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## The art of excess : generic and linguistic hybridity in Polish-Canadian women's life writing

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TransCanadiana 5, 131-142

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2012

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej [bazhum.muzhp.pl](http://bazhum.muzhp.pl), gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

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**THE ART OF EXCESS: GENERIC  
AND LINGUISTIC HYBRIDITY  
IN POLISH-CANADIAN WOMEN'S LIFE WRITING**

In autobiographical writing there is a long tradition of representing the self as utterly unique. Autobiography is “a monument to the idea of personhood, to the notion that one could leave behind a memorial to oneself (just in case no one else ever gets around to it) and that the memorial would perform the work of permanence that the person never can” (Gilmore 13). As autobiographical narratives provide an excellent literary vehicle for negotiating the issue of identity, for such Canadian writers as Fred Wah, Michael Ondaatje, Michael Ignatieff, and Janice Kulyk Keefer autobiographical writing is not only an individual project but one closely linked with a particular cultural, national, ethnic and racial group, as well as with gender and class issues. Additionally, according to Leigh Gilmore, Canadian writers find themselves working among a variety of autobiographical models, and are interested in “the constitutive vagaries of autobiography, in how its weirder expansiveness lets them question whether and how ‘I’ can be ‘here’ or ‘there’” (9).

In her book entitled *The Limits of Autobiography*, Gilmore writes that especially memoirs have become popular in recent literary discourses in Canada (16), as they have fostered “the Renaissance of misbegotten man” (Kadar ix). Though the current boom in memoir in Canada is visible,<sup>1</sup> the Polish-Canadian life writing has so far received the least attention from critics writing

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<sup>1</sup> In *The Limits of Autobiography*, Leigh Gilmore observes that in Canada the number of published memoirs roughly tripled from the 1940s to the 1990s. Memoir has been dominated by young people as well as academics who produce personal criticism, hybrid combinations of scholarship and life writing. In her book, Gilmore also points out factors that have contributed to the current popularity of the memoir: firstly, “the social and political movements of the past thirty years that have made it possible for a broader range of people to publish accounts of their life experiences”; secondly, the growth of confessional discourse in the media; and thirdly, the literary market demand (1–16).

about immigrants both in Canada and Poland.<sup>2</sup> In her article “Are Memoirs Autobiography?” Julie Rak explains that “in autobiography criticism, memoir plays the role of Derridean supplement.” Like writing, the memoir genre<sup>3</sup> has been characterized as trailing after autobiography as a minor writing form, although it precedes autobiography as a genre by centuries (Rak 320–321). Rak explains that in the past critics built a canon for autobiography studies, based on literary values and on ideas about the uniqueness and creativity of the Romantic self. Memoir has been treated by literary critics as a “non-literary textual production” (Rak 306) and as “the province of less-skilled writers” (Rak 310). However, in today’s Canada, the genre is “in the process of becoming a byword for autobiography” (Rak 306) and there are many Polish immigrants, or the children of Polish immigrants in Canada, who have started writing either memoirs or novels about their parents’ immigration to Canada.<sup>4</sup>

The focus of this article are two Polish-Canadian memoirs, entitled *Marynia Don’t Cry*, published in Canada in 1995 by Apolonja Kojder and *Born and Raised Under the Straw Roof*, published by Mary Drzewiecki in 2000. Both Apolonja Kojder and Mary Drzewiecki represent the second generation of Polish-Canadian immigrant daughters, who tap and repackage their mothers’ life stories. They choose “memoir” as their generic designation to foreground their common interest in history and to fit the agenda of feminist literary criticism as attempts to create the conditions in which a Polish-Canadian woman may be “herself-defined” (Kadar, “Essays on Life Writing” 11). Both Kojder and Drzewiecki benefit from the therapeutic function of the memoir<sup>5</sup> and offer a female perspective<sup>6</sup> on the tragic history that their parents and

<sup>2</sup> Polish scholars examine mainly Polish-language Polish-Canadian literature and they do not approve of the Polish-Canadian vernacular, while Polish-Canadian writers marry the lexical forms of the Polish language to English syntax. Such culturally appropriate phrases announce themselves as linguistically different from both English and Polish vocabulary and this difference constitutes a hybrid condition theorized by postcolonial studies, a condition desired by some and feared by others. Furthermore, Polish-Canadian poetry is considered to be the only genre in which Polish writers have produced interesting work in Canada. The most recognizable Polish-Canadian poets are Waclaw Iwaniuk, Bogdan Czaykowski, Florian Śmieja, Andrzej Busza.

