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OLD/NEW STORIES—OLD/NEW GENRE: CANADIAN HISTORIOGRAPHIC ETHNOFICTION REVISITED IN PIK-SHUEN FUNG'S *GHOST FOREST*

Abstract. Canadian literature has been marked by a type of writing, which grounded in historiographic recollections of immigration and (ethnic) identity, has been generally classified as ethnic (minority) or diasporic writing. Yet, in the 1990s, Janice Kulyk Keefer, Ukrainian-Canadian writer, suggested the term "historiographic ethnofiction" which offers much more than the customarily applied generic labels as it captures the richness of works discussing ethnicity. Thus, the concept, so far unattended by critics, deserves attention as a productive tool of generic classification that sheds new light on how ethnic writing could be approached in a more systemic way. To illustrate its potential, this article aims at reading a recent Asian-Canadian work, *Ghost Forest* (2021), by Pik-Shuen Fung, as an example of contemporary Canadian historiographic ethnofiction that both follows and extends Kulyk Keefer's conceptualization of this generic term.

Keywords: Canadian literature; historiographic ethnofiction; ethnicity; history; story

STARE/NOWE HISTORIE – STARY/NOWY GATUNEK: REWIZJA KANADYJSKIEJ ETNOFIKCJI HISTORIOGRAFICZNEJ W *GHOST FOREST* (*LAS DUCHÓW*) AUTORSTWA PIK-SHUEN FUNG

Abstrakt. Literatura kanadyjska wyróżnia się typem pisarstwa, które opiera się na historiograficznych wspomnieniach o imigracji i tożsamości (etnicznej). Jest ono zazwyczaj klasyfikowane jako pisarstwo etniczne (mniejszościowe) lub diasporyczne. Jednak w latach 90. XX wieku Janice Kulyk Keefer, ukraińsko-kanadyjska pisarka, zaproponowała pojęcie historiograficzna etnofikcja", które oferuje znacznie więcej niż zwyczajowo stosowane określenia gatunkowe, ponieważ oddaje bogactwo dzieł poruszających tematykę etniczną. Koncepcja ta, dotychczas pomijana przez krytyków, zasługuje więc na uwagę jako narzędzie służące do klasyfikacji gatunkowej, które pozwala podchodzić do pisarstwa etnicznego w sposób bardziej systemowy. Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu zobrazowanie jego potencjału poprzez analizę niedawnego dzieła literatury azjatycko-kanadyjskiej autorstwa Pik-Shuen Fung, *Ghost Forest* (2021; *Las duchów*), jako przykładu współczesnej kana-

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dyjskiej historiograficznej etnofikcji, która wyraża, jak i poszerza sformułowanie terminu gatunkowego zaproponowanego przez Kulyk Keefer.

Słowa kluczowe: literatura kanadyjska; historiograficzna etnofikcja; tożsamość etniczna; historia; opowieść

Canadian literature has been marked by a type of writing which, diverse in terms of the temporal and spatial contexts, is grounded in historiographic literary recollections[1] and recreations of immigration as well as (ethnic) identity issues revolving around it. Although the genre is characteristically identifiable in Canadian literature, it has not received any specific name that would define it apart from what it has become to be widely recognized as ethnic (minority) or diasporic writing.[2] And yet, writing paratextually about her novel *The Green Library* (1996) in the late 1990s, Janice Kulyk Keefer, Canadian writer of Ukrainian descent, suggested a term "historiographic ethnofiction" to name a type of writing that, similarly to her own literary endeavours, redefines ethnicity by reflecting upon individual and communal experiences of migration through a thorough revision of history.[3]

[1] Renée Hulan, "Reading Historiography and Historical Fiction in Twentieth-Century Canada," in *The Oxford Handbook of Canadian Literature*, ed. Cynthia Sugars (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 760–98.

