

CONCLUDING PANEL

Joseph Pivato:

The studies gathered here are only a selection from the research being done in ethnic minority writing in Canada. Even as we discuss the essays presented here, new works are being written and published by minority writers. We could not possibly deal with all of them here, just as we could not deal with every minority group in Canada in this space. I list some of the new titles at the end of this paper just to give some idea of the original work and the studies that are now available.

This conference and the subsequent proceedings demonstrate several things:

- 1) The value and validity of ethnic minority writing as an area of study in itself, aside from its contribution to Canadian Literature and Canadian Studies.
- 2) Ethnic minority writing is a growing body of literature that will be with us for a long time, rather than a passing phase in the rapid development of Canadian culture, or a temporary phenomenon due to Canadian immigration policies and institutional multiculturalism.
- 3) The role of ethnic minority writing as a bridge between Canada's North American culture and the diverse cultures and traditions of other countries.
- 4) The potential this body of writing has for opening up the study of literature, both mainstream and minority writing, to a wide variety of approaches and methodologies — the polysystem.
- 5) The need to do a great deal more work in this area in order to better understand the history and institution of literature in Canada, the diversity of Canadian culture, the nature of literature and to better understand ourselves.

We also see how little has been done in the study of minority writing in Canada. Many of the contributors to this conference have produced studies and bibliographies on different minority groups: Lorrin Elliot documented Black writers, Jars Balan did Ukrainian writers, George Bisztray Hungarian writers, M.G. Vassanji did South Asian writers, etc. Several researchers not included here have documented other groups: Agnes Grant has studied Native literature, Thomas King and Helen Hoy have looked at the Native in literature both as author and subject, Michael Greenstein has devoted his work to Jewish-Canadian literature, and Andrew Machalski surveyed Hispanic writers. Nevertheless, we all realize that many ethnic minority

writers have yet to be studied and that many minority groups have yet to participate in the institution of Canadian literature. We hope to change this situation in the near future.

One bright light in this general state of benign neglect is the Institut Québécois de recherche sur la culture with Denise Helly, Anne Vassal and their colleagues, which is studying the writing and culture of ethnic minority groups in Québec. Pierre Nepveu and Simon Harel have recently produced detailed studies of this literature and its relation to Québécois writing. Scholars in English Canada have a big challenge to meet.

One of the immediate effects of the growing awareness of ethnic minority writing is the re-evaluation of Canada's mainstream English and French writing. In the 1970s Canadian critics and anthropologists were moving quickly to establish a canon of texts for Canadian Literature. Now, however, any attempt to compile a list of the basic texts must be called into question. In trying to understand Canadian writing we must now question all our assumptions very carefully. There are many diverse voices that must be heard in the writing that comes from Canada. This change in critical perspective is indicated in several phenomena: the rediscovery of Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981) as an ethnic text; the search for a native text by a native author; the sensitivity to visible minorities. Among native writers we now have Beatrice Culleton with *April Raintree* (1984) and Tomson Highway with *The Rez Sisters* (1988). Among Black writers we now have Neil Bissonndath in English and Dany Laferrière in French. *The Tears of Chinese Immigrants* (1990) by Yuen Chung Yip has just been translated into English. The list of names and titles goes on and on. It is now clear that our reading, study, understanding, teaching and writing about literature in Canada must include this ethnic diversity.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS IN ETHNIC MINORITY WRITING

ANTHOLOGIES

- Birbalsingh, Frank, ed. *Jahaji Bhai: An Anthology of Indo-Caribbean Literature*. Toronto: TSAR Publications, 1987.
- Borovilos, John ed. *Breaking Through: A Canadian Literary Mosaic*. Toronto: Prentice-Hall, 1989.
- Hutcheon, Linda and M. Richmond, eds. *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fiction and Interviews*. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1990.
- Iwaniuk, W. and F. Smieja, eds. *Seven Polish Canadian Poets*. Toronto: PCP, 1984.
- Minni, C.D., ed. *Ricordi: Things Remembered*. Montréal: Guernica, 1989.
- Nomez, Naim, ed. *Chilean Literature in Canada: A Bilingual Anthology*. Ottawa: Cordillera, 1982.
- Oberman, Sheldon and E. Newton, eds. *Mirror of a People: Canadian Jewish Experience in Poetry and Prose*. Toronto: Jewish Educational Publishers, 1985.