<sup>3</sup> Historically, memoirs were texts written as propaganda by public people who wrote about commerce, war and politics. In Romanticism, memoirs were considered not worth writing due to the public life associated with the economic problems that resulted from the Industrial Revolution. Autobiography, on the other hand, was considered an excellent literary vehicle in which people could examine their innermost selves and avoid the social problems.

<sup>4</sup> There are many other Polish-Canadian memoirs such as Joanna Matejko’s *Polish Settlers in Alberta. Reminiscences and Biographies* (1979), *Memoirs of Polish Emigrants* (1971) and *Memoirs of Polish Immigrants in Canada* (1977), which entered a contest announced in 1936 by the Institute of Social Economy in Warsaw.

<sup>5</sup> In feminist literary criticism the memoir is considered as the therapy-driven culture of confession, which moves women beyond silence. The power of autobiographical narrative to heal has also been broadly cited in psychiatric research (Gilmore 7).

<sup>6</sup> The book *Marynia, Don’t Cry*, published by the Multicultural History Society of Ontario (MHSO), contains two memoirs: Apolonja Kojder’s “Marynia, Don’t Cry” and Barbara Głogowska’s “Three Generations (The Deputat Family)” (the latter translated from the Polish

other Poles had suffered before and during the Second World War.<sup>7</sup> In her memoir, *Marynia Don't Cry*, Kojder reflects on the old pattern of gender politics in Poland (the custom of "capping") experienced by Eastern European women. She underlines that the women in her family have been helping each other in Poland during the war, as well as during the deportation to Siberia in 1940. In this way, Kojder celebrates strong female bonds, especially those between mothers and daughters. Her life writing narrative fills a significant gap in the history of Polish immigration in Canada, as there are hardly any records of immigration seen from the perspective of Polish women.

Both Kojder's and Drzewiecki's memoirs are exceptional in granting Polish women a position of subjects in Canadian history and they may be linked with the "culture of confession," which Gayatri Spivak has defined as "the genre of the subaltern giving witness to oppression" (Gilmore 2). What is more, Apolonja Kojder and Mary Drzewiecki do not write traditional autobiographical narratives. Rather, they push the limits of what literary critics have considered autobiography precisely because they invent new forms of narrative to suggest both the range and the instabilities of their diasporic identities. Their memoirs thus inscribe the Bakhtinian carnivalesque discourse in the form of disruption or overthrow of conventional literary forms and hence they also construct a genre of excess which corresponds with the process of formulating a hybrid identity dependent on a plurality of cultural narratives.

The main aim of the article is to show how Kojder and Drzewiecki structure their memoirs of excess as a combination of autobiography, biography and family history and how they use subversive literary strategies to represent a hybrid and changing Polish-Canadian identity, to resist stereotypes and question official norms and values.

Apolonja Kojder's and Mary Drzewiecki's memoirs can be read as examples of a genre defined as mirror talk, or relational auto/biography, in which "the (auto)biographer is the child or the partner of the biographical subject, a relationship in which (auto)biographical identity is significantly shaped by the processes of exploratory mirroring" (Egan 7). The Polish-Canadian women write their own autobiographies through the biographies of their grandmothers and mothers. In *Marynia Don't Cry*, for example, Kojder does not unfold her own life story until the last thirty pages of a hundred and thirty-eight page

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by Irma Zaleski). Głogowska focuses on the narrative of immigration as progress from rags to riches and describes the life of Mike Deputat, who is at the centre of this family history. Though the Canadian publisher's concern with "gender balance" seems to be important, the memoir *Marynia Don't Cry* seems to displace the male point of view.

<sup>7</sup> Coming from the eastern regions of Poland, Kojder's and Drzewiecki's parents had lived through extreme hardships in the years preceding World War II. As soon as the war started, they were deported to Germany (Drzewiecki's parents) and to Siberia and Kazakhstan (Kojder's parents). According to Norman Davies, in the years 1939–40, the number of Poles sent to concentration camps or to penal exile reached about one and a half million, almost half of whom died (451).

family memoir. Kojder's family story is constructed as a dialogic narrative, the very definition of a relational autobiography, as the female autobiographical narrator – Apolonja Kojder – uses the stories of women, her relatives with whom she is in relation, to define her identity. When Kojder foregrounds the reciprocal relationship between mother and daughter, she writes,

Mama and my Aunt Genia often talked about how hard Babcia had struggled all her life to survive [...] and now that knowledge was being passed down to me in the form of family stories [...] That story told me that it was important in the family to be a girl (131).

