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Ethnic or National (?): Polish Literature in Canada

Let us start with some basic methodological clarifications. The proposed examination of minority writing in Canada¹ is to take place within the theoretical framework of what is often defined by scholars as the literary institution. This concept, however, when applied to Canadian cultural conditions, has a somewhat specific meaning. It is clear, for example, that the writings of Cz. Mifosz or V.P. Aksenov, who live in the United States, are not considered to be a part of American literature. They are viewed there as emigré writers of Polish and Russian literature, respectively. Yet their compatriots living across the border in Canada have acquired a different status and are often discussed as Canadian writers. True, this status is 'hyphenated,' by such qualifications as Ukrainian-Canadian, German-Canadian, Italian-Canadian, but it is not to be denied. It is interesting to ask the question: what makes this treatment of writers in two neighbouring countries so different? To answer it, one should move from the level of strictly literary-critical considerations to a wider notion of cultural policy. It seems to be obvious that the idea of multiculturalism adopted by the Canadian government as part of its internal policy, opened the possibility of including into its cultural space the activities of ethnic groups other than English and French. In the Western world this probably constitutes a unique example of government intervention which has its immediate repercussions in the sphere of culture. The adjective 'Canadian' (for example, 'writer,' 'artist') is no longer reserved, so to speak, for those who function in two official languages, but can also be used in relation to the representatives of

1 What I am referring to is the collective project of writing a history of the literary institution in Canada, initiated by Professor M.V. Dimić, Director of the Research Institute for Comparative Literature at the University of Alberta. The other members of the initial group are Professors E.D. Blodgett, I.S. MacLaren, S.C. Neuman and A. Purdy. The project intends to attract and involve scholars from universities throughout Canada.

other ethnic minorities. With regard to literature, the adjective 'Canadian' invites a comparison with the adjective 'Soviet' but, of course, without all its ideological ballast or negative connotations: to 'Canadian literature' belong all those writers who live and create in Canada. Consequently, thanks to the official cultural policy of the Canadian government, some writers enjoy, as it were, a double status: those who immigrated to Canada belong to the national literatures of their origin and at the same time they are included into a multiethnic Canadian literary life and, in a broader sense, into a multicultural system of aesthetic values.

It is here that the specificity of the Canadian literary institution becomes so evident and interesting. The Canadian literary institution includes not only production, transmission, consumption of artifacts or such components as the function of publishing houses, the media, schools, universities and so on in the dissemination or diffusion of literature, but it incorporates intentional, conscious and expedient efforts on the part of the official authorities to bring about a multiethnic concept of Canadian literature. This effort is not devoid, one could argue, of a certain political manipulation.

This literary situation seems to be favourably predisposed for an analysis in terms of the structuralist conception of literature as a system. In a most abbreviated summary such a methodological approach implies that any national literature in the course of its evolution cannot be treated as a homogeneous entity but rather as a heterogeneous open system, ready to assimilate or to accommodate within itself other sets of aesthetic values, or, in short, other systems and subsystems, and as such, it should be looked upon as a polysystem.²

This theoretical stand envisages a number of possible invariables of interaction between independent, established national literary systems (like for example, French and Russian) or strong and weak artistic national systems (for example, a case in point is the relationship between Russian and Bulgarian literature in the nineteenth century). In short: the artistic boundaries of literature are viewed to be flexible and subject to continuous change. Singular national literatures taken in their isolation are no exception either: indeed, the literary polysystem assumes the existence of a dynamic dichotomy of *canonized* vs *non-canonized* systems, that is, 'high' and 'low' types of literature which remain in constant interaction. Some elements of the secondary (non-canonized) system 'infiltrate' the artistic values of the primary system and the latter may adopt non-canonized texts and elevate

them to the rank of canonized, privileged status. One may take as a case in point, for example, some genres of science fiction or detective stories.

What seems to be of particular importance here is the implicit suggestion that if analyzed through the prism of the above mentioned theoretical scheme of opposing aesthetic tendencies or types of creativity, national literature emerges as a significant factor serving the preservation of cultural heritage.

Considering the multinational character of the Canadian cultural fabric, the concept of a polysystemic approach to Canadian literature, written in two major languages, and its relation to or relationship with literatures of so-called 'lesser diffusion' deserves to be subjected to a more serious testing. It is my intention to examine this question, taking as an example the presence of Polish writing in Canada. In doing so, I would like to make two preliminary comments: first of all, I feel indebted to two remarkable Polish poets, Professor B. Czaykowski of the University of British Columbia and F. Śmieja of the University of Western Ontario, for their friendly assistance. When requested, they readily put their pioneering research in this area at my disposal and thus made my task easier.³ Although our methodological approach differs considerably, I would like to acknowledge that their studies constitute a valuable factual groundwork which has provided indispensable leads and hints with regard to the material which in this case ought to be taken under closer critical examination. Their preliminary reconnaissance allowed me to take a somewhat broader overview of the problem and to move, I hope, its explication one step further. Secondly, it should be noted that the interest in Polish-Canadian writing is of very recent date. Apart from the above mentioned papers by B. Czaykowski and F. Śmieja, only one more contribution could be verified so far, namely, by L. Kos-Rabcewicz-Zubkowski who gave a short discussion of Polish writers living in Canada in his book *The Poles in Canada*.⁴ If compared to the large number of publications treating the Polish immigration to Canada in

