

**Forgetful Recollections:**  
Images of Central and Eastern Europe  
in Canadian Literature



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**ABSTRACT:** Drewniak Dagmara, *Forgetful Recollections: Images of Central and Eastern Europe in Canadian Literature* [Przypominając zapomniane: Obrazy Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej w literaturze kanadyjskiej]. Adam Mickiewicz University Press. Poznań 2014. Seria Filologia Angielska nr 44. Pp. 221. ISBN 978-83-232-2777-9. ISSN 0554-8144. Text in English with a summary in Polish.

The present study is an attempt to explore the position of the memory and postmemory of Central and Eastern Europe in contemporary Canadian literature. The analysis is inspired by Simona Škrabec's concept of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Central Europe seen as diverse and evolving "space of dispersion." In this context, the book situates the novels and memoirs, published in Canada at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century and written by immigrants and their descendants from Central and Eastern Europe, as the texts which try to recreate the images of "Old Places" filtered through the experience of living in transcultural Canada. The analyses of the selected texts by Janice Kulyk Keefer, Lisa Appignanesi, Irena F. Karafilly, Anne Michaels, Norman Ravvin, and Eva Stachniak are predominantly based on Marianne Hirsch's idea of "postmemory" and Pierre Nora's "*lieux de mémoire*". These two concepts capture the broad spectrum of attitudes to the past, remembering and forgetting, and sites of memory as exemplified in the discussed texts. While all of the chosen novels and memoirs explore the problem of post/memory and un/belonging caused by immigration, poverty, and the trauma of World War II, they try to address the question of identity of immigrants (or their descendants) created on the border between the memory and postmemory of the past and the contemporary reality of transcultural Canada. As a result of this, the post/memory and the recreated after/images of Central and Eastern Europe offer both therapy and consolation as well as testimony to the past and its sites of memory.

**KEY WORDS:** Canadian literature, immigrant literature, memory in literature, postmemory, *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, Central and Eastern European immigrant writing, transculturalism, immigrant novel, Canadian life-writing, memoir

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We do not descend, but rise from our histories.  
If cut open, memory would resemble  
a cross-section of the earth's core,  
a table of geographical time.

Anne Michaels "Lake of Two Rivers"



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This book is an outcome of many years of research in the fields of migrant literatures as well as Canadian literature. Yet, apart from the scholarly reflection which has kept a grip over my research for the past few years, the more I became involved in the reading and writing, the more spiritually possessive the topic started to be for my personal inquiry. The question of our identity as human beings of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries together with the experience of the two World Wars, Communism in Central and Eastern Europe, mass migration, globalization and many other quandaries have inspired me to consider how we construct our identities and how much of the past we carry in ourselves. All the writers and works discussed in this book have tried to respond to these dilemmas. The form they have chosen is important, especially nowadays when the non-fictional genres, particularly the ones labeled under ‘life-writing,’ have been enjoying growing popularity and scholarly attention. At the same time there is an urge, which is particularly rewarding, to go beyond the genre. As Janice Kulyk Keefer pointed out, in her *Honey and Ashes*, family stories “[b]y being stories (...) were the truest things I knew” (1998a: 299).

Gathering my thoughts, strength and courage to write this book would not have been possible without the help and support of the Polish Association for Canadian Studies whose community of scholars has offered me support and advice for many years. The countless discussions on Canada and literature, as well as a few friendships I have made, have been an invaluable treasure I would like to express my gratitude for.

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<sup>1</sup> This term has been used by Professor Sikorska herself on a number of occasions, for example see a dedication to her students in *A Short History of English Literature* (2011).

Agnieszka Rzepa, the head of the Center for Canadian Literature at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, which I am part of, for inviting me to work with her and for providing space and atmosphere necessary to conduct research. I am also very thankful for all the discussions we have had, numerous questions she has answered as well as for her being both my boss and friend. I would like to acknowledge Dr. Aleksandra Jankowska, my former boss, who despite her professional interests and duties, has never stopped supporting my passion for literature and has helped me on many occasions, both professional and personal. My thanks go to Professor Katarzyna Dziubalska-Kołaczyk, the head of the Faculty of English at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, for providing institutional space and support for my research.