In *Marynia Don't Cry*, Kojder feels "the need for mutual recognition, the necessity of recognizing as well as being recognized by the other" (Benjamin 23). For Kojder, the mirror process is rather more constructive than reflective and it helps her to recognize her role in the inheritance of mother-and-daughter talk-story. However, the break in the narrative voice initiated by the sudden appearance of the narrative "I" also displaces the convention of narrative objectivity on which the text has relied so far. In the first part of her memoir, she describes her family's struggle with poverty, war, deportation to Siberia and, the immigration to Canada. In the second part, on the other hand, Kojder recalls her childhood memories and uses a lot of Polish words. Kojder's text lacks objectivity mostly due to the abundance of her emotions and memories. In this way, as a non-literary writer<sup>8</sup>, not only does Kojder create a candid discourse of an immigrant, but also her memoir extends beyond old-fashioned notions of conscious authorship, as she reflects on the subjectivity and historical specificity of the once-forgotten Polish-Canadian masses. In other words, she transmits her family immigrant experiences and imprisons them on the borderline between objectivity and subjectivity.

Additionally, Kojder's auto/biographical writing finds itself at the limit of representing life and death. In *Marynia Don't Cry*, Kojder writes that as a result of her taking courses in women's studies at university, she managed to persuade her mother to write down the family history. However, she never refers to her mother's manuscript. Terrified by the death of both her grandmother (Maria Beznowska) and her father (Franciszek Kojder) and thus, by the possibility of the permanent loss of the "connectedness" (Kojder 129) with her Polish roots, she decides to write a memoir in order to keep her family memories alive and also to represent herself as a second generation of Polish-Canadians. Thus, her memoir shows the extent to which biography and autobiography emerge through the demands the dead place on the living,

<sup>8</sup> In "Coming to Terms: Life Writing – from Genre to Critical Practice" Marlene Kadar writes that non-literary writers have been wrongly labelled non-traditional writers, as they are only non-traditional in the sense of their exclusion from the literary canon.

as well as the ambivalence of speaking to and for them. To organize the identification with her Polish family, she lays down a line between the living and the dead, between "her" story and "their" story.

The variety of autobiographical narratives, which point out Kojder's readiness to abandon biographical writing in order to assume a more personal, confessional voice, makes Kojder's memoir uncomfortable with its own generic conventions. According to Tom LeClair, such practice can be seen as an art of excess which "deforms conventional narrative techniques and employs different methods to make the reader aware that auto/biographical writings are systems of information which represent a cultural paradigm and that the contemporary systems paradigm requires a new conception" (20).

In their memoirs of excess, such Polish-Canadian writers as Kojder and Drzewiecki point out that the conventional constraints of autobiography should be resisted, or even overturned, in order to relate to any type of immigrant subjectivity and to allow any deeply wounding events to be recalled. Therefore, in their memoirs, Apolonja Kojder and Mary Drzewiecki also use various forms of writing: survival stories, letters, Polish songs, maps, fragments of Polish literature, as well as a visual discourse in the form of photographs. For example, maps help Kojder and Drzewiecki, as well as the reader, to locate Poland, Canada, Germany, Uzbekistan, India Tajikistan, and other places where Kojder's and Drzewiecki's parents lived before their immigration to Canada. The distance between these places, which is not easily discerned while reading the memoirs, is enhanced by the maps. Kojder and Drzewiecki's obsession with maps is connected to their Polish-Canadianness endowing upon them a special sensitivity to the process of de- and reterritorialization of Polish culture. By including maps in their memoirs, Kojder and Drzewiecki also underscore the European side of their identities. Apart from the maps, Kojder includes letters, in *Marynia Don't Cry*, which her mother (Helena Kojder) and grandmother (Maria Beznowska) wrote to Jan Beznowski, who had already immigrated to Canada. For Helena Kojder and Maria Beznowska, "to exchange letters is to be in touch, and in touching the letters, one touches the other" (Nitka 58). Such correspondence highlights the paradox of letter writing, negotiating between presence and absence, distance and connection. For Apolonja Kojder's family, letter writing is only a vicarious form of being together. Polish-Canadian letter writing can be seen as "a divisive process of line building that hinges on, but also engineers apartness" (Nitka 22).

