oppression

suffered by Quebecers due to their dissent in relation to participating in the war was forgotten; and worse, the fact that the Great War drove a socio-cultural and political chasm between French and English Canada is completely subsumed under the dominant, celebratory version. Dennis Duffy's treatment of this historical distortion is through an interesting comparison of the representation of Quebec in two best-sellers. Marissa McHugh's chapter connects these same riots with the October Crisis of Quebec in 1970, addressing in this way the issue of privileged versions of history, and the impact that remembering the riots has had for present-day Quebecers and their collective mourning of past, forgotten events.

The four chapters in part IV, "The Compulsion to Remember: Trauma and Witnessing," foreground the necessary juxtaposition and integration of remembering and the diametrically opposed act of forgetting. Robyn Morris' chapter is a balanced, well informed paper on a novel which narrates the experiences of a Cambodian genocide survivor now living in Canada. Morris explains that acts of individual forgetting and remembering in cases of trauma and repression affect not only the personal, but also the collective, i.e., the community who suffered the genocide, as well as, she alludes, beyond the lived experience in terms of the empathy and awareness that may arise in those who access these traumas through literature. The following chapter, written by Farah Moosa, analyses David Chariandy's novel *Soucouyant* (2007), and posits forgetting as a necessary and even desirable act in an attempt to overcome traumatic pasts. However, this becomes more complicated in the context of second-generation diasporans who are compelled to negotiate and balance processes of remembering and forgetting as part of the construction of their cultural identity. The last two chapters in this part are both concerned with the institution of the residential school system, designed for the education of Aboriginal children and effective from the last part of the nineteenth until the end of the twentieth century. Doris Wolf's paper focuses on a graphic novel which narrates the intergenerational trauma provoked by colonisation, the practice of abuse and assimilation in the residential school system and its legacies in the descendants of those who underwent these struggles. Robyn Green's chapter concludes, through the analysis of Richard Van Camp's novella *The Lesser Blessed* (2004) that reconciliation should not be taken for granted, even though it has been recently acknowledged that policies of assimilation have been highly destructive for Aboriginal peoples. She proposes that effective action to redesign pedagogical curricula should be considered one of the first priorities in order to amend and redirect the course of Aboriginal culture policies.

Finally, part V, "Cultural Memory in a Globalized Age," comprises five chapters oriented to how discourses of diaspora and transnationalism (past and contemporary) become central in the configuration of personal and cultural memories. Alexis Motuz's paper examines Dionne Brand's collection of poems *Inventory* (2006) as a sort of elegy for global deaths caused by humankind. As Motuz describes, Brand's mourning process is expressed in transgressive ways, that is, the elegy does not follow the standard pattern

of mourning and consolation. Rather, it seeks to draw attention to the importance of empathy and denounces the way the media dehumanises catastrophes and death on a global scale. Joel Baetz's chapter focuses on Brand's novel *What We All Long For* (2008). Whereas urban space in this novel has been read as a liberating milieu for the main characters to leave their pasts behind and thrive in the multicultural, diverse possibilities of the city and its anonymity, Baetz suggests that the memory (or rather, the postmemory) of diasporic experiences that they carry with them cannot be completely and effectively left behind. In the third chapter of this section, Eva Darias-Beautell points out how current Canadian literary criticism has been oriented towards the theoretical arena of hauntology. This is understood as the writing back of a hidden, suppressed, or absented history that haunts accepted and canonical versions. The exploration of these mechanisms in a globalised context becomes a valuable addition to the debate, and an important point of departure for future conversations on inclusive histories and national narratives. Jennifer Andrews approaches the question of Canada's complex postcolonial condition, which, coupled with politics of cultural memory, the erasure of histories and the processes of recovery, constitutes a very promising and challenging notion to explore in relation to literature. The last chapter in this part, written by Pilar Cuder-Domínguez deals with transnational memory as reflected in the novel *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne* (2004), by Esi Edugyan, where tensions and cultural/identity conflicts between different Black Canadian diasporas are underlined by the haunting of memories and cultural legacies, whose presence affects these communities in diverse ways.

It becomes clear from these essays that memory, remembering and forgetting are not simply personal/individual acts of story and history transmission and preservation. This body of critical work emphasises, repeatedly and in different contexts, that processes of recovery, amnesia and historical representation are highly politicised: personal memories and their inclusions in history are not always accessible to certain sectors of society and systemic intervention plays a central role in the construction of a cultural memory which is often exclusionary. These essays show the importance of redressing the past, of reclaiming lost agency within this complex interplay of remembering and forgetting in order to achieve a nuanced and heterogeneous perspective on Canada's cultural memories. As such, the book constitutes a balanced, well informed collection of essays, where perhaps the most notable absences are a chapter on Joy Kogawa's seminal *Obasan* (1981), one of the works of literature which has been most influential in revising Canadian history and national narratives, or a paper addressing the lost and later commemorated site of Africville. Aside from this, and the fact that some authors struggle at times to connect individual memories with broader, regional or national repercussions—I believe this is especially the case in Peter Hodgins' and Shelley Hulan's chapters, whose narrow focus fail to address wider concerns—this volume is a necessary and thought-provoking compilation for both the fields of cultural memory and Canadian literature.

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Received 15 June 2016

Revised version accepted 13 December 2016

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