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## **Introduction**

The history of Central and Eastern Europe has always been a complicated issue. The territories which constitute today's Poland, the Ukraine, Belarus, Slovakia and many other countries of the region have changed their affiliations in the course of history many times. It is not only the phenomenon of the previous and long-forgotten epochs but a matter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century conflicts, too. In particular the period of the Partitions (which mainly affected Poland but influenced the shapes of other countries as well) and the two World Wars have exerted certain effects on the region, which are visible on the political, linguistic and cultural map of Central and Eastern Europe. Some of the historical processes have made the concept of Central and Eastern Europe evolve into an image beyond a strictly geographical denomination of a certain physical area. Despite the new divisions in the region, being a post-World War II *status quo*, peoples of Central and Eastern Europe have shared a number of common experiences, of which Communism and its disintegration are but one example.

The notion of Central and Eastern Europe is, however, not an easy one to grasp. It is very difficult to define once and for all the geographical and historical dimension of the area. It is even preferable to refer to it as a region and conceptualization rather than as a territory with strictly determined borders and history. Norman Davies and Roger Moorhouse stress the impossibility of finding out the roots and definition of the term Central Europe (2003: 17). They also confirm the political connotations of all the other synonyms such as *Mitteleuropa*, *Zwischen Europa* (The Lands Between) or East-Central Europe (2003: 21), which have appeared in historiography. Such synonyms also pose certain problems and inconsistencies of usage as well as possess strong political allusions. My suggestion, therefore, is to treat Central and Eastern Europe more in a manner which is borrowed from Edward Said's idea of 'imagined geography' ([1978] 1985: 54-55). Although Said's seminal *Orientalism* (1978) discussed the perception of the Orient, his approach to geography can be applied in the present study. As Said claims "it is enough for 'us' to

set up the boundaries in our own minds” (1985: 54) and “the geographic boundaries accompany the social, ethnic, and cultural ones in expected ways (...). The objective space (...) is far less important than what poetically it is endowed with, which is usually a quality with an imaginative or figurative value (...) So space acquires emotional and even rational sense by a kind of poetic process” (Said 1985: 54-55). Thus the tension between what is familiar and well-known, and what is far away and foreign becomes a vital one. This distance and simultaneous lack of strict boundaries offer a creative approach found also in the Canadian immigrant literature discussed in this book. Paradoxically, the process of filling the gap between remembering and forgetting is a viable one that stimulates the reconsideration of Central and Eastern Europe from afar.

The Slovenian scholar, Simona Škrabec ([2005] 2013), expresses her archeological approach to the conceptualization of Central Europe, voicing all the aforementioned difficulties embedded in the usage of the term. She proposes to see Central Europe as a series of excavation sites where various events and phenomena coexist (the Slavic tradition with the Germanic or Jewish ones, for instance) rather than viewing it as a historically determined political entity. Such a perspective favors the active, intangible and inclusive approach and, in consequence, as Škrabec claims, offers a nonlinear, heterogeneous concept of Central Europe, which causes a constant interaction between its centrality and the East on the one hand and the West on the other. Treating Central Europe as a constantly evolving space, she privileges the term “imagined geography” as the only one which caters for going beyond the physicality of maps of the area which exclude others (i.e. countries that do not happen to be within the borders). Imagined geography, despite its oxymoronic meaning, is open, constantly alternating evolutionarily into unknown regions, images, and concepts.

Although still recent and vulnerable to certain political contestations (we have to bear in mind the Balkan conflicts or the most recent 2013 protests and 2014 tensions in the Ukraine), the divisions in contemporary Europe appear to be stable. However, the memory of the previous conflicts is still vivid, and mutually beneficial relations between some countries and nations have to be constantly attended to. Central and Eastern Europe have been areas of intense migrations, from which millions of people have fled to better ‘elsewheres.’ North America, especially Canada and the USA, has received thousands of immigrants from all over Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland, and thus the

stratum of the descendants of these immigrants has reflected the tendencies, antagonisms and cooperation of all the nations coexisting in this part of Europe before the great conflicts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, the multiculturalism of Central and Eastern Europe is, to a certain extent, reproduced in the next generations of immigrants in North America.