[2] Examining the use of the nomenclature for this particular type of Canadian writing reveals the intersection of language, literature, and culture that is a highly politically charged field; see my introduction to *Land Deep in Time: Canadian Historiographic Ethnofiction*, ed. Weronika Suchacka and Hartmut Lutz (V&R unipress, 2023), 33n24). For the variety of its designations as well as their changing application, see, e.g., Anna Branach-Kallas, "Literatura Wielokulturowa? Diasporyczna? Transkanadyjska? Transkulturowość we współczesnej literaturze kanadyjskiej," *Klonowanie Kanady*, ed. Eugenia Sojka, special issue, *ER(R)GO*no. 17 (2008): 37, https://journals.us.edu.pl/index.php/ERRGO/article/view/2515/1807; Smaro Kamboureli, introduction to *Making a Difference: Canadian Multicultural Literatures in English*, ed. Smaro Kamboureli (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 3; Agnieszka Rzepa, "Recent (Re)Visions of CanLit," *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* 55 (2020): 278, https://repozytorium.amu.edu.pl/handle/10593/26114; Eleanor Ty and Christl Verduyn, introduction to *Asian Canadian Writing Beyond Autoethnography*, ed. Eleanor Ty and Christl Verduyn (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008), 22n1. For the preconceived, essentialist notions commonly ascribed to such terms as "ethnic", "ethnicity", and "ethnic literature/writing", see R. Radhakrishnan, "Ethnic Studies in the Age of Transnationalism," *PMLA* 122, no. 3 (2007): 809, https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812900087356; and Sander L. Gilman, "Introduction: Ethnicity–Ethnicities–Literature–Literatures," *PMLA* 113, no. 1 (1998): 25, https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812900060995.

[3] Janice Kulyk Keefer, "'Coming Across Bones': Historiographic Ethnofiction," in *Writing Ethnicity: Cross-Cultural Consciousness in Canadian and Québécois Literature*, ed. Winfried Siemerling (Toronto: ECW, 1996), 84–85, 89–90. The explication of Kulyk Keefer's term as provided

Despite the fact that Kulyk Keefer's ideas were put forth in the late 1990s' debate on ethnicity, they are by no means obsolete because her insistence on approaching ethnicity through history counters a discourse that diminishes the meaning of historical recognition, which has become a ubiquitous practice in the contemporary world, including the Canadian context in the past and present.[4] Read as an urgent socio-political perspective, Kulyk Keefer's persistence on contextualizing ethnicity within hi/story is, however, suggested here primarily as a literary possibility encapsulated in the writer's generic term "historiographic ethnofiction" that is seen here as a productive literary tool for classifying a vast array of Canadian literary works created within the same spirit, if not tradition.

The aim of this article is thus to delineate the concept and its possibilities by first defining the term, which would require going back to its origins as specified by Kulyk Keefer in her seminal essay "'Coming Across Bones': Historiographic Ethnofiction" (1995), as well as to Kulyk Keefer's novel, *The Green Library* (1996). Finally, this preliminary discussion of Kulyk Keefer's theoretical ideas and her literary practice of historiographic ethnofiction will reinforce the analysis of another work of fiction, a recent Canadian debut work *Ghost Forest* (2021) by Pik-Shuen Fung. Reading Fung's novel as a possible example of Canadian historiographic ethnofiction is to explore how and to what extent the category put forward by Kulyk Keefer in the late 1990s is applicable to the analysis of a contemporary work of Canadian literature.

1. WRITING HISTORIOGRAPHIC ETHNOFICTION: VISIONS

In "'Coming Across Bones: Historiographic Ethnofiction'", Kulyk Keefer presents her core methodological principles of writing ethnicity embedded in her concept of historiographic ethnofiction that delineates history as a primary factor in defining ethnicity. Specifying her premise, the writer explains that

here is based on my understanding and discussion of it in the introduction to *Land Deep in Time*, 36–42, where Kulyk Keefer's statements quoted here can also be found. However, this article goes further in the analysis of the genre by defining its specific features and applying them in the discussion of Fung's work. It should also be mentioned here that I presented an abridged version of this article as a paper entitled "Old/New Stories – Old/New Genre? Ethnicity, Hi/Story, and Canadian Historiographic Ethnofiction Revisited" at the 10th Triennial Central European Association for Canadian Studies (CEACS) Conference on Canadian Studies in Central Europe at the University of Maribor, Slovenia, on September 14, 2024.

