

Tomasz Sikora

"Klonowanie Kanady", "Er(r)go", No 17, (2)

Romanica Silesiana 5, 297-301

2010

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.

“Er(r)go” No 17 (2/2008), „Klonowanie Kanady”

Guest edited by Eugenia Sojka

Katowice, Wydawnictwo Śląsk, 2008, 231 p.

ISSN 1508-6305

We are all Canadians.

This may well be one of the conclusions to be drawn from the recent issue of *Er(r)go*, entitled *Map(l)ing Canada*.

Not that we all hold Canadian passports, not yet. But in this rhizomatic, globalized world we are all implicated in Canada, just as Canada is implicated in all of us. With a heightened sense of global interconnections, but without the self-centred myopia of its southern neighbour, Canada may be developing a new cosmopolitan and transcultural consciousness and thus a new political paradigm for the decades to follow. The recent eruption of the Islandic volcano that effectively paralyzed Europe’s air traffic (thus influencing, for instance, the prices of flowers grown by Polish horticulturalists) has vividly dramatized the “butterfly effect” that characterizes the world’s complex webs of natural and social ecologies.

We are all Canadians in one more sense, I think. Much of the current debate around issues of Canadianness, citizenship, nation, ethnicity, multiculturalism, diaspora etc. involve a critical awareness of past and present migrations and their consequences. This is certainly one of the elements of the cosmopolitan paradigm mentioned above: we are all, in one sense or another, migrants. This even applies to First Nations, who are believed to have arrived in North America thousands of years ago, from what is now Siberia and Alaska. (Not that we should overlook the differences between types of migration, of which the European colonization of other parts of the world is a rather inglorious example). But there is one important lesson to be learnt from the First Nations specifically: migrants we may be, but at the same time we are all native to the Earth.

Without a doubt *Map(l)ing Canada* is the richest and most reliable source of information on the current debates in and on Canada available in Polish. It is a collection of essays that bring us right into the middle of the most topical themes and issues connected with Canada today, including postcolonial, diasporic and minoritarian perspectives in Canadian literature and culture, intercultural ethics, the official politics of multiculturalism and its critiques, the search for new guiding formulas (such as TransCanada), etc. The reviewer is not convinced, however, that the title of this collection is particularly felicitous. The puns used in both the Polish and English version of the title are certainly witty and eye-catching, but on second thought they do not seem very relevant to the central issues of the collection, or at least their relevance is not convincingly explained. While both “cloning” (the Polish word for “maple” happens to be homophonous with “clone”) and the somewhat more mysterious “mapling” *do* have a potential for semantic and conceptual elaborations, in this particular thematic context transgenic organisms would seem more to the point than cloning, whereas “mapping Canada” could be brought into creative dialogue with maple/ness.

The concept of “TransCanada” (from which this journal derives its title) is addressed directly in Agnieszka Rzepa’s and Anna Branach-Kallas’s essays. Rzepa offers an informed account of transcanadianism’s somewhat troubled relationship with postcolonial perspectives, which have developed over the last several decades. Her central argument is that the presence of the First Nations, their literatures and cultures, problematizes the concept of TransCanada, especially if it is supposed to simply leave (post)colonial issues behind. While Rzepa sees the promising potential of TransCanadian revisions, she cautions against a possible postnational blindness to the continuing tensions between First Nations’ perspectives and demands and the majoritarian notions of transculturalism. Similarly, Branach-Kallas acknowledges the possible broadening of conceptual horizons that the idea of TransCanada introduces into the academic discourse, as long as it does not become another “trendy” term serving (however covertly) the interests of the cultural/political “centre” rather than the variously defined “margins.” Branach-Kallas argues for the importance of other analytic tools, developed mostly within the postcolonial framework, including the ever-important category of race (as well as gender), the relationship between minority perspectives and the (national) majority, and the concept of diasporic citizenship.

Bożena Zawisza offers a “transcultural” comparison between the Judeo-Christian view(s) of friendship and the axiological bases of the worldview of the Canadian First Nation Nuu-chah-nulth. Although the idea behind the article sounds very promising, the actual analysis is rather disappointing. The summary of Jacques Derrida’s and Tadeusz Ślawek’s subtle considerations is not very convincing, nor is the connection between their respective philosophies

and the broad category “Juedo-Christian tradition” made very clear (the references to classical Greek philosophy do not help, either). Zawisza seems to gloss over important incongruities that may occur to the reader: how, for example, does Sławek’s notion of “distance,” so important to his idea of friendship, relate to the ideas cherished by Nuu-chah-nulth? Accordingly, the alleged similarity between the two (too broadly defined) “worldviews” remains declarative rather than solidly proved.