3 Professor Bogdan Czaykowski's study "Polish Writing in Canada" was recently published under the title *Polish Writing in Canada: Preliminary Survey* (Ottawa: Secretary of State 1988) 59 pp. As far as Professor Florian Śmieja is concerned his article "Pisarze polscy w Kanadzie" (Polish Writers in Canada) appeared in *Echo Tygodnia*, 157, 158, 159 (1985), a Polish weekly published in Toronto; it is also to be printed in the Proceedings of the Congress of Polish Culture Abroad, held in September of 1985 in London, England. An abbreviated and preliminary version of this paper appeared in English under the title "Notes on Polish Canadian Creative Literature," *Polyphony: The Bulletin of the Multicultural History Society of Ontario. Special Issue: Poles in Ontario* VI.2 (Fall/Winter 1984): 105-109.

4 Ludwik Kos-Rabcewicz-Zubkowski, *The Poles in Canada* (Ottawa: Canada Ethnica Series VII 1968) 142-149.

2 The concept of literature as polysystem was developed by Itamar Even-Zohar in his book *Papers in Historical Poetics* (the Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics, Tel Aviv University Series: Papers on Poetics and Semiotics, ed. B. Hrushovski and I. Even-Zohar, Tel Aviv: 1978) particularly 7-8, 11-20, 28-38, 54-62.

general,⁵ research devoted to our particular area of interest here is clearly disproportionate; but it would be grossly misleading to take it as a negative indicator suggesting that the topic is irrelevant or unimportant. In fact, even what we have included up to this stage in our analysis points to the existence of a vast and diverse wealth of material, fascinating by its richness and, in my opinion, worthy of a book-length study.

In the final introductory note, I would like to emphasize that in this article I have confined myself to the generic and partly thematic analysis of the subject only. This limitation, I hope, will allow a clearer comparison with the parallel development of the Canadian mainstream literature written in English and French, and create a point of departure for a more complete discussion of this topic in the future. To engage in a more complex multilevelled analysis of formal and artistic features of Polish-Canadian literature at the present time, when some basic patterns of its evolution remain unknown, seems to be premature and would go far beyond the permitted size of this paper.

MEMOIRS AND DIARIES

The earliest manifestations of Polish writing in Canada can be considered to be memoirs. If the historical investigation holds true that Polish immigration to Canada experienced three waves of influx: that is, (1) Polish immigration prior to 1914, (2) the so-called second wave between 1919-1939, and (3) the third wave since the outbreak of World War II to the present time, then it can be said that memoirs are the only genre which faithfully accompanied all three periods. It is uncertain how far back in time the chronology of writing Polish memoirs in Canada goes.⁶ One can assume that the first more

complete and systematic description of the vicissitudes of Polish immigrants in this country (by the Poles themselves) dates back to the beginning of this century. One such collection of memoirs was written by Józef (Joseph) Samulski and published under the title *Pamiętnik emigranta polskiego w Kanadzie* (The Memoirs of a Polish Emigrant in Canada).⁷ Samulski was born in 1891 and emigrated to Canada as a teenager in 1910. His book covers the period from 1910-1926. It is not the first example of Polish-Canadian memoirs (see W.I. Thomas and F. Znaniecki), but it no doubt exceeds others in its vividness of presentation and the scope of its thematic broadness. Samulski was not what one would call a typical immigrant. He stemmed from a rather well-to-do peasant family in the Poznań district of Western Poland which was under German rule. He left the old country for three reasons: he wanted to avoid military service in the German army; he was no doubt inspired by a strong sense of adventure; and he did not intend just to earn money in order to survive, but to grow rich, if possible, and to surpass in that the relatives he left behind. These characteristics, it seems, allowed Samulski to preserve a sober distance to the described events and to his own lot in the new country. As a result of such an attitude, he gave a vivid panorama of Canadian life in the first thirty years of this century. Samulski worked in various silver, gold, and copper mines of Eastern Canada; he operated a coal-mine hoist, casually served as an interpreter for the police and at one point took up the job of a cook. Samulski's desire to become rich never materialized, but Canada definitely satisfied his quest for adventure.

The closer we move towards the midst of the century, the more dramatic grows the air of the memoirs of Polish Canadians. Quite a few of them contain a shattering account of a tragic odyssey leading through the Soviet concentration camps in Siberia and Kazakhstan to Persia, Palestine, then later to England and eventually to Canada.⁸ One particularly startling record in this respect was left by Father Lucjan Królikowski, who described in

Memoirs of Polish Immigrants in Canada, ed. B. Heydenkorn (Toronto: Canadian-Polish Research Institute 1979) 322 p. B. Heydenkorn, ed. *Pamiętniki imigrantów polskich w Kanadzie* I-III (Toronto: Kanadyjsko-Polski Instytut Badawczy, published in 1975, 1977 and 1978 respectively. To find more exact information regarding the beginnings of Polish memoirs literature in North America see W.I. Thomas and F. Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*. 2nd ed. (New York: Knopf 1927).