Another type of source that Kojder and Drzewiecki employ to reconstruct their family past are documents and photographs. For example, in *Born and Raised Under the Straw Roof*, Drzewiecki includes a variety of documents to get to know more about the reasons for leaving Poland, the family background and family connections. Drzewiecki has a difficult task of going through the old papers mainly in Polish and German. Additionally, both Kojder and Drzewiecki include family photographs of great personal significance in their

memoirs. In *Marynia Don't Cry*, the photos tell Kojder that she is the part of her family and that it is important for her to keep her parents' immigration memories alive, as each photograph immortalizes the high points of her family life. In contrast to Kojder, Drzewiecki includes also her own poems:

I am.  
 And no one knows.  
 I hear, in the silence of my soul;  
 I see, where blindness befalls others;  
 I sing from the heart, without words or music;  
 [...] I am, and no one knows,  
 But me (Drzewiecki 347)

For Drzewiecki, the metaphor "is not the enigma but the solution of the enigma [...] [Her] [f]eelings [...] have a very complex kind of intentionality. [...] [T]he synthesis of [her] thought, imagination, and feeling [...] [is] in metaphor" (Gould 49–50). In this way, Drzewiecki's poems capture what is unsayable for her and difficult to express in "ordinary" language. In her poems, Drzewiecki not only reveals the drama of her parents' life, but also reflects on her own transcultural identity.

In general, the practice of mixing genres as an art of excess has been noted by Kadar who stresses that life writing "includes more than just life stories, and it has the potential to cross genre boundaries and disciplines" (Kadar, *Essays on Life Writing* 152). In this way, Kojder's and Drzewiecki's memoirs of excess inscribe the Bakhtinian carnivalesque discourse<sup>9</sup> in the form of disruption or overthrow of conventional literary forms. In other words, as writers of excess, Kojder and Drzewiecki resort to Fred Wah's "molecular poetics." In *Faking it: Poetics and Hybridity*, Fred Wah introduces the notion of "molecular poetics," or "loose change," as "a set of tools in writing that amplify the minute and particular, the discernment of cells in composition that indicate a potential for presence, residue, evidence [...] The *punctum*, the beat, the gap, the gasp, the pulp, the pulse, the sigh, the sign" (Wah 238). Kojder's and Drzewiecki's role, like that of the Bakhtinian carnival logic, is to foreground the role of minoritized subjects in mainstream society, to give voice to Polish-Canadian immigrants whose stories were excluded from the dominant Canadian national narrative.

Moreover, in their memoirs, Kojder and Drzewiecki show that "without language, experience is nothing" (Gilmore 6). They resort to linguistic hybridity, as well as the hiatus between words, which conveys both their family immigrant experiences and the crisis of memory. The hiatus between words

<sup>9</sup> Carnivalization – the liberating and subversive influence of popular humour on the literary tradition, introduced by the Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin. In this essay, the term carnivalization is used as a vehicle for subversive narrative strategies.

highlights the textuality of memory, its vagueness, and the subjective aspect of any remembrance of things past. For example, in *Marynia Don't Cry*, Kojder refers to her family stories, myths, lullabies and songs as if they were a kind of language: "they could be broken down into individual units ('mythemes') which like the basic sound units of language (phonemes) acquire [...] meaning only when combined together" (Eagleton 104). Kojder writes: "For a child, that story told me that a person should have the courage to live as he or she saw fit [...] now that knowledge was being passed down to me in the form of family stories" (Kojder 131). Like the French structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, Kojder believes that her family myths, or stories, "are inherent in the human mind, so that in studying a body of myth [she is] looking less at its narrative contents than at the universal mental operations which structure it" (Eagleton 104). Similarly to language, her family stories are devices to think with, ways of classifying and organizing reality.

However, in their memoirs, Kojder and Drzewiecki use different "poetics"<sup>10</sup> not only to individualize their parents' immigrant experiences but also to deconstruct English, the great imperial language of this century. There are two distinct processes by which Polish-Canadian women utilize the English language: the first is abrogation, and the second is appropriation. In *The Empire Writes Back*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin explain:

Abrogation is a refusal of the categories of the imperial culture, its aesthetics, its illusory standard of normative or "correct" usage, and its assumption of a traditional and fixed meaning "inscribed" in the words [...] Appropriation is the process by which the language is taken and made to "bear the burden" of one's own cultural experience. (Ashcroft 37–38)