BIBLIOGRAPHIES

- Czaykowski, Bogdan. *Polish Writing in Canada: A Preliminary Survey*. Ottawa: Multiculturalism, 1988.
- Elliott, Lorris. *The Bibliography of Literary Writings by Blacks in Canada*. Toronto: Williams-Wallace, 1986.
- Khan, Nuzrat Yar. *Urdu Literature in Canada: A Preliminary Survey*. Ottawa: Multiculturalism, 1988.
- Machalski, Andrew. *Hispanic Writers in Canada*. Ottawa: Multiculturalism, 1988.
- Miska, John. *Ethnic and Native Canadian Literature: A Bibliography*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990.
- Pivato, Joseph. *Italian-Canadian Writers: A Preliminary Survey*. Ottawa: Multiculturalism, 1988.
- Sutherland, Ronald. *No Longer a Family Affair: The Foreign-Born Writers of French Canada*. Ottawa: Multiculturalism, not published.
- Sugunasiri, Suwanda H.J. *The Search For Meaning: The Literature of Canadians of South Asian Origin*. Ottawa: Multiculturalism, 1988. Contains: Arun Prabha Mukherjee, "South Asian Canadian Poetry in English," S. H.J. Sugunasiri, "Brown, Black and White: The South Asian Short Story," F. Birlingsh, "The South Asian Canadian Novel in English," Surjeet Kalsey, "Punjabi Literature in Canada," and Pragna Thakkar Enros, "Gujarati Literature in Canada."

LITERARY STUDIES

- Bumsted, J.M., ed. *AlPart: Papers from the 1984 Ottawa Conference on Language, Culture and Literary Identity in Canada*. *Canadian Literature*. Supplement 1 (1987).
- Bisztray, George. *Hungarian-Canadian Literature*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987.
- Grant, Agnes. *Native Literature in the Curriculum*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1986.
- Greenstein, Michael. *Third Solitudes: Tradition and Discontinuity in Jewish-Canadian Literature*. Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989.
- Harel, Simon. *Le Voleur de parcours: Identité et cosmopolitisme dans la littérature québécoise contemporaine*. Montréal: Éd. de Préambule, 1989.
- Jonassaint, Jean. *Le Pouvoir des mots, les maux du pouvoir: Dix romanciers haïtiens*. Montréal: Presses de l'université de Montréal, 1986.
- King, Thomas, C. Calver & H. Hoy, eds. *The Native in Literature*. Oakville: ECW Press, 1987.
- Kroetsch, Robert, T. Palmer and B. Rasporich, eds. *Ethnicity and Canadian Literature*. *Canadian Ethnic Studies* Special issue 14.1 (1982).
- Nepveu, Pierre. *L'écologie de réel: Mort et naissance de la littérature québécoise contemporaine: essais*. Montréal, Boreal, 1988.
- New, W.H., ed. *Caribbean Connections*. *Canadian Literature* Special issue 95 (1982).
- . *Italian-Canadian Connections*. *Canadian Literature* Special issue 106 (1985).

---. *Slavic and East European Connections*. *Canadian Literature* Special issue 120 (1989).

Pivato, Joseph, ed. *Contrast: Comparative Essays on Italian-Canadian Writing*. Montréal: Guernica, 1985, 2nd ed. 1990.

Riedel, Walter, ed. *The Old World and the New: Literary Perspectives of German Speaking Canadians*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984.

Vassanji, M. G., ed. *A Meeting of Streams: South Asian Canadian Literature*. Toronto: TSAR Publications, 1985.

---. ed. *The Toronto South Asian Review*. Toronto: TSAR Publications, 1985.

Francesco Loriggio:

Growth, development, innovations, tell us all the same thing, in different degrees and according to different registers. And that is, that evolution can be broken down into phenomena of disorganization and organization; that the disorganizing elements can, under certain conditions, be the very elements that produce growth, development, evolution; that the reorganizing capacities may themselves move in the direction of complexity. (For reference see my article, Morin 435)

