

Ewa Urbaniak-Rybicka

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Ewa Urbaniak-Rybicka
Adam Mickiewicz University, Kalisz
The State School of Higher Professional Education, Konin

**Eugenia Sojka and Tomasz Sikora (eds.) (2010),
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in Transcultural Perspectives.***

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As a postcolonial and multicultural country, Canada has had a complicated relationship with otherness. Throughout its history, various Canadian Others have been eliminated and discriminated against, but at the same time otherness has been indispensable for the construction of the state. Avoiding risky generalisations about the term, the twelve essays in this volume edited by Eugenia Sojka and Tomasz Sikora analyse the multifaceted notion of otherness. Taking on a transcultural perspective, the Canadian and non-Canadian, referring to personal and community experiences and narratives, the contributors to this interdisciplinary volume take part in negotiating Canadian identity and revising the notion of nationhood in Canada. The authors, who come from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and thus reflect Canadian heterogeneity and offer a diversity of Canadian and Canadianists' perspectives, both from within and outside Canada, focus either on their own experiences with/of otherness, or examine aspects of otherness and heterogeneity in Canadian literary, theatre or film discourses. The collection displays a current critical perspective, namely a transcultural, crosscultural and intercultural approach to Canadian culture in its various manifestations, and has been also influenced by critical multiculturalism. The cultural heterogeneity of the authors and the interdisciplinary nature of the essays, some of which deal with often neglected aspects of Canadian culture such as folk dance, Indigenous theatre and feminist experimental cinema, make the volume unique in Poland. The collection originated as a result of a minority studies conference organised by the Canadian Studies Centre at the University of Silesia and the Civic

Education Project, and was extended by cooperation with invited scholars exploring the issue of otherness in various disciplines

The volume is divided into three parts. The first subsection, "Nuances of Otherness: Narratives of Canadian Invisible Others," opens with Justyna Szachowicz-Sempruch's essay entitled "Formulating Un/Belonging: Cross-Cultural Encounters within Canada." The author explores cultural, national and racial identifications of Polish migrants in their contact with Canada. Szachowicz-Sempruch perceives identity as a process of deconstruction of inheritance which simultaneously denies and accepts new linguistic as well as cultural fixities. For her, Polish migrants' identities are fictive and constructed out of differentiated cultural heritage. Since a return to pure origins is irreversible and immigrants are constantly forced to represent their homeland, for Szachowicz-Sempruch origins are a source of anxiety and stigma. She further elaborates on her own un/belonging and nomadic existence as a Silesia-born Pole whose life has involved constant travelling. The European identity of an Eastern European is, as Szachowicz-Sempruch believes, a complicated notion characterized by simultaneous belonging and unbelonging. Eastern Europeans are perceived both as members of the white majority and, at the same time, as invisible Others. Examining the history of the Eastern-European position within whiteness in North America throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Szachowicz-Sempruch points out the need for transformative knowledge and the knowledge of exchange which would address the problem of white diversity, especially with reference to Eastern Europeans. Aware of the fictive homogeneity of Polish whiteness and the historically determined elimination of otherness in Poland, Szachowicz-Sempruch claims that the shades of Polish whiteness are reconstructed in the migratory experience. Polish whiteness, like the notion of identity, is also a nomadic notion. Suspended between the East and the West, throughout its history Poland has been excluded from "participation" in Europe but simultaneously has been an ally of European colonial powers confirming the hegemony of whiteness. As a result, Polish immigrants un/belong, and their identity becomes an investigation, an interplay of different points of reference, a subversive dis-re-location with a dialogic potential.

