

Anna Branach-Kallas

Polish Immigrants' Search for the Peaceable Kingdom: Andrew J. Borkowski's "Copernicus Avenue"

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Anna Branach-Kallas

Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń

**POLISH IMMIGRANTS' SEARCH FOR THE
PEACEABLE KINGDOM:
ANDREW J. BORKOWSKI'S *COPERNICUS AVENUE***

Résumé : L'article est une étude du recueil de nouvelles *Copernicus Avenue* (2011) de Andrew J. Borkowski, écrivain canadien d'origine polonaise. L'analyse se concentre sur l'évolution de la diaspora polonaise à Toronto après la Deuxième Guerre mondiale et sur les efforts des immigrants pour reconstruire leur existence au Canada. L'article commence par un aperçu historique sur l'immigration polonaise dans les années d'après-guerre et sur la législation concernant ce groupe ethnique. On vise à analyser les histoires individuelles des réfugiés polonais et leur assimilation au Canada à l'exemple de Thadeus Mienkiewicz, le personnage principal de *Copernicus Avenue*. Discriminé et humilié, Thadeus rêve d'une identité canadienne interprétée comme liberté et succès. Dans *Copernicus Avenue*, Borkowski établit aussi un dialogue fascinant entre les diasporas polonaise et irlandaise, fondé sur leur expérience d'exclusion sociale partagée. Les concepts de migration et d'identité diasporique sont étudiés du point de vue du constructivisme et des théories du trauma.

In *Copernicus Avenue*, his prize-winning debut collection of short stories from 2011, Andrew J. Borkowski depicts the imagined lives of Polish immigrants in Canada after the Second World War. The stories in the collection were partly inspired by the biography of Borkowski's father, who was born near Pinsk in Polesie, an area that today is part of Belarus. In 1939, he served in the Polish cavalry and, after the defeat of the Polish army, escaped to France and later Britain. He then joined the Polish Air Force and came to Canada to attend navigator school in Ontario. Most of his family were murdered in a Nazi massacre during the war. He decided not to return to communist Poland in the post-war years and travelled back to Canada, where he married a Canadian of English-Protestant descent. Andy grew up in Roncesvalles, the Polish neighbourhood in Toronto, which, in his imagination was transformed into Copernicus Avenue. Although his family spoke English at home, they observed Polish traditions and were immersed in the life of the Polish community

(Stachniak; private correspondence with the author). After the death of his parents, first his mother in 1999, then his father in 2001, Borkowski realized that he needed to complete the fragmented stories he had heard as a child from the Polish refugees and exiles reluctant to speak about their traumatic past (Borkowski www.youtube.com; www.torontoist.com). *Copernicus Avenue* illustrates the difficult beginnings of the Polish displaced persons in Canada, the discrimination of Polish immigrants, the formation of the post-war Polish diaspora and its interactions with other ethnic groups. The central protagonist, Thadeus Mienkiewicz, was inspired by the figure of Andrew's father, whereas Mienkiewicz's sons, Alex and Blaise, are the author's fictional alter egos (Stachniak; private correspondence with the author). Although *Copernicus Avenue* is not a novel, the reappearance of the same characters at various temporal moments in the collection allows the reader to trace their fictional life-stories.

In the years immediately following the Second World War, Canadian immigration policy, shaped during the Great Depression in response to high unemployment and profound feelings of insecurity, continued to be highly restrictive. Anxious about the possibility of a post-war recession, Mackenzie King's government opposed an increase of immigration. Nevertheless, a growing number of Canadian politicians criticized Canada's exclusionist policy and advocated in favour of lowering immigration barriers (Knowles 155-157). They claimed that "a larger population would result in greater productivity and hence higher incomes for Canadians" (Knowles 178) and would improve national security since immigrants would settle the uninhabited regions of the country. Sympathizing with the hardships of the displaced persons and refugees in Europe and invoking the obligation to grant them sanctuary, an increasing number of Canadians demanded the admission of war survivors, many of whom refused to be repatriated to communist regimes (Knowles 157-159). Reassured by Canada's booming peacetime economy, in the decade between 1946-1957 the Canadian government issued a number of acts and provisions "to allow enough immigrants to enter the country to meet domestic labour shortages but not enough to disrupt the Canadian labour market" (Knowles 163). The new law simplified the administration of immigration, regulated the selection, admission, and deportation of immigrants (Knowles 161-178).