It is this creative role of disorder — of what cannot be disposed of on the basis of the rules of the dominant tendencies — that Even-Zohar fails to grasp. Why it should be difficult, historically, for anyone living in Israel, in a country of precarious nationhood, to transcend polysystem pluralism, I do not want to speculate on here. Let me simply, for the moment, note that there is within Russian Formalist poetics sufficient conceptual material that would permit us to give more credit than is usually given to the perturbatory components. In the works of Tynianov and of Sklovskij, change takes place through the intervention and/or reevaluation of junior series, of series previously lying at the periphery of the overall system and often corresponding to the more demotic and democratic levels of taste. But if this is so, then distinctions such as the one advocated by Even-Zohar, which separate primary and secondary systems, become very shaky. Tynianov observes that archaic forms can be as effective catalysts of change as the fully novatory postures. While for Even-Zohar, the former would be epigonic and thus to be relegated to secondary systems, for Tynianov they would be primary, since they are constructive, they do produce or induce shifts in the existing order (See for this J. Tynianov, *Archaism i novatory* (Leningrad, 1929). I have consulted the Italian translation, *Avanguardia e tradizione*, traduzione di Sergio Leone, (Bari: Dedalo, 1968), especially 23-60). Needless to say, such ambivalences would be even more clearly detectable here in Canada. The negative reaction of universalist, "progressive" sociologists and historians from the two founding groups to the idea of multiculturalism (which has been generally explained in terms of party politics, as a tactical expedient of Trudeau-style liberalism, and not for its value as a concept)

goes hand in hand with the search for the unifying features of Canadian literature in literary criticism, undertaken in Canada primarily by Frygean archetypalism and thematism. Both social scientists and literary critics are animated by the same obsession: nation-building. Both have turned nation and nationhood into moral imperatives whose validity is self-evident, and requires no analysis. The discussion on ethnicity seems, instead, to suggest that it is only by debating these criteria, by accepting their historicity, their partial, more limited role in a theory of society that the relevance, even the moral relevance of the concepts of nation and nationhood will become fully apparent. Within the specific area of criticism, the seventies and the eighties prove that no adequate history of Canadian literature can be written without first addressing these issues: the anthologies and collections of essays on "Canadian Literature in English" or "Québécois Literature" or "Italian-Canadian Literature" or "Ukrainian Literature" etc. are necessary to obtain a sense of local developments but the overall picture is much more complex, must be etched out with theoretical tools which we do not yet possess. The first and most urgent step towards the proper theoretical attitude consists in realizing that to pose these questions does not make one less 'patriotic' than one's neighbour, that one is simply trying to understand what it means to live (and to live in Canada in particular) or to think about literature (and Canadian literature in particular) at the end of the twentieth century.

Enoch Padolsky:

In thinking over the many interesting papers we have heard over the last three days, I would like to draw attention to three general issues that seemed to me to have been raised in a number of the presentations.

1) Many of the papers dealing with individual minority literatures led to a discussion of the diversity and similarity of situations to be found in all the different minority literatures being produced in Canada today. Several speakers noted the importance of cross-cultural comparisons and what they had to offer in the study both of a single group of writers or of minority writing in Canada generally. This seems to me to be an important point to stress, central in fact to the very focus of this whole conference, for only in looking across the various literatures can the larger Canadian pattern be understood. A great deal of detailed work remains to be undertaken in this area.

2) The second issue pertains to the relationship between literature and society in the field of ethnic minority writing. This is of course central to the theoretical framework for the conference and was addressed in a thought-provoking way by Jose Lambert both in his keynote address and his

concluding remarks. I find myself in agreement on a great many of his points regarding theory and terminology and the need for an open system which will allow us to take into account as many different factors as possible in the consideration of this body of literature. What I would add, however, is a reminder that our approaches to theory and terminology, however careful we may be, tend to be culture-related if not culture-bound. There is thus some danger of ethnocentrism when moving from a theoretical position, developed mainly in the context of European-based literatures, to one which applies to a North American, and in particular, a Canadian context. For Canadians, as for others, language is not just a neutral terrain but a *champ de bataille* on which fierce battles are fought. Terminology, in the Canadian context, is always political, performative, socially defining. The academic association which was formed to further the comparative study of English-Canadian and French-Canadian literature (and by all these terms I am already implying a political position) argued long and hard on the title for the organization (in both languages). The final outcome — The Association for Canadian and Québec Literatures/ Association des littératures canadiennes et québécoises — can be seen, even with reference to singular or plural usage, to carry precisely this highly performative dimension.

The same is obviously true in the whole discussion of what terminology to use for the literature(s) we have been discussing at this conference. "Literatures of lesser diffusion" (conference title), "ethnic literature" (Loriggio and others), or "ethnic minority literature" (my own preference), this diversity of terminology is thus not a dispute about which terminology is descriptively and neutrally most fitting, though this is perhaps part of the question. Rather it is at the same time a debate about Canadian society and the place that minority writing, and minority groups generally, to use my terminology here, have within it. Many of the speakers at this conference have reacted, even emotionally at times, to this level of language and have, in their titles and in other ways, implied positions with social, political, or other instrumental dimensions. Examples of titles that display this element include: "The Literature of German-speaking Canadians" (Riedel), "Finnish Canadianism in English Canadian Literature" (Mattson), and "Ethnic or National (?): Polish Literature in Canada (Możejko).