In "Escaping the Ventriloquist's Trap. The Nomadic Opportunities of Polyglossia and Migration," Katherina Rout, an Eastern European, like Szachowicz-Sempruch, describes her own transformation through the act of immigration with the use of the escape from the ventriloquist's lap metaphor. Rout draws on her experience as a German immigrant to Canada who moved from a monolingual context to a bilingual country with a multicultural policy, and traces the subsequent alterations in her identity. She describes her experience of diversity during her teaching in Canada and her self-discovery as a poly-vocal person in a polyphonic context. She sees immigration as a metamorphosis of the self. Changing languages and cultures is both

impoverishing and liberating for an immigrant. Such translinguistic and transcultural dialogues add consequent layers to the self, enrich it significantly, and liberate certain aspects but at the same time estrange others, as loss and gain intermingle. Rout notices that the self grows in exchange necessitated by Canadian bilingualism, multiculturalism and heteroglossia. Emphasizing, just like Szachowicz-Sempruch, the need for origins, Routs, the immigrant-woman-translator, sees herself as suspended between cultures and languages, between the role of author and scholar. Treating her translation projects as “minoritizing,” Rout is aware of enhancing the translated texts and her new culture with her voice.

The third essay of the first section, entitled “Strategies for Dealing with Canadian Multiculturalism: The Example of the Lithuanian-Canadian Minority,” by Milda Danytė, shows how culture and politics cross in the implementation of the official policy of multiculturalism. Aware of the pitfalls of multiculturalism, Danytė explains how the official principles have been adapted to serve the diverse goals of ethnic minorities when she contrasts the diasporic perspective with the transnational notion of Canadian ethnic identities. Using the example of Lithuanian-Canadians, the author emphasizes the fact that ethnic groups are very skilled in promoting their own goals within the system of funding. The essay analyzes two activities that the Lithuanian-Canadian diaspora has been involved in, namely the “Baltic Days” festival held from 1973 till the early 1990s in the Parliament Buildings, and the promotion of folk dancing among the second generation of Lithuanian-Canadians. The Baltic Days festival is described by Danytė as a unique event because it was highly politicized within the framework of Canadian multiculturalism, which denies ethnic identity a political aspect. Behind the cultural façade, Lithuanian-Canadians and other immigrants from Baltic countries sought, on behalf of their countries, support for independence after having been annexed by the Soviet Union. Similarly, culture and politics came together in the promotion of folk dancing, often cited by critics of the policy as an example of trivializing culture in the name of multiculturalism. While Lithuanian-Canadians saw the symbolic discourse of folk dancing as a way of strengthening, or “performing,” their ethnic identity and passing on their traditions to the next generation, the state organized folk dance festivals in order to bring separate ethnic identities out of their cultural ghettos and enhance their ties to the country.

The second part of the volume, “Responsibility to Otherness: Canadian Pedagogical Projects,” begins with Donna Palmateer Pennee’s essay, “‘National’ Literature, Literary Citizenship, Civic Education: A Report on Theorizing and Teaching Minority Cultural Expression and/as ‘Canadian’ Literatures.” Pennee, as a teacher, researcher and curriculum supervisor, reports on her experience at the University of Western Ontario. Her essay is divided into two parts. In the first part, Pennee underlines the importance of

“minoritized” literatures within national literatures. Literature is a means of representation, and both “minoritized” and “majoritized” literatures indicate that nations are not natural, but are carefully produced and revised. She sees literary culture as a form of interventionist diplomacy, a type of communing, which creates awareness of and sensitivity to difference. In her opinion, literary studies become a public sphere of negotiation in response to globalization, and can defamiliarize our notions and experiences of both citizenship and identification. National literatures are sites where state policies and traditional notions of nationalism can be questioned. In the second part of her article, Pennee stresses the importance of imagining community at the national level, rejecting the argument that in the era of globalization the category of “national” is obsolete. She illustrates this argument with a detailed report on a Canadian literature course she taught, entitled “Culture, Location, Identity: Minoritized Literatures in Canada and Beyond.” For her, a given curriculum should teach methods via particular cases. As far as minority issues are concerned, a curriculum should display how “minoritization” and “majoritization” are created and interact with one another and with political as well as cultural spheres. The aim of literary courses is to teach differentiation and point out similarities while avoiding reductive sameness. Pennee calls this process “the double and doubling generalizing as/and particularizing, heterogenizing as/and homogenizing.” (83) In her analysis she proves that literary studies can function as a form of civic education, and a Canadian literature class can become a space for teaching citizenship.