Interestingly, one of the first groups of immigrants admitted to Canada in the post-war years were Polish soldiers who had been placed under British military command in 1940 and were unwilling to return to a communist-occupied homeland. Although initially Mackenzie King's cabinet was hostile to accepting Polish veterans, in July 1946 they passed an order-in-council allowing entry to 4527 Polish combatants between November 1946 and April 1947. The British government provided the shipping and sponsored transportation costs. This

resettlement program in fact anticipated the later “bulk labour” schemes. The veterans were required to serve on a farm for the period of one or two years. Many of them were shocked and humiliated by the poor conditions, poor pay, and poor treatment and wrote letters of complaint to Polish-language press. After their contracts expired, 97% decided to relocate to Canadian cities. Although most of them were educated professionals – army officers, teachers, engineers, Canadian authorities did not recognize their qualifications. In spite of the difference in class, the Polish diaspora organizations assisted their compatriots, helping them to find jobs and accommodation, providing them with loans, clothes and medicine. However, the veterans rarely appreciated these efforts and formed a distinct group within the Polish Canadian community, unified by army traditions and intense *esprit de corps*. They disagreed with the political agenda of Polish organizations and soon dominated the most important of them - the Canadian Polish Congress (*Kongres Polonii Kanadyjskiej*), imposing intransigent, anti-communist views (Reczyńska 218-221; 272-279; Patalas 16-18; Knowles 161).

In the decade between 1945 and 1955, over 50, 000 Polish exiles and refugees resettled to Canada. Apart from combatants and prisoners of war, they were survivors of concentration camps, labour camps, *gulags*, Warsaw uprising. Many of the better-educated DPs settled in Canadian cities, taking advantage of the developed network of Polish parishes, associations, youth organizations, as well as publications, cultural events and services provided in Polish (Reczyńska 277-279; Jurkszus-Tomaszewska 23-24; www.multiculturalcanada.ca).

In the longest story in *Copernicus Avenue*, “Allemande Left”, Borkowski illustrates Thadeus Mienkiewicz’s and other Polish displaced persons’ difficult process of assimilation in post-war Canada. By means of disturbing comparisons and juxtapositions that place the legendary Canadian tolerance and hospitality in an uncanny perspective, the author conveys a sense of historical injustice. Employed at a beet farm in Manitoba, the Polish DPs take the place of German prisoners of war and move into the unheated sheds that a few weeks earlier had been inhabited by the Germans. Like the POWs before them, they are watched by armed guards. The fact that Polish combatants are placed under the control of the so called “Zombies”, “draftees who refused to volunteer for service overseas” (Borkowski, *Copernicus* 13), highlights their humiliation and historical irony. The isolation and surveillance of the DPs in the Canadian West reminds them of Soviet *gulags*: “It felt like they were being swept under the carpet, kept out of sight in a Canadian Siberia” (Borkowski, *Copernicus* 13).

When the veterans are finally allowed to move to Toronto, it turns out that Canada needs labourers for the most menial and exhausting jobs, while

intellectuals are deprived of decent means of subsistence. Referring to the discrimination of the better-educated among the Polish immigrants, Borkowski creates a series of haunting comparisons that place the persecution of Polish intelligentsia in the vicious circle of history: “The architects, the lawyers, the doctors, and the teachers have had to conceal their educations from the immigration officers, just as they did from the Gestapo and the Soviet secret police, the NKWD, exaggerating time spent on the farms of distant relatives or playing up their experience cutting trees in the Gulag” (Borkowski, *Copernicus* 13-14). Mienkiewicz himself cannot find any employment in Toronto, and his heroic war deeds gradually lose their value and significance: “He’ll need something more than a war on his resume to win this battle” (Borkowski, *Copernicus* 24).