The greatest paradox of having Central and/or Eastern European roots is that it is rarely univocally clear to determine who you are. This is exactly the quandary this book tries to approach. Due to the ‘tangled vision’ of the concept of nationality and the coexistence of many nations within the area of, roughly speaking, Central Europe, it would be a morally dubious and one-dimensional oversimplification to refer to a person only as a Pole, if they were of both Polish-Russian origins, or Polish-Jewish, or Jewish purely but living in Poland, or Jewish-Ukrainian, or Ukrainian-Polish etc. (the examples could be multiplied here). That is why, although the majority of writers (and thus their characters) discussed in this book come from the areas belonging at least at some point to Poland, these authors cannot be classified as only of Polish origin (with the exception of Eva Stachniak). Consequently, my use of the term Central and Eastern Europe is an umbrella term for the peoples, nations, and particular human beings inhabiting once the territories which have belonged at least for some time to one of many ‘versions’ of Poland over the course of history. They either are of Polish-Jewish, or Ukrainian-Polish, or Russian-Polish-Jewish, or Polish ancestry but, by the absolutely fundamental experience of their own or their forefathers’ immigration to Canada, have predominantly defined themselves as hyphenated Canadians. By being members of particular diasporas in Canada, they have become important figures for these immigrant communities and, through their literary and scholarly output, they have frequently spoken on behalf of the groups in question. Over the course of history, the ancestors of these authors were certainly labelled differently depending on the political situation of the lands in question, but they have always belonged to people of mixed origins and their families’ immigration to Canada only multiplied their sense of belonging.

Despite the similarities and differences they may possess, “there is something to be said for the idea of dialogue between peoples who are dissimilar yet have common antecedents” (Ibrahim 1998: 44). The dialogic space which is created in Canada has proven extremely valuable for immigrant writing. I refer here to the Bakhtinian concept of dialogue, which he developed in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981) where he claims

that “[e]verything means, is understood, as a part of a greater whole – there is constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others” (426). Anna Branach-Kallas in her study of body and nation in diasporic fiction in Canada has further elaborated on this perspective claiming that “the tension between otherness and selfhood within the multicultural context is seen as a source of creativity and ethics” (2010: 29). In *Challenging Canada. Dialogism and Narrative Techniques in Canadian Novels* (2003), Gabriele Helms proves the applicability of Bakhtinian dialogism and polyphony of narrative voices to the study of a range of immigrant and ethnic texts (among them Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan* and Sky Lee’s *Disappearing Moon Café*). As a result of her study, it is possible to state that “dialogism describes more than friendly, mutually enriching encounters between the different but equal voices” (Helms 2003: 25-26). In this light, the texts selected for my book prove illustrative of how cultures, ethnic groups, and immigrants (or their children) interact. The clash of cultures, languages, reminiscences from the past do not deprecate one another but they “may agree dialogically, modify, supplement, polemicize, parody, or contradict each other; (...) they come into contact, which will not allow them to re-emerge unaffected” (Helms 2003: 24).

The multicultural phenomenon, being the result of immigration and frequently fleeing from the hecatomb of World War II, is definitely an outcome of Canadian policy of multiculturalism, both praised and criticized, but truly highlighting the issues of transnationalism and transculturalism discussed in this book. Maria Noëlle Ng, though referring to her own Chinese diaspora in the Canadian context, stresses the fact that the diasporic position “is enabling and empowering” (Ng 2008: 43). For her, this is the only approach possible and point of departure for her, writing. Creativity is where multiplicity finds its only outlet as “the diasporic subject lives in a borderland existence” (2008: 43), which, despite obvious differences between the Asian and European experience, aptly summarizes the borderland experience.