The next article, “Exploring Indigenous Oratory through Image Theatre as One Possibility for Cultivating Indigenous Knowledge in the Academy,” written by Laura Cranmer, describes the author’s experience of teaching an Indigenous Theatre class in the First Nations Studies Department at Vancouver Island University. Cranmer believes that for Indigenous people theatre can be a tool of decolonization and liberation. Her discussion of Indigenous knowledge, oratory and image theatre results from her experience as a Kwakwaka’wakw woman. She describes her academic education and her writing as a process of affirming her formerly colonized Indigenous self. She sees Indigenous theatre as an instrument which, apart from decolonizing Indigenous people, also challenges the audience’s assumptions about both Indigenous people and colonizers through political, socio-cultural critique. Reporting on her Indigenous theatre class, Cranmer describes the effects of translating life experience gained from interviews with Indigenous and Western tradition orators her students conducted into artistic expression – Theatre Image performances. The process developed trust among the Indigenous and non-Indigenous student actors, and built confidence in their own creative voices. For Cranmer, her Image theatre course, which links academia with Indigenous communities, became a space for intercultural exchange and cooperation, in which oratory is explored and the student’s individual voices

are liberated. Inspired by Marie Battiste's essay "The Struggle and Renaissance of Indigenous Knowledge in Eurocentric Education: Sites of Struggle, Strength, and Survivance" (2008), Cranmer calls for Indigenous educators, apart from raising awareness among non-Indigenous educators, to honour Indigenous knowledge by including it in innovative academia curriculums.

The last article in the subchapter, "Being Here, Being Queer, and Getting Used to it: Canada's Charter Right and University Culture," written by Craig Tapping, focuses on his own experience of otherness as a homosexual person, and on teaching about otherness on the grounds of sexual orientation in the English Department at Malasina University College in Nanaimo. In the essay, which offers a queer perspective on Canada's Charter of Rights, the author shows how the personal influences the public, the local the national, and what role higher education institutions play in the process. Tapping, drawing on Michael Ignatieff's *The Rights Revolution* (2000), sees Canadian culture as an entity in progress aimed at the future, open to change and inclusion. The author explains how changes in Canadian law between the mid-1990s and the year 2010 have influenced his teaching experience and his private life. He marks the changes in Canadian's acceptance of homosexuality, and describes his legal challenging of discriminatory Canadian law and his success at having his homosexual relationship officially recognized. Furthermore, Tapping demonstrates, by referring to his experience of teaching a course on Gay and Lesbian Literature, that virtual equality taught during such courses is a preparation for equality in the real world, and that the aesthetic promotes social change so that virtual inclusion of Others results in real incorporation of various minorities. He goes so far as to call the students who finish such a course "advocates of human rights" (131). The author sees the classroom as a place where social changes start, where reality is negotiated and where students expand their ideas of community to include various Others.

The third part of the volume, "Embracing Complexities of Canadian Otherness in Transcultural Literary and Film Discourses," offers six essays. The first, "Transforming Ethnicities in Canada: Central Eastern European-Canadian Writing in English," by Dana Patrascu-Kingsley, shows how the history of immigration has shaped the fiction of Central and Eastern European-Canadians created in the second half of the 20th century. Patrascu-Kingsley draws attention to the fact that the literature of Central and Eastern European-Canadians communicates changing ethnic identities and presents alternate attitudes to the transcultural exchanges in Canada. In her analysis of the most prominent novels by Central and Eastern European diasporas she shows how a path – from the desire for assimilation and material success, through transculturalism and transnationalism, to re/defining Central and Eastern European ethnicities – is inscribed. While the first texts discussed by Patrascu-Kingsley, written in the 1950s and set in the 1920s and 1930s, show the immigrants' break with the past and need to assimilate amid racial

discrimination and decreased economic opportunities, the literature of the second stage displays doubly-rooted immigrants who are political refugees and whose ethnicities are defined by the transcultural connections established between Canada and the home countries. Belonging, in this stage, is negotiated not only in the public sphere, as it was done before, but also in the personal realm. These texts illustrate the importance of transnationalism and transcultural connections. Immigrants' identities are defined by on-going transcultural exchanges. The late twentieth-century texts by Central and Eastern European-Canadian writers renegotiate their authors' ethnic identities from within the white majority. With their hybrid identities, in multicultural Canada, Canadians of Central and Eastern European origin reflect on and question their "invisible" otherness, explore and re-examine the diasporas into which they are born, and rediscover as well as redefine their ethnicities and their relations with other ethnic minorities and the ethnic majority of Canada. The transforming identities construct ethnicity in terms of a continual performance growing out of the past into the present.

