

# Magdalena Paluszkiewicz-Misiaczek

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"Uraz przetrwania: Trauma i polemika z mitem pierwszej wojny światowej w powieści kanadyjskiej",  
Anna Branach-Kallas, Toruń 2014 :  
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**ANNA BRANACH-KALLAS (2014). *URAZ  
PRZETRWANIA: TRAUMA I POLEMIKA Z MITEM  
PIERWSZEJ WOJNY ŚWIATOWEJ W POWIEŚCI  
KANADYJSKIEJ*. TORUŃ, WYDAWNICTWO NAUKOWE  
UNIwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika. 268 PAGES.  
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The monograph by Anna Branach-Kallas belongs to the vast array of publications commemorating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the outbreak of World War I. However, the aim of this particular book is not to devise yet another historical and literary study of the Great War. Through the analysis of the motive of trauma in a few, well selected war novels, the author draws the readers' attention to the deconstruction of the myth of World War I taking place in Canada throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Such approach is truly innovative. It allows readers to realize how historical memory and knowledge about war events can be manipulated. Such awareness of changes in narration concerning historical events is of utmost importance, especially when dealing with the "difficult past".

In Poland, the knowledge about Canadian participation in the conflict is virtually non-existent, apart from a limited group of readers who got acquainted with the Polish translation of *Rilla of Ingleside* – the last volume of Lucy Maud Montgomery's saga about red-haired Anne and a small circle of subject-interested academics. Thus, the decision to write the book in Polish was certainly most appropriate, for the sake of popularizing Canadian literature and history among wider spectrum of Polish readers. Equally apt was the decision to precede literary analysis with a thorough, multifaceted, yet synthetic historical presentation of Canadian participation in WWI, and a concise outline of the history of changing approaches towards war trauma, both before and after the conflict. These parts greatly facilitate reading of the subsequent chapters devoted to the examination of particular literary works.

Literary analysis proper begins with works published either during or shortly after the war. From a multitude of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century novels the author decided to choose Ralph Connor's *The Sky Pilot in No Man's Land* (1919) and Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Rilla of Ingleside* (1921) as the ones which vastly contributed to creation of the myth of WWI in Canada. They were showing romanticized and idealized picture of the conflict, promoting the concepts of honour and courage of the soldiers, as well as sacrifice and patriotism of those who stayed at home. *Generals Die in Bed* (1930) by Charles Yale Harrison and *God's Sparrow* (1937) by Philip Child are presented as the first examples of realistic war prose, written by former soldiers, who did not pass over the negative aspects of war – cruelty, barbarity, suffering and broke down with the stereotypical notions of manly courage or brave and heroic soldiers, who did not succumb to the feelings of terror and panic.

The problem of war trauma and tragic confrontation of a sensitive and caring individual with the insane reality of war is further developed on the basis of *The Wars* (1977) by Timothy Findley and *Three Day Road* (2005) by Joseph Boyden. In the end the author decided also to refer to the novels presenting WWI from rather uncommon perspectives. In Frances Itani's *Deafening* it is a stretcher-bearer from Canadian Medical Corps. In Jane Urquhart's *Underpainter* (1997) it is a nurse from Canadian Army Nursing Corps. In Jack Hodgins' *Broken Ground* (1998) and Jane Urquhart's *The Stone Carvers* (2001) these are veterans fighting for return to civil life or civilians whose beloved were either killed or returned permanently scarred – physically or mentally.

Approaching such a wide selection of texts may pose considerable challenge, yet their careful and well thought out selection allowed Anna Branach-Kallas to build a multi-faceted and complex picture. It is showing how the perception of “the war to end all wars” was undergoing change in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, and how the evolution of approach towards the conflict helped to begin gradual uncovering of the problem of war trauma among the soldiers and their families. The book demonstrates also how participation in European military conflict influenced Canada as a country. It presents the role of war propaganda, censorship as well as government policy of post war commemoration of war heroes in the creation of the war myth. The style of the book is flowing, involving and attractively plain. Brilliant translations of well chosen fragments of the novels, which have not been published in Polish, constitute yet another of its assets – encouraging readers to reach out to the original texts. All things considered, Anna Branach-Kallas did a meticulous work and wrote a book which is lucid, well balanced and truly pioneering. I am sure it will be of great value for promotion of knowledge about historical and literary aspects of Canadian participation in the Great War.