The search for identity is viewed as a characteristically Canadian quest. In the 1960s, Northrop Frye expressed his conviction that in order to look for identity in Canada, one has to confront the question “Where is here?” which accompanies the other famous quandary “Who am I?” ([1965] 1971: 220). This, according to Frye, highlights the Canadian problem of identity by “a series of paradoxes in what confronts that identity” ([1965] 1971:

220). In her *Survival*, Margaret Atwood continues Frye's discussion by emphasizing the fact that these two questions, and especially the "Where is here?" one, allude to the importance of a place and its image. In relation to immigrants, this interplay between the new places found in the new homelands and the images of the lost homes becomes a central aspect of identity formation processes. Atwood alleges that one of the most important questions asked in Canada is: "Where is this place in relation to other places?" (1972: 17) The authors whose texts I have selected for this study have all come to the point when the identity crisis, seen as a constructive tension, has been approached in the form of a narrative, either based on one's life as in various forms of life-writing or in the form of fiction. The juxtaposition of various literary responses of writers being rooted in Central and Eastern Europe in the following chapters shows how living in Canada and reconsidering one's European roots offer the platform of linguistic and cultural contact. Therefore, the analyses that follow are concentrated on the change of perception of one's identity, memory and belonging; this reconsideration, re-emergence as a different person is a result of a dialogic, thus open and active, reflection on what is home and what it means to try to define it.

It is noteworthy, as Atwood suggests, that "[l]iterature is not only a mirror; it is also a map, a geography of the mind" (1972: 18-19). My aim here is to show how differently the writers and their texts respond to this dilemma, taking into consideration the fact that they have all originated from the same territory of the Central and Eastern part of Europe and that they or their forefathers have at least for some time lived in Poland (given all the Polish objections to the term Central and Eastern Europe and the changes of borders that I have mentioned above). Moreover, their experience has been modified by immigration to Canada, which, apart from the idea of uprooting, includes the practice of Canadian multiculturalism or, as I would prefer to call it, after Marie Vautier (2003), transculturalism. Vautier rejects the idea of multiculturalism as too stable and posits transculturalism in order to express the interaction of cultures rather than to trace the dangers of a cultural standstill. A similar view is voiced by Eva Darias Beautell who claims that

the writing produced in contemporary Canada often rejects oppositional representations, positing instead a concept of literature as contamination (...) It is precisely the elements of contamination and heterogeneity in Canadian writing, involving a positive cultural and linguistic exchange,

that can provide a transcultural focus on specific instances of writing as an alternative to the somewhat abstract multicultural model of Canadian identity (2000: 29-30).<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, the idea of interaction among cultures embedded in this understanding of transculturalism proves extremely valid in the present study. All the texts in question, through their narration of migration to Canada, demonstrate a “decentred concept of culture (transculturalism)” (Darias Beautell 2000: 24). Wayson Choy prefers the term interculturalism instead of transculturalism to further emphasize the notion of interaction among people who “interact on the level of the human personality and spirit (...) while retaining essentials from [their] separate culture” (2000: 279). The continuous exchange and interaction contribute to the creation of a fluid and dynamic rather than a stable society in Canada.

The aforementioned notions of identity, transculturalism, immigration and diaspora have all been fused in the search for a concept of home in the texts discussed in the subsequent chapters of the book. The central idea of home which prevails here is realized in various ways by different authors, who go back into the past but also look to the future, who search for home in a physical sense by undertaking journeys to Poland or the Ukraine to uncover the remnants of their ancestors’ pasts. A figurative concept of home is also sought through language: Polish, Yiddish, Russian, and German surface from the distant corners of memory and affect the authors and their protagonists in a number of mysterious ways. Home is finally sought through the memory of places which have been left and irrecoverably lost in the process of emigration. In two different memoirs I have encountered statements that have both been significant inspirations for the writing of this book, illustrating the troubled concept of home as I approach it here. They both take into consideration the inability to arrive at a single, univocal truth about an immigrant vision of home. Janice Kulyk Kefer claims in her *Honey and Ashes*: “Perhaps home is only this: inhabiting uncertainty...” (1998: 328). Eva Hoffman, in turn, finishes the ‘Canadian’ part of her autobiography *Lost in*

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<sup>1</sup> Darias Beautell acknowledges Edward Said’s “Figures, Configurations, Transfigurations” (1992) and Lola Lemire Tostevin’s “Contamination: A Relation of Difference” (1989) as her inspirations for the conclusions regarding contamination and cultural exchange in literature.