Copernicus Avenue therefore focuses on what Avtar Brah refers to in *Cartographies of Diaspora* as the “situatedness” of an immigrant group:

The manner in which a group comes to be ‘situated’ in and through a wide variety of discourses, economic processes, state policies and institutional practices is critical to its future. This ‘situatedness’ (...) enables us to begin to deconstruct the regimes of power which operate to differentiate one group from another; to represent them as similar or different; to include or exclude them from constructions of the ‘nation’ and the body politic; and which inscribe them as juridical, political, and psychic subjects (182-183).

Importantly, the Polish DPs are not the only ethnic group discriminated against by the Canadians. In “Allemande Left”, already during his first stay in Canada for navigation training in 1943 Mienkiewicz is angered by the Puritan hypocrisy of Canadian society, the Orange Day Parades, and the open anti-Semitism of the signs “Gentiles Only” (Borkowski, *Copernicus* 10). Borkowski’s protagonist perceives the massive intolerance of the Anglo-Saxon majority as an important mechanism in the process of nation building, the attempt to impose a homogenous vision of collective identity still defined to a large degree by the British model. Consequently, the relation between the Canadian nation and the diasporas that aspire to become part of it is based on a specific hierarchy of ethnicities, which does not encourage intercultural dialogue or the development of hybrid identities (see Radhakrishnan 121). The humiliations and hardships suffered by the DPs in *Copernicus Avenue* thus provide a pretext for profound reflection on the formation of post-war Canadianness in a multicultural context.

A fascinating aspect of *Copernicus Avenue* is the heterogeneous portrait of the Polish diaspora in Toronto, which reflects the varied itineraries of the post-war Polish immigrants in Canada. By highlighting the different circumstances

that conditioned his characters' diasporic journeys, Borkowski illustrates the socio-economic, political, and cultural factors that marked the formation of the Polish diaspora in Toronto after the Second World War. The inhabitants of Copernicus Avenue are combatants, prisoners of labour camps and *gulags* ("Constitution Day," "Babayaga," "Skywiper"), pre-war communists ("The Lesson"), as well as political refugees of the 1960s ("Twelve Versions of Lech"). "Allemande Left" and "Constitution Day" in particular illustrate the disparate opinions of the Polish immigrants concerning the political situation in Poland, the loyalty of the Polish diaspora to the homeland, as well as the meaning of Polishness in exile.

Ignacy Poniatowski, an aristocrat and officer of the Polish army, considers himself a political refugee and a representative of the Polish government in exile. His obsessions with Soviet espionage are fuelled by the political climate in North America in the early 1950s. A representative of the radical combatant circles in post-war Canada (see Reczyńska 220), Poniatowski intends to lead a radical anti-communist campaign, pressuring the Canadian government for intervention in Poland and intending to reconstruct the Polish pre-war borders. His ideas are vehemently questioned by Pavel Skrubicki, a lower class character who was drafted into the *Wehrmacht* when his hometown was incorporated into the *Reich*, ran away and joined the Polish army. Skrubicki has enriched himself on the post-war black market in Toronto and is involved in contraband trade with the Polish consulate. He supports the Polish diaspora financially, however, embittered by the Yalta agreement, he is fully aware of Poland's isolation and the utopian aspect of Poniatowski's projects. Caught in between, Thadeus Mienkiewicz, a former teacher of Ukrainian children, a Lancer in the Polish cavalry and a RAF navigator during the war, attempts to mitigate Poniatowski's radical ideas and to encourage him to focus on his Canadian present rather than the Polish past.

Although in Canada they all belong to the category of impoverished DPs, differences of class and regional background, imported from pre-war Poland, influence the conflicts and disparate attitudes of the Polish immigrants in *Copernicus Avenue*. As a result, Borkowski highlights the tension between two conceptions of diaspora, the traditional one, based on an idealisation of the ancestral home, a collective commitment to its safety and prosperity, a strong tie to the past and a block to assimilation in the present (Cohen 24-26), and a modern approach to diaspora identities "constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (Hall 402; italics in the original). In *Copernicus Avenue*, diasporic identities are never fixed or essentialised. By illustrating the socio-political dimensions of the diaspora experience, Borkowski therefore places the concepts of migrancy and diaspora in a non-conventional, thought-provoking context.