[4] Suchacka, introduction to *Land Deep in Time*, 38.

history is to be considered on its two levels simultaneously; therefore, both "personal and public, private and collective" accounts need to be taken equally into consideration.[5] Thus, it is only such an interpretation of history that allows the writer to examine the meaning of ethnicity on its discursive level of "literary ethnicity", defined by Kulyk Keefer as "the imaginative exploration and inscription of ethnic experience".[6]

Such a double perspective in understanding history as a key marker of ethnicity goes parallel with duality that should also delineate not only a temporal but also spatial context in the focus of the literary outlook adopted by the writer of ethnicity. Consequently, according to Kulyk Keefer, the writer of ethnicity should develop what she calls "the Janus-faced, split vision" as such a perspective facilitates the writer's attempts to be "engaged not only with the invention of ethnicity in a new-world, or *ad quem* context but also … with the *a quo* old world or country of origin, ancestral or immediate".[7] This approach is thus indispensable in practising the "aesthetics of writing ethnicity" which, in Kulyk Keefer's view, becomes a vital element of the writer's ethics in handling the subject matter that involves "confront[ing] and struggl[ing] with the history, both private and public, of her 'ethnos'".[8]

These main specifications of Kulyk Keefer's ideas presented in her essay are evident in *The Green Library* (1996), which, as she admits, is her own literary practice of historiographic ethnofiction.[9] As the writer explains, *The Green Library* "has for its protagonist a woman who, having grown up as a WASP Canadian, suddenly discovers that she is half-Ukrainian".[10] Learning the truth about her belonging opens up for the protagonist, as Kulyk Keefer states elsewhere, "the vortex of context"[11] hushed in both her family stories and communal history. In this way, Kulyk Keefer follows in her novel her "aesthetic of writing ethnicity" through referring to "history in … [this] twofold sense."[12] Exploring "literary ethnicity" in her novel, Kulyk Keefer sets the idea of her plot in the aforementioned "Janus-faced vision" by having her protagonist travel to Ukraine and back to Canada, recreating in a reversed

[5] Kulyk Keefer, "Coming Across Bones," 84.
[6] Kulyk Keefer, 85.
[7] Kulyk Keefer, 85.
[8] Kulyk Keefer, 101.
[9] Kulyk Keefer, 84.
[10] Kulyk Keefer, 84.
[11] Janice Kulyk Keefer, *Honey and Ashes: A Story of Family* (Toronto: HarperFlamingoCanada, 1998), 5.
[12] Kulyk Keefer, "Coming Across Bones," 84.

order her ancestral journey that also becomes part of her personal story. Thus, crossing borders literally and metaphorically, Kulyk Keefer's protagonist rediscovers her own ethnic identity by uncovering truths and lies that both her family stories and ethnic history involve.[13]

The Green Library encapsulates Kulyk Keefer's ideas of writing ethnicity by following the premises the writer specified as defining the genre. Therefore, the novel can be seen if not as a prototype, then as a referential model for Canadian historiographic ethnofiction. Consequently, analyzing the novel on a narrative level, at least three main characteristics can be suggested as paradigmatic for this genre. The first feature involves ontological issues that revolve around identity; hence, the plot is defined by a dynamic protagonist whose self is questioned, which inflicts upon her a state of anxiety, or at least uncertainty, that clearly marks the process of her transformation. The second feature, which may be a cause, an effect, or both, of the first component, distinguishes a plot and characterization that significantly entail bordercrossing vitally in its both senses, i.e. a literal movement in the form of a journey, and a metaphorical passage that involves an experiential transformation of the protagonist and/or other characters. The third feature is a necessary consequence of the first two as it constitutes the protagonist's confrontation of past and present narratives on both a historical and familial level, which probes necessarily a present status quo of the protagonist. A quintessential aspect of this feature involves a representation of an idea or practice of writing ethnicity and/or writing it down, so that the element of literary recording is crucially emphasized.