⁷ Józef Samulski, *Pamiętnik emigranta polskiego w Kanadzie* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy Imienia Ossolińskich 1978) 377 pp.

⁸ For example, Marietta Janowa, *Cienista droga do Kanady* (On A Thorny Road to Canada) in B. Heydenkorn, ed. *Pamiętniki imigrantów polskich w Kanadzie* II: 43-60; see also Henryk Piasecki *Znał Niemna przez Syberię do Kanady* (From the Riverbend of Niemen, through Siberia to Canada).

⁵ Bolesław Makowski, *Polska emigracja w Kanadzie* (Linz-Salzburg: Nakładem Związku Polaków w Austrii 1951) 79 pp.; William Bolesław Makowski, *History of Integration of Poles in Canada* (Niagara Peninsula: The Canadian Polish Congress 1967) 274 pp.; D. M. Avery and J. K. Fedorowicz, *The Poles in Canada* (Ottawa: University of Western Ontario 1982) 22 pp.; Andrzej Włodkiewicz, *Polish Contribution to Arts and Sciences in Canada* (Montreal, 1969) 363 + xxxii pp. This book does not contain, however, any specific information about Polish literature in Canada. Benedykt Heydenkorn, ed. *Past and Present: Selected Topics on the Polish Group in Canada* (Toronto: Canadian-Polish Research Institute 1974) 224 pp.; Victor Turek, ed. *The Polish Past in Canada* (Toronto: Polish Research Institute in Canada 1960) 138 pp.; William Makowski, *The Polish People in Canada* (Montreal: Tundra Books 1987) 300 pp.

⁶ Benedykt Heydenkorn, one of the most meritorious cultural activists and writers of the Polish community in Canada, and an ardent editor of memoirs and diaries of Polish Canadians, does not make mention of dates which would indicate when such first memoirs were written or published. See his "Memoirs of the Polish Immigrants," *Past and Present: Selected Topics on the Polish Group in Canada* (see Footnote 5) 193-200; also:

Skradzione dzieciństwo (Stolen Childhood) the sufferings of Polish children who were deported to various regions of the Soviet Union for the purpose of divesting them of their national identity but who were saved and later settled in Canada.

Regardless of when the memoirs were written, whether in the early or later stages of Polish immigration to Canada, they all bear some common characteristics and thematically can be divided into the following categories: 1) Memoirs describing the misery of life in the old country (shortage of land, large families), travel to Canada and the description of difficult beginnings (work on farms, mines, grubbing up forests, severe weather conditions, etc.). 2) Memoirs recalling either World War I or II and the winding road to Canada with some longer or shorter stops in other countries and then the hard period of adaptation to new conditions of life. 3) Memoirs devoted entirely to new life in Canada and providing a detailed picture of labour relationships, social conditions, economic hardships, cultural life and ethnic diversity; the latter component not unknown, for instance, in two other types of memoirs, gives at times a very valuable insight into the Polish perception of other national groups.

Polish-Canadian memoirs have been printed in both Canada and Poland. There exists, of course, a difference in putting stress on the kind of material that is published in both countries. While in Poland the clear preference is for older manuscripts, we observe in Canada a tendency to favour chronologically later texts, written primarily after World War II. To be sure, it is not aesthetic considerations that dictate these differences. They are determined by political circumstances. Authors of the more recent memoirs take a definite anticommunist stand and their memoirs are permeated with highly critical depictions of the Soviet Union which, of course, cannot meet the acceptance of a censor.⁹

Regardless of where they are published, memoirs are most often treated as sociological material; however, one cannot deny the fact that many of them display features of high artistic qualities and values; as such, they belong to literature. We can even go as far as to say that in the case of Canadian-Polish writing, memoirs can be perceived as a genre which grows exclusively out of Canadian experience and reality. Neither Polish poetry nor prose created in this country can demonstrate the same intensity of representation referring to the not-so-distant Canadian past. The following

should also be noted: Polish memoirs in Canada reached such an intensity of practice and degree of development that there arose the need for institutionalization. In 1969 the Memoirism Friends Association (*Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Pamiętnikarstwa*) was founded, and in 1971 the first issue of the quarterly *Polish Memoirism* appeared (B. Heydenkorn, *Past and Present*, 1993).

Before we go on to discuss other aspects of our topic it appears appropriate to make reference to yet another type of creative verbal activity which possesses the element of Canadian authenticity: oral literature, mainly poetry. Edward Ożóg, a graduate of the University of Ottawa, has gathered interesting material which demonstrated that Polish oral literature has been 'transplanted' to Canada and became an important source of information about early Polish settlers, their "hard life, depression, nostalgia and finally their integration"¹⁰ and assimilation into new society.