Importantly, in *Copernicus Avenue*, Borkowski highlights the narrative aspect of diasporic identity, a crucial element in contemporary theoretical works on migration and diaspora (see Bhabha; Brah; Gilroy). Like the nation (see Anderson), a diaspora is an „imagined community”, taking shape during the performance of symbolic rituals, consolidated in various narratives of individual and communal experience (Bhabha 139-170). As Brah suggests, the multiple diasporic journeys „may configure into one journey via a *confluence of narratives* as it is lived and re-lived, produced and transformed through individual as well as collective memory and re-memory. It is within this confluence of narrativity that ‘diasporic community’ is differently imagined under different historical circumstances” (183; italics in the original). In his stories, Borkowski emphasizes the variety of identity narratives in the Polish diaspora as well as the role imagination plays in the construction of these stories. This is not only the reflection of current postmodern conceptions of de-centred subjectivities. In *Copernicus Avenue*, immigration appears a new beginning, a chance for a new life, for it enables the immigrant to erase the painful past and to imagine a new self: “Everyone is free to invent their own story here” (Borkowski, *Copernicus* 14).

Diasporic narrativity takes hyperbolic proportions in “Twelve Versions of Lech,” which focuses on Mienkiewicz’s son, Alex, and his fascination with the mysterious figure of Lech, a great artist, who, apparently with the help of Magritte himself, decided not to return to Poland after his success in the 1962 Biennale in Brussels. Incredible, often contradictory, rumours about Lech circulate in the Polish neighbourhood. Interrogating the reliability of these narratives, Alex is given the following reply by an immigrant friend: „You will never know what really happened to Lech or any of us. (...) It is a silent agreement we all have with ourselves, that nothing will ever make us prisoners again, not even memory” (Borkowski, *Copernicus* 128). The structure of “Twelve Versions of Lech”, composed of eleven parts instead of twelve, illustrates graphically the lack of closure and constant transformation of immigrant identities in the New World.

In the stories focusing on post-war immigration, on the example of Poniatowski, Mienkiewicz and other combatants, Borkowski shows how important these – fragile and illusory – narratives are for the confused Polish refugees, facing the nadir of their hopes in the New World. After the occupation of Poland, often in dramatic circumstances, they walked hundreds of kilometres to join the Free Polish Force abroad. Mienkiewicz, for example, chased by the Gestapo and the NKWD, guided by some friendly Ukrainians, crossed the Carpathian Mountains on foot to get to Hungary. They risked their lives in the most dangerous endeavours on land and in air, motivated by honour, honour identified with Polishness, “because honor was all they had left” (Borkowski,

Copernicus 175). Tragically, their system of values collapsed after the Yalta conference. For the cynical figures such as Skrubicki, the betrayal of Poland in Yalta justifies the abandonment of all ideals for the sake of pragmatic materialism (Borkowski, *Copernicus* 16). Although perceived by the Polish community in Toronto as the embodiment of Polishness, Mienkiewicz himself realizes gradually how inadequate and grotesque his own life story, full of heroism and pathos, appears in the New World. He would even like to erase these events from memory: "It was something that I think I am already forgetting" (Borkowski, *Copernicus* 34). In fact, Mienkiewicz dreams of a narrative of Canadianness to define himself anew: "He has left behind Poniatowski and the Copernicus Avenue set, all the ones who insist on walking backwards into their new home. He will learn to skate, have sons who play baseball. He will own a house in the new suburbs, a car, and a driveway to park it in. He will lose his accent and finish his sentences with 'eh?'" (Borkowski, *Copernicus* 29).

This desire to refashion his identity motivates Mienkiewicz to venture outside of the Polish neighbourhood in Toronto. It is important to emphasize that the relationships between various ethnic groups are crucial from the point of view of diaspora theories for such a perspective makes it possible to free the diaspora from the stereotypical relation with the ethnic majority, which always involves specific hierarchies and a dialectic of conflicts and antagonisms. Such an approach to the immigrant experience allows a more insightful analysis of diaspora in multicultural societies. According to Avtar Brah,

Rather, the *concept* of diaspora concerns the historically variable forms of *relationality* within and between diasporic formations. It is about relations of power that similarise and differentiate between and across changing diasporic constellations. In other words, the concept of diaspora centres on the *configurations of power which differentiate diasporas internally as well as situate them in relation to one another* (183; italics in the original).