2. WRITING HISTORIOGRAPHIC ETHNOFICTION: RE/VISIONS

Reviewing ethnic/diasporic Canadian writing at least since the 1980s, we can point to instances of literary works that are modelled on this identifiable paradigm. These include, for example, *Obasan* (1981) by Joy Kogawa or *Necessary Lies* (2000) by Eva Stachniak.[14] But one of the most recent works of Canadian literature that demonstrates features characteristic for historiographic ethnofiction is a debut novel from 2021, *Ghost Forest*, written by Pik-Shuen

[13] For my analysis of Kulyk Keefer's novel, see Suchacka, *"*Za Hranetsiu*" – "Beyond the Border"* (Augsburg: Wißner-Verlag, 2019), 261–85. For another interpretation of the novel, see, e.g., Lisa Grekul, *Leaving Shadows* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2005), 129–41.

[14] Suchacka, introduction to *Land Deep in Time*, 38.

Fung. Published in Canada and the U.S., and translated into Italian, Turkish, and French, the novel received such literary distinctions as the Amazon Canada First Novel Award and the Rakuten Kobo Emerging Writer Prize.[15] Fung has been widely acclaimed for her first novel, and yet her work is still to be discovered by critics. Nonetheless, she constitutes a new and promising voice within a long and well-established tradition of Asian-Canadian writing represented by such prominent authors as Fred Wah, Wayson Choy, Sky Lee, Kerri Sakamoto, Hiromi Goto, Larrisa Lai or Madeleine Thein.[16]

In constructing the plot and characterization, Fung has heavily relied on the theme of conflicted identity of the protagonist, a young Canadian woman of Chinese background. Her perplexity is mainly grounded in her family's complex situation that results from the history of their ancestral land, Hong Kong. As we learn from the protagonist: "I was three and a half when we immigrated to Canada. Like many other families, we left Hong Kong before the 1997 Handover. They say almost a sixth of the city left during the time."[17] What adds to their already difficult immigrant experience is that it splits the family because while the protagonist lives with her mother, grandparents, and her sister in Vancouver, her father remains in Hong Kong. As a result, the family continues reenacting their bordercrossing as they reunite at least twice a year (47–48).

The Here-and-There motif is also accentuated by its correlation to its temporal aspect because the family's literal travels between the two spaces in the present entail symbolical journeys of the protagonist into her family's long- and short-term past that is connected with the historical and political circumstances of their ancestral land. The readers learn about the protagonist's family's past There (Hong Kong) from the stories either told by her grandmother and mother in their own voice (as recorded by the protagonist) or retold by the protagonist herself. The protagonist's present Here (Canada), on the other hand, is mostly drawn through the protagonist's reminiscences of her early

[15] Pik-Shuen Fung, "Ghost Forest," Pik-Shuen Fung, accessed October 22, 2025, https://www.pikshuen.com.

[16] Asian-Canadian writing has been thoroughly studied by numerous critics; see, e.g. Ty and Verdun, introduction to *Asian Canadian Writing*, 1–27; Eleanor Ty and Donald Goellnicht, eds., *Asian North American Identities Beyond the Hyphen* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004); Eleanor Ty, *The Politics of the Visible in Asian North American Narratives* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

[17] Pik-Shuen Fung, *Ghost Forest: A Novel* (New York: One World, 2021), 5. Subsequent parenthetical page references are to this novel.

childhood in Canada which depict personal and socio-cultural struggles that the immigrants face while settling in the new country (7–16, 20, 26).

Once the Canadian context of the protagonist and her family is sketched, the portrayal turns to the stories from the ancestral land. Significantly, the first as well as the following accounts about the family's past are narrated in the first-person voice of the protagonist's grandmother, who relates her troubled life in China since the 1930s, revealing how her narrative intermixes with the history of China throughout decades. It includes the depiction of the war atrocities committed against the Chinese by the Japanese army; the resulting poverty, hunger, humiliation, and violence witnessed and experienced by the grandmother (27–30) but also previous historical wrongs done to her preceding generations (41). Moreover, the portrayal of the grandmother's life after the war illustrates the socio-cultural, economical, and medical circumstances of Chinese women, heavily influenced by the political context of post-war China (42–44, 98–102).

