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Refractions of Germany in Canadian Literature and Culture
(review)

Alexander Freund

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This recording is potentially useful in a number of different areas of the discipline of German Studies. In Ricarda Huch studies, for example, a discussion of the statement in the CD booklet that Ullmann “strengthened the prevailing mood of the poetry, and added new components to it” (14) could be very fruitful. In addition, Ullmann’s editing of Rilke’s text and its effect on the work promises a fascinating project, while Ullmann’s entire biography offers a particularly compelling instance of an artist’s confrontation with National Socialism and the Holocaust. Given an academic climate that actively promotes interdisciplinarity, it is wonderful to find a recording that brings music and *Germanistik* together in so many ways.

SHARON KREBS *Independent Scholar, Victoria, British Columbia*

Heinz Antor, Sylvia Brown, John Considine, Klaus Stierstorfer, eds. *Refractions of Germany in Canadian Literature and Culture*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003. 377 pp. Euro 108 (Hardcover). ISBN 3-11-017666-1.

Germany and Germans figure in Canada’s literary consciousness in complex ways. Canadian and German literary critics explore some of these “refractions” in this important collection. The seventeen essays, originating as presentations at a conference in Banff, Alberta, in 2002, are carefully edited and, essentially, of evenly high quality. They are grouped in three sections: “Diaspora and Settledness,” “Jewish Experience and the Holocaust,” and “Literature and Cultural Exchange.” These themes are “refracted” rather than merely summarized in John Considine’s introduction and in an essay/poem by Robert Kroetsch.

In the first two essays of section one, Sylvia Brown and Anna Wittmann claim German immigrants’ oral histories about flight, displacement, and eventual settlement in Canada during and after WWII as Canadian literature. Brown examines her father’s and other Prussian-Germans’ stories and silences about the loss of *Heimat*. Juxtaposing fiction and oral history, Wittmann investigates East European Germans’ continually shifting identities in times of war and migration. While it is unclear how the life stories are shaped by the Canadian experience, it is clear that their marginalization has shaped the two authors. Thus both articles are expressions of second generation German-Canadians finding their voice in Canadian society. Peter Webb echoes this political motivation in his carefully crafted rehabilitation of Martin Blecher, a German-American living part-time in Ontario, who until recently has been suspected by Germanophobic Anglo-Canadians of murdering Canadian painter Tom Thomson in 1917. The next three essays pick up the idea of constructing a German-Canadian cultural memory. Considine analyzes Jack Thiessen’s Mennonite dictionaries as an archive of language and thus as a (or the) *Heimat* for Mennonites. Others felt that “home” could or even should be religious rather than ethnic, as is evident in Thomas Mengel’s descriptive analysis of “Der deutsche Katholik in Kanada (1964–1993).” That identity and *Heimat* are socially contested concepts is evidenced by Heinz Antor’s useful examination not only of the impact of Rudy Wiebe’s Mennonite heritage on his writings but also of his writings about Mennonites on Canadian society. Wiebe writes against truisms held about and by Mennonites.

The Holocaust is at the center of section two, in which four scholars from Germany examine Jewish Canadians' writings. Axel Stähler investigates the journalistic and fictional writings of A. M. Klein, whose Zionist view of Jewish identity and history was deeply shaped by his critical understanding of post-Holocaust Germany, and vice versa. Henry Kreisel's view of the Holocaust, Nazi Germany, and postwar Germany is much less straightforward. Klaus Stierstorfer shows that Kreisel's writings, e.g. *Betrayal*, are informed by his experience as both a refugee from Austria and an immigrant on the Canadian prairie. Even more ambiguous, as Laurenz Volkmann shows, is Leonard Cohen's Holocaust poetry. Seen by some critics as Holocaust trivialization, poems such as "Flowers for Hitler" have been understood by others as intelligent interventions in the discussion about poetry after Auschwitz. Canadian playwrights have reflected on the Holocaust, as Albert Reiner Glaap documents in his analysis of contemporary plays, in order to deal with personal issues such as the troubling quest for vengeance and political issues such as Canada's failure to accept Jewish refugees in the 1930s.

The first two essays in section three continue the analysis of Canadian authors' writings about the Nazi legacy. Annette Kern-Stähler juxtaposes Mavis Gallant's writings about postwar Germany and Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich's socio-psychological study *The Inability to Mourn* to show that there continued to be reminders of the war and the Holocaust in German society because it repressed the Nazi past. Writing from the social position of the child of German and Jamaican immigrants, Suzette Mayr enters the debate from yet another perspective, as Doris Wolf emphasizes. In *The Widows*, three generations of German-Canadian women reestablish mother-daughter relationships ("motherlines") that had been broken by migration and the history of Nazism and racism and engage in *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* within a specifically Canadian and immigrant setting. The next two essays, which are on Jane Urquhart's *The Stone Carvers*, continue the theme of German-Canadians' interaction with German and Canadian history. Gordon Bölling analyzes the two German-Canadian protagonists' role in the shaping of Canadian history around the Battle of Vimy Ridge. James Skidmore examines Urquhart's use of German stories and literary forms – which he calls the "German cultural imaginary" – to craft Canadian literature. Two different kinds of cultural exchange are the subject of the last two essays. Jörg Esleben reconstructs the Canadian reception of Goethe's *Faust* between 1834 and 1970 and shows Canadian society's use of *Faust* performances as foils for negotiating contemporary social issues and national identity. Eva-Marie Kröller's essay about the influences of German history and Canadian landscape on the design of the new Canadian embassy in Berlin expands the understanding of Canadian literature.

Overall, this collection documents the complex and fragmented refractions of Germany and Germans in some of Canada's many literatures.