Even though after the Second World War the DPs replaced the Irish Catholics discriminated against and marginalized in pre-war Canada, Roman Catholicism, which used to be the factor of discrimination in the pre-war years, bridges in *Copernicus Avenue* very different diasporas. Rosary Hour held in the open air in Torontounifies thousands of Irish, Polish, Lithuanian, Italian and Hungarian immigrants: "Twenty thousand voices murmur the Our Father and three Hail Marys. Italians, Hungarians, Poles, and Lithuanians spice the prayers with fresh accents and strange grace notes. This is the Church triumphant, not just the refuge of the Catholic Irish and Scots, its

ranks swollen by wave after wave of DPs” (Borkowski, *Copernicus* 21). Religious factors therefore bring together immigrants of very different cultural backgrounds and allow them to form new alliances, beyond cultural differences.

Thadeus’ confrontation with the Canadians of various, unspecified ethnic backgrounds in “Allemande Left” constitutes a most interesting aspect of *Copernicus Avenue*. Eager to become Canadian, Mienkiewicz chooses to attend a square dance held by the Air Force Association instead of the dance organized by the Polish Combatants’ Association to introduce Polish girls who have just arrived from refugee camps in Austria. What becomes apparent on this occasion is the cultural clash between Thadeus’ elegant Old World manners and the vulgar behaviour of the Canadian labourers in the New World. Having noticed that they are not really interested in the war, “already a distant memory” (Borkowski, *Copernicus* 28) as most of them never flew out of Canada, Thadeus makes an effort to find a common language with them by discussing the quintessential Canadian sport -hockey. When they realize that their idol, Turk Broda, is also “a polack” (Borkowski, *Copernicus* 26), “Thadeus is granted admission to this small circle of Canadian manhood” (Borkowski, *Copernicus* 28).

Importantly, this encounter with the Canadian other makes Thadeus self-conscious as he becomes aware of his own alterity encoded in his body language. Consequently, he attempts to acquire what Sneja Gunew calls „somatic or corporeal technologies” (Gunew 63) that will allow him to perform the North American identity of his choice. He therefore drinks beer, a beverage that he detests, straight out of the bottle, a practice that he finds “repulsive, but he reminds himself that he is a Canadian now, so he does as the Canadians do” (Borkowski, *Copernicus* 27). He eats steaming corn on the cob, butter running down his fingers, and, although he initially believes he will not be able to acquire the “Canadian taste for cattle feed” (Borkowski, *Copernicus* 31), he discovers it is surprisingly tasty. Anxious to integrate with the Canadians, Mienkiewicz imitates their uncouth behaviour – he removes his jacket, rolls up his sleeves, and starts to learn the fundamentals of square dancing. Contrary to his expectations, however, square dance proves very different from a Krakowiak or a Mazurka and his performance is a disaster. Mienkiewicz’s chaotic body movements and utter confusion during the square dance lesson function as a metaphor of his inability to comprehend the North American cultural norms and his feeling of loss in the Canadian reality.

Despite several faux pas, during this afternoon, Thadeus initiates his relationship with Marlene O’Halloran, whom he will later marry. Marlene is an oversensitive, intelligent woman, traumatized by the loss of her fiancé during the war. Her sensibility challenges the norms of womanhood in the

Irish diaspora. Moved by the vulnerability of this “damsel in distress” (Borkowski, *Copernicus* 28), Thadeus resorts to the stereotypically Polish code of chivalric behaviour, which she, in turn, finds particularly attractive. Borkowski’s masterful design of “Allemande Left”, in which Thadeus’ and Marlene’s points of view alternate thus shifting between the Polish and Irish communities, provides insight into the complex relationships within the specific diasporas and between diasporas in post-war Canada. Furthermore, the encounter with Marlene makes Thadeus understand the paradoxical situation of an immigrant in the New World. On the one hand, his failure to grasp North American cultural codes intensifies his feelings of confusion and dislocation: “In England, I am a navigator. But in Canada, my navigation is not so good” (Borkowski, *Copernicus* 30). On the other hand, however, it is while talking to Marlene that Thadeus realizes the transformative potential of migrancy (Hall 393), which initiates a never-ending metamorphosis, a constant process of creating new, never complete, identity narratives:

‘Canadians never say they are Canadian. Always, they are saying ‘I am Irish,’ or ‘I am Scottish.’ Why must you always be something else than what you are?’