POLISH POETRY AS A CANADIAN PHENOMENON

While analyzing the question of Polish literature in Canada one cannot overlook the fact that its beginnings and specificity are tightly bound up with past patterns of immigration. The third wave of Polish émigrés' influx to Canada, which occurred shortly after the end of World War II, differs considerably from the preceding ones in its social structure, educational profile, and intentions. They came to Canada not of their own volition but forced by the new geopolitical map of Europe. They came in defiance of or as protest to a political system which was forcefully imposed on Poland by a foreign and hostile power. These were not illiterate peasants looking for the improvement of their economic lot, but soldiers who had the experience of six long years of bloody war behind them in which they fought on the side of the Western Allies in the Polish armed forces abroad and for whom the war proved to be a bitter disappointment. Most of them had some education: a high school diploma, to a lesser extent — a university degree or some sort of professional schooling. These were people from all walks of life, including painters, sculptors, journalists, academics, and writers. Among the latter category, a few notable poets and prose writers decided to make Canada their permanent home. Worth mentioning are the following names: Adam Tomaszewski; Bolesław Pomian Piątkowski; Wacław Liebert;

9 In fact, it is noteworthy that the theme of the "gulags" entered Polish literature in general and Polish memoirs, published in Canada and elsewhere, in particular, long before the publication of A. Solzhenitsyn's story *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. However, the reception of this theme as fact was rather sceptical in the West, at times even unfavourable.

10 The information and the quote comes from Professor F. Śmieja's paper. E. Ożóg wrote his M.A. under the supervision of the late T. Krukowski, Professor of Polish at the University of Ottawa. See Professor Śmieja's review of E. Ożóg's study in *Związkowiec* XIV.3 (1985).

Bohdan J. Ejch; Izabella Lutosławska-Wolikowska¹¹; Wacław Iwaniuk and many others; somewhat later, in the mid-fifties or early sixties a younger group of poets, who made a 'stop-over' in Western Europe to complete their university degrees, arrived in Canada to take up positions as academics at various universities. Thus, Danuta Bieńkowska became a professor of Polish language and literature at the University of Toronto; Florian Śmieja, a professor of Spanish at the University of Western Ontario (London); Bogdan Czaykowski and Andrzej Busza accepted offers from the University of British Columbia in the departments of Slavonic Studies and English respectively; Vladimir (Włodzimierz) Krysiński joined the Comparative Literature Programme at Carleton University in Ottawa and later the Comparative Literature Programme, now department, at the Université de Montréal. One of these young poets, Janusz Ihnatowicz, who came to Toronto in 1951, chose to become a priest and theologian.

If we are to ask the question, who among the Polish-Canadian poets occupies the most prominent poetic stature, the name of Wacław Iwaniuk comes immediately to mind. Born in 1915, he began his literary career in pre-war Poland. His first collection of poetry, *Pełnia Czerwca* (The Fullness of June) appeared in 1936; the second — in 1938, under the title *Dzień Apokaliptyczny* (Apocalyptic Day). As a poet, Iwaniuk went through a long creative evolution from lyrical reflections about nature (in which he contemplates its fantastic, miraculous powers and elements), apocalyptic motifs linking him clearly, for instance, with Miłosz through a confrontation with history as a result of the war experience — to expressing a deep sense of isolation, inadaptability to the new Canadian environment and finally, if not a gradual reconciliation then some sort of accommodation with it. The latest evolution seems to be of particular interest to our present topic. In the past decade or so, Iwaniuk began to publish in English. *Dark Times* (1979) gives a cross-section of Iwaniuk's poetry in English translation;¹² the

collection *Evenings on Lake Ontario* (1981) which has a significant subtitle *From My Canadian Diary* is Iwaniuk's first attempt to write in English. It is an interesting and in many ways revealing experiment. First of all, it indicates the poet's desire to become part of the Canadian literary landscape and a clear departure from the attitude of isolation. In doing so, he brings into Canadian literature a peculiar experience, full of contradictions, both ironic and serious, disapproving and approving of the existing situation in which, as he claims in one of the poems, "those who survived are themselves again" ("Post Scriptum"). In the opening poem of *Evenings on Lake Ontario* we read the following lines:

My fascination with Canada has been long and stable
The country is enormous but its brain is still growing.
The people, Canadians, are not as Canadian
as the Greeks are Greek.
We are all clients of war

Yet in another poem we find a distich which moves the reader by its sincerity and lyrical tone:

I wasn't born here, I don't know the splendour of this land,
but my voice trembles when I speak of it.

Iwaniuk's poetry is a fascinating testimony to our epoch, encompassing both a profound sense of history which has its roots in the long tradition of European culture and the motif of lonely existence in modern North American civilization. "By confronting continental historicism" suggests one critic, "with an environment devoid of any historical sense" Iwaniuk has universalized the problem of alienation of a contemporary émigré.¹³

Let us now turn our attention for a while to a group of poets who began their literary careers in Great Britain in the early fifties and later continued them in Canada. I refer specifically to the following names: Bogdan Czaykowski, Florian Śmieja and Andrzej Busza. All three of them belonged

11 Unlike other quoted writers, Lutosławska-Wolikowska came to Canada as an established and quite well known author with a prolific literary output. One of her first books was a novelized memoir *Boleszewicy w polskim dworze* (The Bolsheviks on a Polish Estate) (Warszawa: Perzyński, Niklewicz i Ska 1921). Her novel *Córka* (The Daughter) appeared after the war (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Eugeniusza Kuchana 1946). While in Canada, she published *Roman Dmowski: Człowiek, Polak, przyjaciel* (Roman Dmowski: Man, Pole, and Friend) (Chicago: Komitet Wydawniczy Stronnictwa Narodowego 1961).