In *Marynia Don't Cry*, parenthetical translations of individual words, or glosses, such as "Tatu tells me stories about *krasnodudki* (dwarfs) and *baba jaga* (witch)" (Kojder 113) are a common authorial intrusion. As Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin maintain the implicit gap between *krasnodudki* (dwarfs), or *baba jaga* (witch), in fact "disputes the putative referentiality of the words and establishes [*krasnodudki*], or [*baba jaga*], as a cultural sign [...]. The requisite sense of difference is implicitly recorded in the gap [...] between the word and its referent" (Ashcroft 61). In her memoir, Kojder glosses her favourite Polish songs, lullabies, and fragments of Polish literature: "Wszystkie krasnodudki śpią, a ty nie, a, a, a." ('All the dwarfs are sleep, but not you, ah, ah, ah).'" (Kojder 113), "Adam Mickiewicz's '*Oda do młodości*': '*Bez serc, bez ducha – to szkieletów ludy*' ('Ode to Youth': 'Without a heart, without a soul – a man is

<sup>10</sup> In *Faking It: Poetics of Ethnicity. Critical Writing 1984–1999* Fred Wah explains that he uses the term "poetics" as the tools designed by Canadian writers to foster change. "Poetics" forces the reader into an active engagement with the horizons of a particular non-English culture.



*but a skeleton*’)” (Kojder 138). Such Polish diminutive forms as “Wójciu (uncle),” (Kojder 113) are also glossed as a way of introducing patterns of Polish vernacular speech.

Like Kojder, Drzewiecki uses glosses, in *Born and Raised Under the Straw Roof*, but without parentheses, to present everyday conversations among her relatives: “Ja nie mogę iść kopać studnię. Tam jest drabina i ktoś musi ją wyjąć. [...] I can’t go and dig the well [...] The ladder is in it and someone had to pull it out. [...] Idź. Ja wyciągnę [...] Go. I’ll pull it up. Mamo, ja uciłam włosy dla Wandzi! [...] Mama, I cut Wandzia’s hair!” (Drzewiecki 310–317). In *Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin state that the problem with glossing in Canadian cross-cultural texts is that “it may lead to a considerably stilted movement of plot as the story is forced to drag an explanatory machinery behind it” (Ashcroft 61). In contrast to their view, Canadian poet Dennis Lee maintains that “glossing is challenging for the Canadian minority writers, as it presents the difference through which hybrid identity is articulated” (Ashcroft 62). Perhaps for such Polish-Canadian women as Kojder and Drzewiecki, glossing – the post-colonial act of appropriation – is even more challenging, because it promotes Polish-Canadian culture, which was marginalized by mainstream critics.

Apart from introducing abrogation, appropriation and glossing as a life writing strategy of excess, Kojder and Drzewiecki marry the lexical forms of the Polish language to English syntax as in the example of “the oczepiny,” (Kojder 11) or “mamas” (Kojder 113). In *Marynia Don’t Cry* neologisms are another very specific form of syntactic fusion: “I called him *Bojczyk* – a Ukrainianized version of little boy” (Kojder 114). Consequently, Drzewiecki’s and Kojder’s writing styles may be successfully described “by the term ‘interlanguage,’ a term coined by Nemser (1971) and Selinker (1972) to characterize the genuine and discrete linguistic system employed by learners of a second language. [...] It is important to discard the notion of these forms as ‘mistakes,’ since they operate according to a separate linguistic logic” (Ashcroft 66). In *Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin write that “the most common method of inscribing alterity by the process of appropriation is the technique of switching between two or more codes” (Ashcroft 71).

In this context, it should be emphasized that, in their memoirs, Kojder and Drzewiecki resort to the technique of code-switching, as it enables them to produce a culturally appropriate Polish-Canadian dialect that announces itself as different even though it is “english.”<sup>11</sup> The Polish-Canadian dialect bears the burden of immigrant experiences for which the terms of the

<sup>11</sup> In their book Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin point to the difference between the standard British English language inherited from the Empire and the linguistic code “english” (they do not capitalise the first letter), which has been transformed into distinctive varieties and used, in postcolonial countries, by societies to indicate their own sense of linguistic difference.

inherited language do not seem appropriate. It is also an alternative to the Polish-Canadian oral language, which Kojder and Drzewiecki speak at home. It is a signifier of a Polish-Canadian "Otherness," not just as a construct, but as a process which mainly foregrounds their Polish-Canadianness. In other words, code switching is a deliberate strategy of excess to translate Polishness into the majority culture and hence it is also an attempt at constructing a dialogue between Polish and Canadian cultures.