‘I guess it’s because we don’t really know what that is.’

‘It’s what I wish to become.’

‘Then you can tell us when you find it.’ (Borkowski, *Copernicus* 32)

In this sense, Canadianness becomes an “open signifier” (Ang 241) and it is only up to Thadeus what kind of meanings he will inscribe within it.

Nevertheless, several of the immigrant biographies fictionalised in *Copernicus Avenue* are not stories of success. In fact, Borkowski depicts the immigrants’ reconstruction of new lives in the New World and the formation of Polish-Canadian identities in terms of trauma. Mienkiewicz himself suffers from multi-layered post-traumatic stress disorder resulting from his war experience, the dramatic loss of his family in a Nazi massacre, and finally immigration itself¹. Geographical displacement and the accompanying sense of cultural dislocation can be approached as transformation trauma, resulting in radical challenges to the accepted system of values and the disruption of the support networks typical of a given social group (Orwid 85; Widera-Wysoczańska 111). As depicted in *Copernicus Avenue*, immigration involves an ontological and epistemological shift, requiring from the Polish DPs

¹I thoroughly discuss Thadeus’ psychological trauma and the impact of intergenerational trauma on his sons in “Trauma polskości w opowiadaniach Andrew J. Borkowskiego”. *Nuansze wyobcowania. Diaspora i tematyka polska w Kanadzie*. Ed. Anna Branach-Kallas. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2014. 163-181.

immediate transition to new lifestyles, routines, ways of earning money, social hierarchies, intellectual frameworks, points of reference, and existential goals.

Although Mienkiewicz seems to desire to leave behind the narrative of Polishness, he fails to abandon his noble ideals of altruism and sacrifice for the sake of North American individualism and materialism. He works hard to become an accountant and buy a house in the suburbs, yet he becomes so absorbed in the problems of the Polish diaspora that he never manages to realize his “Canadian” dream. He gives up a profitable job in an insurance company to head the loan committee in the Parish Trust; he works for the Polish Combatants’ Association, the Air Force Association, and many other organizations; lobbies members of Parliament and intercedes with the Polish consulate; organizes charity events, fundraising for parcels to Poland, medicine, monuments in the Polish neighbourhood. Rejecting the cynical attitude of Skrubicki or the radical, non-compromising views of Poniatowski, Thadeus combines tradition with innovation, shaping his own conception of what it means to be a Polish Canadian in Toronto in the post-war years. As Borkowski emphasizes in an interview with Eva Stachniak, “many Polish veterans never stopped seeing themselves as soldiers, continuing the fight both by aiding Poland in whatever way they could, and by working in the community here [i.e. in Canada] to ensure that their fellow veterans could live a life of dignity – that in itself was an act of resistance – a kind of defiance of the powers that had deprived them of their homeland” (Stachniak).

On a collective level, *Copernicus Avenue* represents the Polish post-war immigrant community as suffering from cultural trauma, which occurs when “members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (Alexander 1). Cultural trauma refers to “a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion” (Eyerman 61). Disrupting people’s sense of security and continuity, traumatogenic change transforms their system of values, rules and ideals in a radical, deep and fundamental way (Sztompka 159). Cultural trauma is therefore a form of collective trauma based on a community’s awareness of their common plight and collective attempts to give meaning to the shared occurrences (Sztompka 160). The Polish community in *Copernicus Avenue* are brought together by their experience of war and dislocation, and the impossibility of return to a communist-occupied homeland. They produce complex – tension and conflict-generating – narratives about these events, trying to identify causes and villains, envisaging means of protest, looking for conspiracies (Poniatowski). In this sense, Mienkiewicz’s involvement in the lives of the Polish community is a way of dealing with trauma by helping others

to cope with traumatogenic change. Paradoxically, by remembering about the war and their common experience of suffering in exile, Mienkiewicz helps the other immigrants to leave the damaging events behind and to refashion their existence in the New World.