In addition to the grandmother's accounts, the protagonist's ancestry can also be traced through her mother's stories. Since the mother's life in Hong Kong coincides with a relatively peaceful time in China's history, her narratives focus mainly on her relationship with the protagonist's father but also on her health issues (125–28). The narratives of her past in Hong Kong are thus illustrative of social issues in China of the day, such as problematic medical treatment or poor living conditions (37–39).

And yet, the family's particular context does not allow for a neat, clear-cut differentiation between Here and There, present and past. Since the family has never ceased their movement after their primary exodus, their temporal and spatial context is never fixed but permanently processual. Thus, while the time and space of the protagonist's ancestral There is obviously no longer present for her, it remains reachable through her grandmother's and mother's narratives but also through her continuous literal connection to it. Since the protagonist revisits Hong Kong at least every summer, she also revisits the space of her ancestral There which becomes now, just like Canada, her immediate Here.

This entangled context that the protagonist finds herself in is vividly expressed in the way she tells, retells, and records all the narratives which come significantly in layers; therefore, since times and spaces entwine in them, there is neither a specific chronology nor one voice in their narration. And yet, all constitutes a coherent whole. The Janus-faced vision that the novel is firmly embedded in is conveyed through its protagonist who confronts and

challenges her familial and ethnic hi/stories by sieving these accounts through one another and incorporating them into her personal narrative.

While the described characterization and plot construction complies with the aforementioned features of historiographic ethnofiction, further examination of *Ghost Forest* reveals some interesting twists that altogether point to the novel's idiosyncrasies that add to the analysis of the genre in question. First of all, the notion of a conflicted identity does not concern only the protagonist but also her other family members. In fact, the ontological conflict presented in the novel results mainly from the protagonist's troubled relationship with her father who, as a traditional Chinese patriarch, has very high expectations of his daughters and, at the same time, belittles them continuously for being female and too Canadian (76, 78–79). This obstructs communication between the father and the protagonist although she attempts at developing mutual understanding. Yet, the generational and, even more so, cultural gap between the two constrains their relationship; as a result, there is no meaningful communication between the two.

On the father's side, the lack of communication is the effect of his inability to accept his daughter's lack of competence in Chinese culture, language, and history, which, in his mind, deprives her of "Chinese roots" (64). This fact deepens their identity crises as both are, in fact, seriously limited by their cultural legacy although in a very different way—while the father is blinded by tradition, the daughter struggles with her ignorance about it. In the case of the father, his fixation with his daughter's (lack of) cultural proficiency never wanes, and he keeps renewing his bitter accusations against her (e.g. 52, 57–59). The protagonist, on the other hand, tries to keep up with her heritage which, nonetheless, does not diminish her cultural estrangement (48).

The father–daughter conflict is additionally pivotal in the constellation of other characters and their identities. Ironically, it is the father's death that allows the protagonist to rediscover her relationship also with her grandmother and mother as she asks questions about the women's pasts, listening to their stories deeply implicated in the history of Hong Kong, Canada, and Chinese immigration. As she admits, "People ask me why I've been recording my mother's and grandmother's stories. I asked them questions only after my dad died" (231).

Indispensable as these questions are for the women's mutual understanding in the present, they are also particularly revealing about their unresolved anxieties suffered from past experiences. In the case of the grandmother, the protagonist's questions about her grandmother's life expose not only historical

horrors that the grandmother witnessed in Hong Kong during the war but also her own experiences of them as well as of other wrongs committed against women also in times of peace. In telling one of her stories, the grandmother reveals, for example, how she miraculously avoided being sold by "the people in the village" to "a big family descended from generals in Qing dynasty" in order to be "marr[ied] … into the boy's family while … still a child" in order to "grow up in their house working as a servant, and when … old enough, give birth to his children" (30). Revealing this story to her granddaughter, the woman admits that she has never related it to anyone: "None of my children know about these things. I've never told them, and they've never asked me" (30). In this way, the protagonist managed to break the intergenerational silence that clearly reigned in the family.