12 Other collections and books by W. Iwaniuk include: *Czas Don Kiochota: Poezje* (The Time of Don Quixote) (London: Wydawnictwo Światowego Związku Polaków z Zagranicy 1946); *Dni białe i dni czerwone* (White Days and Red Days) (Bruxelles: Klon 1947; *Dziennik z podróży tropikalnej i wiersze o wojnie. Poemat z lat 1939-1945* (Diary From a Tropical Journey and Poems about the War: A Poem From the Years 1939-1945) (Toronto: Konfraternia Artystyczna Smocza Jama 1951); *Gorycze nocy. Poemat* (The Bitterness of Night) (Paris: Instytut Literacki 1951); *Pieśń nad pieśniami. Poemat*

(Song of Songs: A Poem) (London: Oficyna Poetów i Malarzy 1953); *Milczenie. Wiersze 1949-1959* (Silences: Poems 1949-1959) (Paris: Instytut Literacki 1959); *Wybór wierszy* (Selected Poems) (Paris: Instytut Literacki 1965); *Podróż do Europy. Opowiadania i szkice* (Journey to Europe: Short Stories and Essays) (London: Polska Fundacja Kulturalna 1982).

13 Maja Elzbieta Cybulska, *Wacław Iwaniuk. Poeta* (London: Oficyna poetów i malarzy 1984) 125 pp. This is so far the most comprehensive study of W. Iwaniuk's poetry.

to a poetic group "Kontynenty"¹⁴ (Continents), formed in London (England) in 1959 but in fact existing since 1955 when the first issue of the periodical *Merkuriusz polski nowy...* (New Polish Mercury...) was published. The composition of the group fluctuated and it eventually fell apart in the early sixties. Out of seven or eight members, one returned to Poland, three made their home in Canada and the rest remained in Britain. The "Kontynenty" group never created a coherent or homogeneous aesthetic programme. The only common denominator they had was language. Consequently, each of them spoke in his own poetic voice.

The oldest among them, Florian Śmieja, has so far published six collections of poetry, three of them in Canada. His poetry shows a broad range of sensitivity, linking in a masterly manner the concreteness of daily happenings with subtle philosophical reflexion. In fact, the latter emanates, as it were, from juxtapositions of concrete external objects and events: the intellectual depth of his poems is neither preimposed nor dependent on any explicitly overt effusion of feelings which would conclude a poem. Śmieja's poetic world is real and yet tempting by its pensiveness. Irony, present in almost all of these poems, is combined with a distinctly creative discipline which disallows verbosity. In general, Śmieja strives to achieve authenticity.¹⁵

It is not easy to write about the poetry of Bogdan Czakowski. According to Cz. Miłosz, Czakowski has "best expressed the predicament of a poet in exile." Indeed the author of *Point-no-Point* faced this issue in both his early poetry and criticism. For Czakowski, a poet is born into a language and has no choice but to accept such a condition:

I am a poet (I need to name myself)

Language is my chain

Words are my dog-collar

I was born there.

(I would prefer to be born simply in grass).

But unlike many other poets in his condition, Czakowski does not indulge in self-pity and goes far beyond the linguistic dilemmas or national obsessions. What he tries to accomplish is to turn what is generally seen

as the negative into a positive, creative attitude. Hence the reassuring, refreshing mode of this poetry.

Nature and man seem to preoccupy Czakowski's poetic imagination with a particular intensity. Man is placed against the background of a fantastic world of nature which at times comes close to surrealistic imagery. Is this an expression of alienation or a longing for another, more promising setting? No clear answer is given and the poet seems deliberately to intrigue, to keep the reader's fantasy in suspense. It can be said with certainty however, that Czakowski invokes a pantheistic vision of the world and ties it with ultimate questions of death and, as he admits himself, nuclear annihilation.

Finally, the youngest author of the *Kontynenty* group, Andrzej Busza, strikes yet another tone: his poems are transmutations of personal experience, of love, metaphysical awe and anguish, the human predicament, and the paradoxes of life, into highly cultural idiom, where emotion is conveyed through the intensity of symbolic values juxtaposed in the unfolding of the imagery rather than in more direct ways... (Czakowski, 37-38). And in this, I would say, he is somewhat akin to B. Czakowski: Busza's poetry captivates by its contrast, that is, a fusion of biological sensuality with the sense of transitoriness.