The article entitled "The Laughter of Law-unbiding Bodies in Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* and Ashkok Mathur's *Once Upon an Elephant*," by Rita Wong, displays the critique through laughter which both writers employ. The novels invite the readers to notice and reconstruct the narratives of otherness for mis-named "Indians" – both First Nations peoples and South Asians. The texts make readers more sensitive to mis-identification within the Canadian (in)justice system, as Wong puts it, which results from stereotypical representations in other spheres of life. Following Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Wong claims that the novels show how the judicial system manufactures criminals out of those who are perceived as delinquents and those who deviate from the norm. The protagonists' othered identities are constructed and imposed on them. Furthermore, the texts display how mis-identification by the legal system becomes a form of social control. The humorous presentation of racial or sexual Others' oppression challenges the dominance of the legal system and aims at transcending its repressive narratives. In both novels, Bakhtinian carnival laughter becomes a re-creative tool. The racialized and ambiguously gendered protagonists with fluid identities elude being pinned down by representations and confining narratives – they subvert hierarchies and divisions, challenge traditional narratives, disrupt linear time, defy realism, reject homoglossia and problematize/proliferate truth(s). The novels, according to Wong, encourage the reader to question the process of racial and sexual normalization, which is a necessary prerequisite for change.

In her article entitled "Universalizing Humour: Drew Hayden Taylor's Indigenous Comedy." Klára Kolinská also focuses on humour and sees it as a core element of Aboriginal cultures, which maintains the continuity of culture and which has helped Aboriginals cope with injustice. Humour, like in King's

and Mathur's works, is for Taylor both an aesthetic tool and a potent social statement. It is a source of social incongruity and a tactic of survival in times of crisis. Analysing the literary output of one of the most prominent Aboriginal playwrights, Drew Hayden Taylor, Kolinská argues that his plays, influenced by the tradition of oral storytelling, Western realistic theatre and dramatic comic as well as popular culture, employ humour as the most humane and universal medium of destroying otherness. It becomes a powerful weapon to help recognize one's own limitations of perception and judgement. For Taylor, the dramatic performance functions as a space of transcultural encounter where differences among culturally diversified viewers are creatively revised. The language in his plays, due to mimicry and defamiliarisation, becomes a potent means of erasing cultural prejudice, ethnic tensions and historical injustice. By creating a feeling of incongruity, his plays encourage change in the audience.

The next essay, by Robert Zacharias, entitled "What Else Have to Remember: Mennonite Canadian Literature and the Strains of Diaspora," discusses the diasporic "narrative strains," as the author calls the repeated narrativisation of key historical diasporic experiences, in Rudy Wiebe's *Blue Mountains of China*. Zacharias claims that it is possible to identify certain core experiences that are explored by diasporic literary discourses, and he is interested in the way they are (re)told and the aims they fulfil. Aware of the slippery nature of the notion of diaspora, he defines the concept by looking at the ways a given text or a collection of texts imagines it. In his analysis of Rudy Wiebe's novel, which is, for the critic, a prominent representative of Mennonite literature, Zacharias argues that a Mennonite diaspora is created by returning to and retelling the community's key narrative – the traumatic exodus from Russia and the global dispersal of Mennonites. Wiebe's overwhelmingly multi-layered, polyphonic and reflexive novel provides a heterogeneous portrayal of the migrant experience and thematizes the notion of the diasporic community. It stresses the importance of the narrativisation of diasporic experience. Narrativisation carries potential for retelling, repeating, selecting and ordering. It also places in the foreground the process of remembering the diaspora. In *The Blue Mountains of China*, the representations of key diasporic experiences, apart from a shared culture, religion and language, connect and sustain the Mennonite community, but also become a site of contestation and negotiation of its Canadian diaspora identity.

