

Krzysztof Majer

"Niuanse wyobcowania. Diaspora i tematyka polska w Kanadzie", Anna Branach-Kallas, Toruń 2014 : [recenzja]

TransCanadiana 6, 341-342

2013

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, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Krzysztof Majer

University of Łódź

ANNA BRANACH-KALLAS (ED.),

NIUANSE WYOBKOWANIA.

DIASPORA I TEMATYKA POLSKA W KANADZIE.

TORUŃ: WYDAWNICTWO NAUKOWE UNIWERSYTETU

MIKOŁAJA KOPERNIKA,

2014. 185 PAGES. ISBN 978-83-231-3101-4

The volume edited by Anna Branach-Kallas is a welcome addition to the small, yet steadily developing area of research into the Polish diaspora in Canada. As the editor states in the introduction, the collection builds significantly on previous publications within this field – such as Mirosława Buchholtz's *Obraz Kanady w Polsce* or Bożena Szałasta-Rogowska's *Literatura polska w Kanadzie. Studia i szkice* – by expanding the scope to include works published in English and French, which nevertheless problematize Polishness. Importantly, the volume itself is in Polish; in this way, valuable information about diasporic culture and writing in the three languages may reach a broader audience, scholarly and otherwise.

The notion of Polishness – it must be added – is by no means a clear or obvious one. Already in the volume's early sections we are faced with intricate questions related to identity: is Polishness constituted by ethnic rootedness, language, geographical location, or perhaps a combination of some or all of these factors? As Anna Branach-Kallas shows in her analysis of Andrew J. Borkowski's stories, even the tiny world of Toronto's Roncesvalles – figured here as the eponymous Copernicus Avenue – is a microcosm of conflicted, irreconcilable notions of what it means to be Polish. The issue is complicated further by the inclusion of other identifications – in the case of this volume, primarily Jewishness, which is a central aspect of identity for a large number of the discussed authors (Helen Weinzwieg, Régine Robin, Tecia Werbowski, Lilian Nattel, Irene Karafilly, Anne Michaels, Norman Ravvin and Myriam Beaudoin), who engage with the Polish 'homeland' both through memory and postmemory. Thus, the proposed Polishness is shown as multifaceted, often dispersed and tentative, deeply traumatic or even haunted.

The volume is logically structured: a set of critical analyses of particular literary works is preceded by Anna Reczyńska's historical outline of Polish emigration to Canada and Anna Branach-Kallas's interview with Borkowski. Combined, the two pieces lay a solid foundation for the remaining inquiries. The rest of the volume consists of essays devoted to writing in English (contributions by Dagmara Drewniak, Agnieszka Rzepa, Ewa Bodal and Anna Branach-Kallas), French (Piotr Sadkowski and Anna Żurawska) and Polish (Bożena Szalasta-Rogowska).

Whereas the earliest of the discussed works – the poems of Zofia Bohdanowiczowa – date back to mid-1960s, the emphasis is on writing from the last two decades; the most recent examples include Borkowski's aforementioned short story cycle *Copernicus Avenue* (2011), Marek Kusiba's volume of poems *Alassio* (2011) and Aga Maksimowska's novel *Giant* (2012). This adds considerably to the value of the publication, since many of the works analyzed here have not thus far received such detailed critical attention; frequently, then, the reader is offered a glimpse of the contemporary Polish-Canadian writing scene *in statu nascendi*. In the case of critical engagements with earlier writers, their work is often reevaluated (Agnieszka Rzepa's essay on Helen Weinzwieg, who enjoyed a sizeable critical stature in the 1970s and 1980s but whose work has now largely fallen into neglect) or juxtaposed with that of more contemporary authors (Piotr Sadkowski's comparative study of Régine Robin's *La Québécoise* – a classic of *écriture migrante* – and Myriam Baudoin's *Hadassa*, described as occupying 'trans-migrant' positions). Two essays in the collection offer a broader perspective: Bożena Szalasta-Rogowska describes the intriguing evolution of Polishness in Canadian poetry written in Polish, from Bohdanowiczowa to Edward Zyman and Marek Kusiba, while Dagmara Drewniak presents a study of Polish cities as represented across several Canadian works of fiction (by Lilian Nattel, Anne Michaels, Ewa Stachniak and Norman Ravvin) as well as non-fiction (Irena Karafilly). In one essay, translators into Polish are taken to task for consistently ignoring a large body of work which deals with Polishness and even advertises itself through suggested Polish titles (Anna Żurawska's overview of Teczka Werbowskiego's numerous *petits romans*).

What results is a rich and highly diverse collection of essays, which attempts to strike an equilibrium between literature written in English, French and Polish; between conventionally understood "Polishness" and its less obvious yet equally valid incarnations; lastly, between writers belonging to a certain established (if regrettably still minor) tradition and relatively recent newcomers. It also offers a balanced overview of literary production in its various forms, exploring the novel, the short story, the poem and the autobiography / travelogue. With its remarkably compact 180 pages, the volume constitutes a comprehensive and cogent study of an elusive, multidimensional and otherwise under-analyzed literary community.