Likewise, the protagonist's questions allow her mother to open up and verbalize her past and recent anxieties. The mother tells her daughter about the times she lived in Hong Kong; her loneliness as a child (37) but also what living in poverty meant for her (39). Yet, the mother also reveals to her daughter the extent of fear, anger, and uncertainty she went through on a daily basis when, already in Vancouver, she struggled with her younger daughter's cancer (233–35). The mother exposes that her deteriorating state has remained unrecognized, even by herself: "I never saw any doctors because I didn't know there was anything wrong with me. Nobody noticed either. I only realized later, years after I'd gotten better" (234–36). Thus, revealing the truth about her mental crisis to her daughter becomes healing for both women because, once the truth is known, they clearly grow in understanding of each other and themselves. What is more, the protagonist's searching inquiries about her grandmother and mother's pasts move the intergenerational communication forward because, even though the women of the family have retreated into silence across generations, they have finally managed to break its threating cycle.

When it comes to the second feature of Canadian historiographic ethnofiction, its quintessential motif of bordercrossing is significantly updated as it reveals the contemporariness of the time that the plot is set in. The crossing of borders in *Ghost Forest* is not only multiple as the family reenact their *a quo* and *ad quem* journeys continuously, but it is also multifaceted because it reveals the intersectionality of immigrant experience that is particularly evident in the contemporary world. Consequently, their bordercrossing movement is not restricted to a one-time ancestral exodus and a later journey made by future generations seeking reconnection with their roots, but it becomes an integral part of the family's past and present lives. As the protagonist admits,

they share this experience with other Hong Kong immigrants, who have become participants of a sociological phenomenon that has received its specific name: "Astronaut family. It's a term invented by the Hong Kong mass media. A family with an astronaut father—flying here, flying there" (6). The protagonist's family story becomes thus an integral part of the Hong Kong emigration history. As the protagonist admits, her family members share this hi/story with other Hong Kong immigrants "in Canada [because] there were more Hong Kong immigrants than in any other country, and in Vancouver," the protagonist continues, "I had many classmates whose fathers stayed in Hong Kong for work too. I didn't think of my family as different. I thought, this is what Hong Kong fathers do" (6). In this way, the novel illustrates, on the one hand, general immigrant experience that is profoundly determined by economic circumstances, showing how difficult and, even more so, desperate conditions immigrants frequently find themselves in.

On the other hand, it reveals a specific character of this particular immigration as it sheds light on its participants' movement as an ongoing process clearly marked by the contemporary geopolitical circumstances. Ultimately, it reflects (upon) the concept of bordercrossing that, in this specific case, has become a pragmatic solution defining directly the daily existence of Hong Kong immigrants. What is more, the family's circumstances portray that the enactment of the post/immigrant bordercrossing movement between the Old and the New World, which has been traditionally accorded a mythological status, has become not only seriously pragmatized but also pluralized as it includes spaces other than the mythic-like Here and There. This is what happens to the protagonist who, already as an adult, pursues multiple bordercrossings due to her profession, "moving and moving—from Vancouver to Providence to London to New York" (221).

And yet, while the protagonist's existence as a habitual bordercrosser is dictated by globalization and, by extension, capitalism of the present world she lives in, the novel also shows that it remains a matter of her decision that also becomes a source of her considerable anxiety. As she admits, "whenever I started to feel attached to a place or to people, I wanted subconsciously, to make sure I would be the first to leave.… And I am overcome with envy for people who live where they were born and raised. Why is it that I have to choose?" (221). Hence, the bordercrossing movement does not resolve the protagonist's identity conflict; it only deepens it, proving that identity re/construction is not defined by any finality or closure but is a compound process of confrontation.

Both features defining the genre are thus closely linked to the third one because when crossing borders, the protagonist crosses also many boundaries by confronting personal, familial, and ethnic narratives of the past and present. Consequently, she faces her lack of knowledge and experience of ancestral culture but also a void that this lack has inflicted upon her relationship with her family. Yet, what is remarkable in her characterization is that this process is not restricted only to her listening to painful narratives, but it rather involves the protagonist's active participation in what becomes her performative recreation of her legacy. In effect, the protagonist not only listens to her family members attentively but she also acts upon the meaning of what she receives. For example, when the protagonist's multiple attempts at her father's verbal expression of his love towards her are futile, she is unflinching about her goal and uses her imagination, writing a "script" of her possible conversation with her father that she revises every day until it finally takes place, ending in success (93–94). In this way, the protagonist uses her creativity to make up for personal and cultural limitations that constrain her relation with her father. Likewise, when the final obstruction comes in the form of her father's death, the protagonist keeps telling their story by imagining moments which they have never experienced but which are nonetheless possible because conjured and acted out imaginatively, and so given meaning by her in her narrative (239–51).