The eponymous protagonist of "Babayaga", in turn, a homeless, dirty, frightening survivor of a German labour camp, embodies the inability to deal with trauma, both individual and cultural one:

To get there, Babayaga must pass the Crippled Civilians store where women line up every Thursday morning when the week's shipment of used goods arrives. Pencilled eyebrows pucker and cashmere berets bob like poppies as the women recoil from her smell. It's the odour of cattle cars and crowded bunkhouses, of a past they have rouged over with husbands and houses and Toni permanents (Borkowski, *Copernicus* 148).

Babayaga therefore haunts the edges of the Polish community reminding them of what they wish to forget – their victimization in the Old World. An uncanny spectre of the abject past, Babayaga disrupts the process of adapting to trauma and, with time, of overcoming trauma by the Polish community.

The enduring effects of cultural trauma in *Copernicus Avenue* are also demonstrated on the example of Alex, Mienkiewicz's elder son. Alex identifies himself with his father's combatant past. Consequently, when he joins the Air Cadet School, he is motivated by the ideals of honour and brotherhood that he inherited from his father. However, the relationships between the air cadets are based on corruption, racism and homophobia, which challenge the reliability of a narrative of Polishness among the second generation immigrants. Alex then acquires prestigious diplomas, becomes a partner in his firm, marries a Polish girl, buys a house in the suburb, realizing his father's Canadian dream. And yet, the last story in the collection, "Being Alex", illustrates Alex's disappointment, by showing his imaginary alter ego, a successful artist in the Polish neighbourhood, leading an existence he always dreamt of but was never able to realize, eager as he was to compensate for his father's losses.

Nevertheless, *Copernicus Avenue* ends up with a sense of acceptance and hope. Portraying the changing facets of Copernicus Avenue, Borkowski's stories also highlight the positive and constructive aspect of change. From a "nameless buffer zone" in the late 1940s, difficult to find among other streets and avenues, "the perfect receptacle for Thadeus and his army of displaced persons from another place-between-places" (Borkowski, *Copernicus* 10), a working-class neighbourhood for "dowdy, earnest, working people" (Borkowski, *Copernicus* 201) in the 1960s and 1970s, Copernicus Avenue

metamorphoses at the turn of the millennium into a fashionable district with multicultural cafes, restaurants, bookstores, services, and music spilling from bars onto the street. The evolving neighbourhood stands metaphorically for the Polish diaspora and the changing Polish Canadian identities. Initially subjected to the harsh rule of law, the Polish DPs manage to rebuild their lives, finding in Canada a sanctuary, “that place where nobody touch you” (Borkowski, *Copernicus* 45). If Borkowski does not allude directly to Northrop Frye’s concept of a Peaceable Kingdom (Frye 251), in “Twelve Versions of Lech” he cites Frye’s famous question “Where is here?” (Frye 222). The eponymous character then replies that here “is nowhere. And that (...) is a good, good place to be” (Borkowski, *Copernicus* 132). Borkowski and his protagonist thus emphasize the immigrant’s liminal state yet, synchronously, and somehow provocatively, place the themes of displacement and traumatic dislocation in an ambiguous perspective. Celebrating the post-war Polish immigrants’ generation in Canada, whose endurance, in spite of traumatic experiences, testifies to their strength and dignity, and the “durability of the human spirit” (Borkowski, www.youtube.com), in continuity with a distinctive Canadian tradition as identified by Frye, *Copernicus Avenue* illustrates their quest for “a world of peace and protection” (Frye 241), highlighting Canada’s utopian potential for transformation.

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Anna Branach-Kallas (Ph.D., D.Litt.) is Associate Professor in the Department of English at Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń, Poland. She is the author of *Corporeal Itineraries: Body, Nation, Diaspora in Selected Canadian Fiction* (2010) and *In the Whirlpool of the Past: Memory, Intertextuality and History in the Fiction of Jane Urquhart* (2003). She has also published over fifty essays, which express a range of interests from intertextuality and historiography to corporeality, trauma, and postcolonialism. She is the co-editor of, among others, the first two volumes of the Polish Journal of Canadian Studies *TransCanadiana*. Since 2009, she has also directed the Canadian Studies Resource Center at Nicolaus Copernicus University.