All the above discussed poets make up the recently published anthology *Seven Polish Canadian Poets*.¹⁶ The appearance of this volume marks in itself an astonishing development: for the first time Polish poets living in Canada have declared themselves to be also *Canadian* poets. This self-determination was made possible and inspired by the existing policy of multiculturalism. In his foreword to the anthology, Z. Folejewski rightly points out the consequences and complexities of this situation:

In this multinational nation of ours the concept of national Canadian literature is still in the process of crystalization. Even in professional circles it still often means literature in English, while literature in French is hyphenated as French-Canadian. Scholarly research concerned with a comparative study of works written in official languages is still not at a very advanced stage. Naturally, it is harder still to fit in works in unofficial languages. This does, indeed, create a challenging problem of putting together the Canadian literary 'Mosaic,' 'Polyphony' or whatever other symbolic term we wish to use to indicate the complexity of our national literary scene.¹⁷

By speaking of a Canadian literary "Mosaic" and "our national literary scene" Folejewski clearly suggests that poetry, and literature in general

14 See Andrzej Lam, ed. *Opisanie z pamięci. Antologia poetycka londyńskiej grupy "Kontynentów"* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy 1965) 180pp. Also Bolesław Taborski, "Grupa Kontynentów," *Związkowiec* 17.1 (1984).

15 Edward Zyma, "Jeśli w krajobraz wchodzić masz, to z sobą" *Polish Voice* 16.22 (April 1985): 13; Mariusz Wesołowski, review of *Jeszcze wiersze* by F. Śmieja, *Dialogi-Dialogues* 1.4 (1985): 24-25.

16 W. Iwaniuk and F. Śmieja, eds. *Seven Polish Canadian Poets: An Anthology* (Toronto: Polish Canadian Publishing Fund 1984) 223 pp.

17 Ibid. 9.

created in unofficial languages, should be 'integrated' and become a part (at least its best achievements) of the national literature. It seems that without implementation of this principle the policy of multiculturalism itself would remain a dead concept.

To close our discussion of poetry, it should be mentioned that the number of Polish artists living in Canada has been considerably strengthened by the recent wave of *Solidarity* emigration among which we can find a number of talented poets, such as, for example, Edward Zyma, Grażyna Brakoniecka, Maciej Piotr Prus (also a prose writer), Magdalena Czyżycka, Krzysztof Kasprzyk, and Marek Kusiba, who will certainly contribute to the richness of Polish-Canadian poetry. It is worthy of noting that, outside Poland, Canada now has the largest concentration of poets writing in Polish.

PROSE AND OTHER GENRES

In comparison with poetry, Polish prose writing in Canada lags far behind in both scope and quality. Two Polish writers created some sort of national mythology about Canada: Arkady Fiedler with his travelogue *Kanada pachnąca żywicą* (Canada Smells of Resin) and Melchior Wańkowicz by writing his novel *Tworzywo* (1954), translated into English as *Three Generations* (1973). The former concentrated on the exotic, and described Canadian forests, the danger of travel in remote parts of the country (it was written in 1937), hunting, and the encounter with Indians. Canada is the land of adventure, enchanting with its intact tracts and exoticism. Wańkowicz, on the other hand, displayed a much more profound understanding of Canada which he depicted as a land of settlers who toil and sweat to create for themselves, and their children, a better future. Indeed, he caught the spirit of this country as few foreign writers did. He traced this theme through three generations of Polish settlers which he projects to the reader as a great success story. But neither A. Fiedler nor M. Wańkowicz stayed in Canada longer than it was necessary to gather material for their books and they can hardly be considered as Polish-Canadian writers.

The main corpus of Polish literary prose-texts in Canada was produced, as is the case with poetry, by those who arrived here immediately after the end of World War II; but they have never gained the same artistic significance as poets did. Among the early arrivals one should mention, however, Adam Tomaszewski, the author of memoirs (*Młodość została nad Obrą* (My Youth Remained on the Obrą Rover), *Gorzko pachną piołuny* (The Bitter Smell of Wormwoods)), travelogues and essays devoted to the North American continent and his adopted city — Toronto (*Toronto, Toronto, Trana*). Not without original traits is the prose of Wacław Liebert, especially his short stories under the title *O miłości i tak dalej* (About Love and So On) which received first prize from the Ontario Arts Council.

Apart from the above mentioned writers, closer attention ought to be given to Andrzej Brycht and Ryszard Bugajski. The former came to occupy a very reputable position of being recognized as one of the most talented prose writers in post-war Poland, the latter made his name known first of all as a film maker (director) whose movie *Przesłuchanie* (Interrogation)¹⁸ remains, to date, the most staggering settling of accounts with the Stalinist regime. I would like to dwell on Brycht. After a rapid, even glamorous literary beginning in Poland, and clear flirtation with the regime, Brycht surprised everyone when, during a cruise in the Mediterranean, he left a Polish ship and declared himself to be an émigré writer. Shortly after his defection, he made his way to Canada. "A soldier and miner in his youth, and later a heavyweight boxer" (Czaykowski, 9), Brycht wandered across Canada, accepting all kinds of manual jobs, including one as a truck driver.