Zuzanna Szatanik’s revealing essay concentrates primarily on another parameter of intra- and intercultural difference, i.e. gender. Even before we begin to look at cultures transnationally, and thus destabilize their apparently homogeneous nature, we are always faced with an internal fracture, an irreducible “feminine” difference that threatens the phallogocentric fictions of a nation, a culture, a state. Szatanik’s analysis of a few poems by three Canadian female writers focuses on various representations of the female body, whose perceived “instability” seems to correspond to the ambivalences at the very heart of Canada’s definitions of itself. “Home” in its multiple meanings — as body, as home country, as one’s native culture, etc. — proves to be very problematic both because of the diasporic realities of a globalized world and the gender codes operating within every culture.

The problematic nature of “home” is also referred to in Justyna Kucharska’s discussion of a new interesting genre in Canadian film industry, the so-called “diasporic cinema.” According to Kucharska, diaspora becomes a “home” which guarantees immigrants a sense of rootedness through the creation and maintenance of a “palimpsestic” identity. It is, however, not a stable idea of home; rather, it becomes a never-ending process that involves journeying, the taming of new spaces, various degrees of adaptation and acculturation, etc. Although the text lacks an in-depth analysis of the tensions between the nation-building and diasporic (or postnational) tendencies within Canadian multicultural cinema, it is nevertheless a valuable overview of the phenomenon in question.

The contributions by Tina Mouneimné-Wojtas and Krzysztof Jarosz, together with an essay by Monique LaRue, make up a very interesting section on Quebecois literature and culture. Mouneimné-Wojtas looks at the so-called *écritures migrantes*, or migrant writing, as a literary and sociological phenomenon that dominated literary debates in Quebec over the last three decades, and seems now to be fading away. Not that immigrant writers have ceased to be important, simply their “place” in Quebec’s literary system is no longer so hotly debated, while the term itself proved too limited and ultimately inadequate. Still, the debates around the constructions of Quebecois national identity and cultural heritage are bound to continue. An important moment in the history of those debates occurred in 1996, when the novelist Monique LaRue published her essay “L’Arpenteur et le navigateur” [The Surveyor and

the Navigator], spurring a “scandal” in Quebec’s literary world. The essay itself is a reflection on the moral responsibilities of a writer and the more or less covert instances of xenophobia and parochialism justified in the name of preserving national traditions — a task felt as particularly urgent in Quebec, always defending itself against the encroachments of Anglophone Canada. In the foreword to his translation of the essay, Krzysztof Jarosz wonders why the essay was met with such an outburst of opposition, which in retrospect seems completely misguided. To elucidate the riddle, Jarosz provides a useful and highly readable account of the historical and cultural context for the LaRue affair as well as for the ongoing debates over multiculturalism (or transculturality) in Quebec.

Brian S. Osborne’s article is an extended analysis of the collision between nostalgic views of a national community, still present in Canada, and new transnational values that emerge as a result of globalization and diasporization. As Canada’s liberal multiculturalism gives way to a “hybrid pluralism,” symbolic landscapes (which include various material manifestations of the nation-state and its official history) become sites of increasing contestation. Osborne suggests that the natural icon for (trans)Canadian polity should no longer be the stable “native pines,” but rather the mobile, cosmopolitan geese. The massive material used to illustrate the author’s arguments includes a mention of the re-interment of the 14th century king of Poland, Casimir the Great, in 1869 as an example of how dead people are employed for a national cause; in view of the recent burial of the tragically deceased President Lech Kaczyński in the Wawel Castle, Osborne’s example rings very relevant, indeed. Regrettably, the essay’s multiple merits are somewhat dimmed by the poor quality of the translation, which contains a great many anglicisms, not to mention the “feminization” of the well-known political philosopher, Will Kymlicka.

Eugenia Sojka has collected, arranged and annotated statements from a number of important Canadian writers, artists and researchers who (themselves representatives of minorities) deal with issues of multiculturalism, transcultural dialogue, ethnicity, otherness, old and new forms of citizenship, diaspora, etc. These brief commentaries offer a fascinating polyphonic picture of current strains of thinking in the fluid, ever-changing space of TransCanada.

The essays and commentaries mentioned above are supplemented with reviews of, and notes on, Canadian Studies publications in Poland. As Paweł Jędrzejko points out, the growing number of these books and journals, as well as their academic quality, attest to the vitality of this relatively recent field of research in this country.

Are we all Canadians, then? Well, many Quebeckers would certainly disagree. But without erasing local specificities and complex webs of difference, it could still be argued that Canada provides a more sustainable model of glo-

balization (or glocalization) than the US. If “being a Canadian” is a process rather than a state, a mode of consciousness rather than a passport, we could all claim a certain degree of Canadianness. Being a Canadian-ist is a good start, too.

Tomasz Sikora
Pedagogical University of Cracow