Beside using code switching as a strategy of excess, as well as Fred Wah's "molecular poetics," Kojder and Drzewiecki also adopt Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's linguistic theory, which distinguishes four languages:

vernacular, maternal, or territorial language, used in rural communities or rural in its origins; a vehicular, urban, governmental, even worldwide language, a language of businesses, commercial exchange, bureaucratic transmission, and so on, a language for the first sort of deterritorialization; referential language, language of sense and culture, entailing a cultural reterritorialization; mythic language, on the horizon of cultures, caught up a spiritual or religious reterritorialization. (Deleuze and Guattari 23)

For Kojder, the vernacular, maternal, or territorial language is Polish. Kojder writes that since childhood she has spoken Polish, which also had a cultural, referential and mythic function. Kojder liked reading Polish books, watching Polish films, and she even prayed in Polish. At school, Kojder started to learn English, which, at the beginning, performed the function of Henri Gobard's vehicular language.<sup>12</sup> Kojder considered English an urban, governmental language, as well as a language of bureaucratic transmission. She writes:

I started to learn English words, but the first term I got all D's on my report card. I don't know if I knew then what that meant [...] By grade four or five I can remember walking in the school hallway and thinking, "I'm thinking first in Polish and then doing the work in English in school [...] I had come to realize that school (English) had little to do with home (Polish)." (Kojder 119–122)

At school, not only did Polish culture and history become mythic, but also the Polish language, which was marginalized in Canada. English started to play the dual role of vehicular and cultural language, as Kojder also began reading English literature. A few years later, she notices that what fascinated her in relation to both Polish and English was that

what can be said in one language cannot be said in another, and the totality of what can and can't be said varies necessarily with each language and with the connections between these languages [...] [Her cultural language] can have ambiguous edges,

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<sup>12</sup> Henri Gobard's vehicular language is urban, state controlled, commercial and bureaucratic.

changing borders, that differ from this or that material. Each function of language divides up in turn and carries with it multiple centres of power. A blur of languages, and not at all a system of languages. (Deleuze and Guattari 24)

In *Born and Raised Under the Straw Roof*, Mary Drzewiecki does not mention her linguistic alienation in Canada. However, she writes about her mother's linguistic dispossession. In contrast to Kojder's mother (Helena Kojder), who could speak English, because she learned it in India, Drzewiecki's mother – Janina Drzewiecki – “would have enjoyed conversation with the ladies in the neighbourhood, but she was still terribly isolated by language” (Drzewiecki 306). For Janina Drzewiecki, English was a vehicular language – a “language that frightens more than it invites disdain [...] it is a language that is [...] filled with vocables that are fleeting, mobilized, emigrating” (Deleuze 24). In *Born and Raised Under the Straw Roof*, it is Mary Drzewiecki, the second generation of Polish-Canadians, who pushes English toward deterritorialization, and makes use of the polylingualism of her mother's language. For example, in her memoirs, Drzewiecki includes a letter to her parents that she has written in both English and Polish. Consequently, she shows that she speaks Polish and is involved in the process of reterritorialization of Polish culture. She writes:

Moi Kochani Rodzice [...]

Dziękuję Mamo i Tato. Ja bardzo kocham was i jestem dumna że jesteście moimi rodzicami (Drzewiecki 328).

To conclude, in their life writing texts, Kojder and Drzewiecki employ excess and push the limits of what critics consider autobiography precisely because they invent new forms of narrative to suggest both the range and the instabilities of their hybrid identities. They achieve the fluidity of their hybrid experiences in equivalently hybrid narratives of excess, blending fiction with history, memory, family stories, photographs, maps, poems, and other documents. Polish-Canadian life narratives provide Polish immigrant women with a multitude of contrasts and paradoxes within which they construct their hybrid identities. In other words, their life narratives of excess testify to the fact that national and cultural boundaries are, for Polish-Canadian women, slippery inventions requiring continuous interrogation. *Marynia don't Cry*, *Born and Raised Under the Straw Roof* are excellent examples of hybrid life narratives in which Polish-Canadian women reflect the changing concepts of their Polish-Canadian female identity. What is more, the exploration of language by Polish-Canadian women also leads to the creation of a minor literature located neither at home nor in exile, but in the space of cultural hybridity. Working within a discourse of minor literature, Polish-Canadian women hope to

call for “an active solidarity” (Deleuze and Guattari 17) among other Polish-Canadians, as minor literature fosters a new politics and history. In their memoirs, Polish-Canadian women show that they know that

nothing succeeds like excess [...]. [T]he art of excess is ultimately an art of balance, measuring and counterbalancing cultural power [...]. The art of excess is the serious author's response to this environment, for excess is a strategy that first meets and then transforms conventional, even popularly engineered expectations to have an impact [not only] on the reader. (LeClair VII–26)

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