In 1978 Brycht published his first 'Canadian' novel *Zoom* (a translation from the Polish), which had a moderate success. As it deals with some psychological and religious problems, *Zoom* no doubt brings a new vein into Brycht's excessively realistic writing but it cannot be taken as a major break-through. Evidently, Brycht is quite disappointed with his Canadian experience and, as in the past in Poland so in Canada today, he suffers from inadaptability. His most recent novel *Hubris* is set in North America and contains unequivocal, malicious condemnation of this continent. No wonder Brycht could not find a publisher in Canada; but the manuscript was accepted by the editor of a Polish literary monthly *Twórczość* in 1984.¹⁹ Whether this is a prelude to Brycht's return to Poland is a question which only time can answer.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This paper, I hope, gives sufficient evidence and reason to pose the question, what is the nature of the relationship between Canadian literature and its Polish counterpart which evolved out of Canadian experience and history? How has this relationship been shaped from the point of view of a polysystemic methodology? I must admit that I do not have answers but two very basic preliminary observations can be of help to answer the question implicit in the title of this paper.

1) On the thematic level, Canadian 'content' permeated Polish-Canadian literature quite a long time ago, and vice-versa the Polish theme, exactly through its literary Polish intermediary which acquired the status of so-called

18 R. Bugajski, *Przesłuchanie* (Paris: Instytut Literacki 1983) 109. See also his *Przyznaję się do winy. Powieść* (London: Puls Publications 1985) 183 pp.

19 A. Brycht, "Hubris," *Twórczość* 1 (1984): 9-71.

'ethnic literature,' as well as through other 'neighbouring' creative linguistic codes (for example, Ukrainian, German, etc.), 'entered' the Canadian literary space. In spite of such a 'reciprocity,' the relationship between Canadian literature of the mainstream, written in the two official languages, and Polish-Canadian literature, has rested on the vertical principal of hierarchical order. That is, no matter what kind of texts are produced by Polish-Canadian writers, or other ethnic writers for that matter, regardless of their artistic quality, they are treated or perceived within the accepted system of multiculturalism with two dominating languages as texts of secondary significance because they are products of a subculture which, out of necessity, are aimed at the creative ambitions and artistic tastes of a minority group. In this respect Y. Lotman's views on semiotics of culture²⁰ may further help to clarify the issue. By speaking of inner and outer points of view in culture, Lotman suggests that those who represent the inner point of view of the culture bearers situate themselves in the centre of the culture. They speak of themselves as 'we' and perceive others as strangers and denote them as 'they.' As Irene Portis Winner rightly points out, in this treatment ethnic culture is understood

as a subset of culture in general. Ethnic culture is based upon the concept of ethnic identity which flows from the universal situation that a culture is pluralistic, composed of ever-changing, inter-related subcultural systems. Just as the members of one culture see themselves as distinct from those of another culture, the members of a particular subculture distinguish themselves as 'we' as opposed to 'others' representing other subcultural units. Such distinctions and self-identifications are based upon fluid and changeable significant and subjectively determined differences that define ethnic boundaries, the content of ethnic identities, as well as the members of ethnic groups.²¹

In this respect, Canada with its officially legislated policy of multiculturalism can be considered to be an exemplary micro-world of cultural interrelation of two major cultural systems (English and French) with various subcultural systems. Up till now, however, this relationship has not been as dynamic and mutually fertile or inspiring as one would have wished it to be. And here I come to my second comment.

2) For a long period the above mentioned interrelationship between diverse cultural and subcultural systems remained, even on its most

elementary thematic level, in a state of inconvenient neighbourhood, or at best, in a relationship of 'peaceful' coexistence rather than meaningful structural interaction. It seems to me that much blame for this is to be laid upon some terminological labels and deeply entrenched clichés.

Certainly, in the context of Canadian cultural configuration, more than one factor contributed to this mutual isolation between what is considered to be the primary literary system and its multilingual subsystems, the most negative in my view being the use of the term 'ethnic literature.' While it is a convenient label, it is misleading in more than one way. It contains a hidden and depreciating value judgement which has, for instance, little to do with the aesthetic appreciation of literature and as such should probably be removed from our critical vocabulary. Not so long ago, the Polish critic (shall we call him ethnic because he lives in Canada?) Adam Lubicz wrote the following:

To me the adjective *ethnic* (as applied in relation to literature — E.M.) has a clearly pejorative connotation, even in a sense an offensive one, as has the qualification 'ethnic Canadian' or 'ethnic Canadian groups.' It suggests a certain defect, some sort of incompleteness which typifies those who belong to this category of people; this implies that they are 'incomplete' Canadians, operating and acting on the peripheries of the main stream of Canadian life. In short, they are of secondary importance.²²

For example, I have reason to believe that many Polish writers in Canada remained uninterested in establishing any closer relations with the literature of their adopted country as they feared being labelled 'ethnic.' It should be noted here that, with a few exceptions, almost all of the above discussed writers have enjoyed the privilege of being published in Poland, not only in literary periodicals, but also by publishing houses; and collections or anthologies of their poetry appeared in the country of their origin throughout the sixties, seventies and eighties. Some of them were recognized for their important contribution to the evolution of modern Polish poetry and their poems have been translated into quite a few foreign languages. Obviously, in these circumstances the prospect of breaking into the Canadian literary system or 'market,' only to be acknowledged or qualified as an 'ethnic' writer, was not particularly exciting to say the least. Apparently, Wacław Iwaniuk expressed indignation when someone suggested that he was an ethnic writer. My point is to demonstrate the intricate, complex relationships which may arise in the process of continuous interactions of modern literature. To discuss Polish-Canadian literature in terms of 'ethnic' writing and its relation to major Canadian literature

20 J. M. Lotman, "Theses on the Semiotic Study of Culture (As Applied to Slavic Texts)," *Structure of Texts and Semiotics of Culture*, ed. Jan van der Eng and Mojmir Grygar (Paris: Mouton 1973).