Confronting her familial and ethnic hi/stories involves therefore not only being an attentive listener but also becoming an imaginative storyteller. In this way, the protagonist acts upon both her family reconciliation and her own transformation, which requires her creativity as well as work. Thus, learning new narratives, the protagonist frequently struggles with her epistemological lacks which she in fact fills by researching Chinese culture and art (72–74); studying Chinese ink painting at the China Academy of Arts in Hangzhou (69); or reading *The Pocket Thich Nhat Hahn* which she translates from English into Chinese to her dying father (207–9). Finally, she becomes an artist herself; a painter practising a centuries-old Chinese technique of ink painting (76) and a skilled calligrapher of Chinese characters who writes her grandmother's story into her own artistic creation by dedicating her piece of calligraphy, "Heart like water", i.e. "her final project at the China Academy of Art" to her grandmother (82). This piece of art becomes therefore a palimpsestic expression that interweaves all the histories and stories she has learnt, crafting them into her own narrative. Ultimately, the idea of old stories being incorporated into a new narrative finds its ultimate expression in another of the protagonist's art works, i.e. her painting entitled "Ghost Forest". Embedded

in the "xieyi" technique, i.e. a Chinese "freehand style" method of painting (71), which gives salience to the idea that "empty space was as important as form, that absence was as important as presence" (70–71), the protagonist's painting shows that being haunted by the spectral presence of the past does not shackle but may, in fact, open up a possibility of unfettered existence, a promise of the freedom of a bird that "soar[s] above tree after tree" (76).

CONCLUSION

Firmly established within Canadian literary tradition, historiographic ethnofiction can be defined as an "old" genre. And yet, the mere fact that, so far, it has not undergone a serious critical study renders it a novel category that deserves further examination. The analysis of this "old-new" genre as exemplified by the discussion of Fung's *Ghost Forest* shows that while Fung's novel interestingly adds to Kulyk Keefer's observations about this type of writing, or even necessarily updates her ideas,[18] the ultimate message of Fung's work strongly corresponds with Kulyk Keefer's main suggestion that crossing borders entails uncovering individual and historical meanings. The process may be painful, but it is also indispensable if one's ethnic narrative is to be read meaningfully through historical records and family accounts. This does not guarantee any successful accomplishment or any final reconciliation but becomes at least a promise of a lesson learned, be it historical or personal, and a vital step towards a change to happen.

[18] As stated, this analysis focuses largely on how Fung's novel contributes to Kulyk Keefer's concept and so, by extension, to the genre in question. Yet, for lack of space, it does not exhaust the topic but rather showcases *Ghost Forest* and opens up discussion on the novel as historiographic ethnofiction. Thus, further investigation could examine how the novel not only adheres to the genre but also diverges from its paradigm. In terms of the former, Fung's work abounds with many other examples that speak for its generic classification as offered here. However, in the latter case, further examination of Fung's novel may (and should) consider the limitations of the historiographic ethnofiction generic framework. For example, it may question the arbitrariness in defining the two fundamental components of the genre, i.e. its historiographic and ethnic aspect by questioning what the balance between the two should be. To put it simple, it could raise questions about the extent to which a given work should address history and ethnicity to be classified as historiographic ethnofiction. To exemplify this point, one could observe that while *Ghost Forest* clearly refers to the history of Hong Kong and China, it does so by relying more on family narratives through which historical aspects are communicated although other sources of historical records (e.g., the internet that the protagonist uses in her research on historical/cultural events or figures) are also present in the novel. Additionally, further analysis could also detail another idiosyncractic aspect of Fung's novel, namely its experimental form, and consider whether and, if so, to what extent the formal aspects of the work contribute to the genre of historiographic ethnofiction.

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