Rūta Šlapkauskaitė, in her essay "Story of Identity, Identity of Story: Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*," analyses the question of (ethnic) identity and the process of storytelling in Goto's novel. Aware of various scholars' definitions and prescribed roles of ethnic identity in Canada, as well as views on its management by Canadian multicultural policy, Šlapkauskaitė claims that minority literatures provide a discursive space of cultural encounters and mutual influences. Because of this, they alter the reader's perception of otherness and its ideological constraints. For the critic, ethnic minority

literature, at its core, is concerned with identity which becomes a dynamic, multiple, and fractured entity. Such a view of identity is present in Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* which is rooted in Japanese North American fiction, but which challenges its restricting boundaries. For Šlapkauskaitė, the text, which focuses on the hyphenated identities of its protagonists and centres on the question of what it means to be a racialized and gendered subject in Canada, due to its polyphony of voices, stories and language, and subverted cultural paradigms and truths, becomes a critique of cultural prejudices and conservative storytelling patterns. The cross-cultural encounters of the novel's protagonists also result in a re/revision of the myths of the Canadian West, the prairie imagination and Canadian nationhood. Goto, as Šlapkauskaitė argues, shows the power of language which is responsible for notions of the self and others, and which becomes a tool of change. It is the language(s) in Goto's novel which allow(s) the readers to experience the anxieties of its characters, their otherness, and is/are the key shaping activity(ies). The metaphor of storytelling in Goto's novel, Šlapkauskaitė writes, presents identity as a process of change, return, transformation and re/construction, implying that other concepts, such as cultural stereotyping or exoticizing, are, similarly, fluid.

The final essay in the volume, entitled "Searching for Her/Self in Helen Lee's *Subrosa* – Canadian Minority Women's Experiments in Audiovisual Media," by Katarzyna Michalczyk, presents an experimental filmmaker, Helen Lee, who is doubly minoritized as a woman and an Asian-Canadian. As a representative of Canada's experimental cinema and audiovisual art, creating from outside the canon in her thematic and formal exploration of hybridity, Lee transcends traditional modes of white, male forms of expression in order to deconstruct the politics of representation, explore the concept of identity and create new counter-cultural positions. Lee's "cinematic essays" are inspired by the critical theories of feminism, postcolonialism, hybridity and altering. In her experimental film *Subrosa*, an example of the intercultural genre which makes use of experimental techniques such as "haptic" vision, Lee focuses on a postcolonial displaced subject's search for identity and personal truth(s). The heroine functions in the film as a representative of her generation of Asian women raised in Western cultures, who embodies cultural Others and exposes the falsity of official stories along with the secrets of hegemonic cultural regimes. The identity crisis which results from the protagonist's quest offers potential for new possibilities, both for the central character and the viewer, who also becomes engaged in questioning representations. Due to the film's power to reshape the viewer's perception, he/she becomes empowered to cause change.

Can otherness, in all its variety, be embraced? This interdisciplinary collection of essays, which examines concerns resulting from the coexistence of various racial/ethnic/gender/sexual minority groups within Canada, is proof

that it is possible. Created by culturally diversified writers, literary critics, academic teachers, artists, “guardians of transcultural memory, critics of inequalities and visionaries of better life” (10), as Eugenia Sojka calls them in the “Introduction,” the volume, exploring shades of personal and public/national otherness, invites the reader to intercultural encounters, makes him/her more sensitive to otherness and raises awareness of difference. The essays, which display how transculturality, crossculturality, interculturality and critical multiculturalism are employed in the process of constructing culture, intend to challenge the reader to think ethically and responsibly. With its versatile approach to the notion of otherness and heterogeneity, reflecting recent trends in critical discourses and offering Canadian (diasporic) and international Canadianists’ insight into Canadian culture, literature, theatre and film, the collection is a valuable work especially for Canadianists, students of Canadian culture and literature both in Poland and abroad, and for all readers interested in Canada. As its editors and contributors believe, *Embracing Otherness. Canadian Minority Discourses in Transcultural Perspectives* also aims at transcending the aesthetic and affecting the real, since our lives consist of constant interactions between the Same and the Other.