21 Irene Portis Winner, "Some Comments Upon Lotman's Concepts of Semiotics of Culture: Implications for the Study of Ethnic Culture Texts," *Semiotics*, ed. M. Hall, et al. (Michigan: The University of Michigan, Michigan Slavic Contributions 10 1984) 28-29.

22 A. Lubicz, "O polskiej poezji etnicznej w Kanadzie," *Dialogi-Dialogues* III.1-2 (1987): 42.

(English, French) is, I think, of little explicatory value because what we are dealing with is not necessarily a subsystem vs. system, but two primary systems trying to find some sort of accommodation in quite unusual cultural and historical conditions of the existing and officially accepted policy of multiculturalism. It should be made clear, however, that within Canadian cultural realities literature written in Polish or any language other than English or French will function as a subsystem. At the same time, this literature may belong to a primary system of the language from which it derived. Consequently, in answering the question formulated in the title of this paper, one could say that Polish-Canadian literature is, in a sense, both national and (if we are to preserve the traditional nomenclature) 'ethnic.'

In this connection, I would like to make yet another comment with regard to the formulation, 'literatures of lesser diffusion,' which is the title of this conference. While I find it more acceptable than the term 'ethnic,' I think that it too has its flaws, especially when applied strictly within the Canadian literary system, because it may unintentionally push some important literary phenomena into the shadows created in languages other than English or French. What does 'literature of lesser diffusion' mean? It implies, of course, literary texts which are produced within lesser known and popular languages. But what happens if a writer who belongs to a 'literature of lesser diffusion' (and I am talking here about a Canadian context) wins international recognition and many awards, as is the case, for instance, with Wacław Iwaniuk? Does he automatically move to the category of 'broader' or 'greater' diffusion? In discussing this question, one should not lose sight of the fact that Canadian literature itself (that is, English and French), if analyzed on an international level, would be qualified as a 'literature of lesser diffusion.' To create within such a literature the above term may suggest that we are dealing with totally marginal if not irrelevant literary phenomena, while in fact, in some instances, the reverse might be true. In short, any criteria based solely on linguistic qualifications within the Canadian cultural fabric may at times be dubious if not misleading.

It is easy to expose flaws but much more difficult to find acceptable solutions. I wonder, however, whether as simple a term as 'literature of national minorities' would be more adequate than the two categories (that is, 'ethnic' and 'literatures of lesser diffusion') used in the current debate?

What we observe today is a strong pressure exercised by literatures of national minorities to break the existing wall between the so-called minor and major literature, and thus to find a more equitable place within Canadian culture. It is obvious that the mainstream of Canadian literature published in two major languages will preserve its privileged position on the national scale. At the same time, however, it should become more open to its third, so to speak, dimension, that is, literature written in other unofficial languages of Canada. In doing so, it may find an unexpected source of

inspiration and artistic enrichment. The Polish example is, in this respect, quite interesting. Apart from W. Iwaniuk, who began to stress his Canadian identity, other poets seem to be moving in similar directions, that is, to find some kind of acceptance within the Canadian literary landscape, to break into its mainstream. It is not a vain desire, but an expression of a sense of belonging to a country which one considers to be one's own. Having been accepted elsewhere, they want to overcome the obvious paradox of being totally ignored in their own, albeit adopted, country. In his collection of English poetry entitled *Not A Tourist*, F. Śmieja writes the following:

Looking at the sun setting in rich crimson
at the black squirrels fearless on the road
surveying fertile fields and live pastures
I say to myself: no tourist am I,
a bird of passage without a nest of my own,
I do not merely journey with a cold lens.²³

If not translating, some of these poets try to write in English (for example, A. Busza) and eventually they may be classified as bilingual writers. Their contribution to modern Canadian literature should not be lightly discarded, as the assimilation of their poetic experience may open new formal and thematic possibilities. In commenting on the contribution that W. Iwaniuk may bring with his poems into Canadian poetry, Z. Folejewski wrote the following:

There is an unusual depth in his perhaps somewhat one-sided exaggerated sense of history and personal integrity. There are themes, motifs that add new dimensions and forms that enrich the scope of Canadian poetry. Ellipses, alliterative semantic stress, condensed metaphors, and other devices of the Polish avant-garde can occasionally reach a unique degree of intensity.²⁴

To conclude, I would like to emphasize that this is certainly true of literary values contained within other national groups which may be assimilated into the mainstream of Canadian poetry. And this may only mean a further enrichment of its artistic diversity.

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23 F. Śmieja, *Not A Tourist: Poems* (London: Third Eye 1986) 11.

24 Z. Folejewski, "Foreword," W. Iwaniuk, *Dark Times: Selected Poems* (Toronto: Hounslow Press 1979) 5.