3) The centrality of the instrumental and the performative thus brings us back to the basic network of issues regarding minority/majority relations within Canada and their implications for Canadian minority literature. Using Tamara Palmer's analytic framework (success/failure) as a paradigm, we might rephrase this issue by asking whether minority writing will be able to break out of its present binary opposition (ethnic vs mainstream) and change the nature of the Canadian literary institution without losing entirely its own identity, its own concerns, its particular modalities, and its international

connections, where these apply. As I argued in my own paper, this is fundamentally a question of Canadian acculturation dynamics, and involves both the acculturation options of Canadian minority writers and readers, and the range of responses from Canadian majority society. And a number of papers, I might add, have exemplified the way in which these issues arise in specific literatures or in general. Thus Nancy Mattson's presentation, to give one example, dealt both with majority depiction of Finns in Canadian literature and with the emergence of Finnish-Canadian voice in contradistinction to exile Finnish writing in Canada. And both George Bizstray and Francesco Loriggio, in the course of their papers questioned the current Canadian institutional rigidity in the way Canadian minority writing is taught, funded, critically treated, and so on. The conclusion we need to draw in this regard, then, is that not only is there a great deal of work to be done of a cross-cultural and trans-cultural nature within the field of Canadian minority writing, but also that we will have to bring into the discussion the whole range of issues regarding majority and minority relations in Canadian society and their impact on Canadian ethnic minority literature.

Milan V. Dimić:

Papers presented at the conference and discussions which have taken place during the sessions, in smaller groups, and at this Round Table, displayed a considerable variety of methodological approaches. For all that, there has been a remarkable unity of purpose and genuine desire to contribute to a sober examination of the ethnic minority writing and its institutional underpinnings. This examination has been enhanced by the evident empathy for the position of minorities, but without acrimony towards the more privileged groups. There has been also a constant and good-humored use of English and French, a practice which cannot be taken for granted especially when dealing with this topic.

Concerns have been expressed about connotations and imprecisions of our terms ('lesser diffusion,' 'ethnic,' 'ethnic minority,' 'national minority') and certain aspects of the Polysystem Theory. Although I am personally convinced that these concerns about the theory are largely the result of misunderstandings and of the conflation of the scientific and common meanings of crucial terms,¹ the research team is aware of the need to

consider this and any alternative model as tentative and heuristic. For the time being, we are satisfied to preserve a general direction for our research; later on, final decisions and a consensus about the exact methodology of the project will become mandatory. The example of the work pursued by our colleagues at Laval University in Québec clearly demonstrates that this is an attainable goal.

This conference has confirmed that in ethnic writing, inspiration is frequently not exclusively literary, but historical, social, and cultural: to bear witness and express a unique experience. Therefore, we are well aware of the fact that a purely aesthetic evaluation or a simple placement on the grid of the polysystem are one-sided and that they impoverish the texts under scrutiny. Moreover, the use of both the heritage languages and those of the two major groups so as to express fairly similar insights has also shown that while of decisive importance, the choice and practice of a language is not the only index of a culture and of its values. In general, to hear these ethnic voices means to allow them to express their subjectivity, without reducing them to the position of a simple object of discourse. Without abandoning the hope of a coherent scholarly discourse, we hope therefore that ours will be the result of continuing dialogues. They meant to create an intersubjective space broad and varied enough to encompass without violation the different voices in their commonality and particularity.

I should like to thank all those persons and institutions which have made this conference possible. We are greatly indebted to Joseph Pivato for his scholarly contribution to its preparation. Last but not least, I must thank all participants for their uncommon friendly enthusiasm, patience with our plans and limitations, and for their willingness to give us the benefit of the doubt and to continue to support the project of a history of the literary institution in Canada. This help is indispensable!

1 Since this debate had taken place, I. Even-Zohar has offered replies to most objections raised about the Polysystem Theory during this conference and, of course, in many other contexts. Cf. particularly I. Even-Zohar, "Introduction," *Polysystem Studies* Special issue *Poetics Today* 11.1 (Spring 1990) 1-7 and "System, Dynamics, and Interference in