*Translation*, referring to the initial ten years she spent in Canada before she moved to the USA, by saying: “I’ll be made, like a mosaic, of fragments – and my consciousness of them. It is only in that observing consciousness that I remain, after all, an immigrant” (Hoffman 1989: 164). This uncertainty, together with the feeling of a fragmented self, has been common to all characters of the stories selected for this book. The chosen texts aptly describe a hiatus each and every immigrant experiences on the one hand, and show how the shattered experience of immigration is inherited by the subsequent generations on the other.

The memories, encapsulated in the memoirs and novels, come in various forms: as ghostly hauntings, as tormenting fragments that torture the parents, as the lack of knowledge, as the memories of trauma, as after/images of the lost towns or villages, as painful mysteries, as traps of recollections inherited from the parents and grandparents. These varied forms of memories intertwine with, correspond to and converse with one another. Therefore, as I argue in this book, a dialogic approach to one’s identity realized through the immigrant experience and being rooted in many cultures and languages at once is only possible because of Canada’s openness to identity-formation processes and the pluralism the country offers. As Enoch Padolsky mentions in his essay ““Olga in Wonderland”: Canadian Ethnic Minority Writing and Post-Colonial Theory”

In practice, at least in Canada, discussions of pluralism and multiculturalism take place on a very complex territory of dispute and contestation – between Quebec and English Canada, between Aboriginals and others, between minorities and majorities, between differing views within minority groupings, between the claims of individuals and groups, and so forth. Far from being a simple and static hegemonic strategy, Canadian pluralism/multiculturalism has been precisely the terrain on which alliances have been formed, racism has been fought, and the shifting needs of Canadian ethnic and racial groups have been argued and developed (2004: 246).

Despite the controversies around Canadian multiculturalism (Bissoondath 1994, Kymlicka 2002) that Padolsky sees as well, it is this dynamic and pluralistic quality of Canadian society and culture, which makes it feasible for members of ethnic groups to actively participate in the discussion and to approach the problem in criticism, theory, and literature.

As a result of such a dialogic approach, the leading critics in the field of literary and cultural studies in Canada have initiated the project of TransCanada.<sup>2</sup> The comprehensive debates during the conferences and works on the project have led to various publications in which the prefix *Trans-* plays such an important role and the term is indispensable in situating the diasporic writing discussed in this book in its wider context. Winfried Siemerling in his “Trans-Scan. Globalization, Literary Hemispheric Studies, Citizenship as Project” claims that the ‘trans’ in Canadian literature puts an end to a traditionally understood concept of Canadian literature: “If to go ‘trans’-Canada is also to go ‘beyond’ Canada, what’s on the other side? In a perspective that sees national borders as phenomena to be studied rather than a priori delimiters of a field of study, one possible answer is ‘America’ or the ‘New World’” (2007: 131). As Siemerling concentrates his inquiry on North and Latin American literatures in their dialogue with Canada, I would stress here that another answer to his question could be the Old World, and mainly Central and Eastern Europe. Emigration from this part of the world was counted in substantial numbers and the members of this immigration have finally found their own voice in writing.<sup>3</sup> This is possible for, as Siemerling claims: “one of the most effective options in the ‘TransCanadian’ business is going ‘through’ and ‘across’ Canada and its literatures and cultures, of which there remains much to be carried *out*” (2007: 135, emphasis mine). In the Introduction to *The Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha stresses the value of going ‘beyond’ in one’s interrogation of culture, and thus literature too, by stating: “the ‘beyond’ is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past... (...) there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the ‘beyond’: an

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<sup>2</sup> One of the leaders of the group and the initiator of the three conferences on TransCanada held so far is Smaro Kamboureli who has cooperated with Roy Miki (the first two conferences) and with Christl Verduyn (the most recent 2007 one). She has also established TransCanada Institute at the University of Guelph which work on the TransCanada Project. For details see <https://www.uoguelph.ca/transcanadas/institute>. For the resume of Kamboureli’s ideas around the organization of the conferences and the Project itself see the Preface to *TRANS.CAN.LIT. Resituating the Study of Canadian Literature*.

<sup>3</sup> The strength of their voice in Canadian literature is still debatable. The authors coming from Central and Eastern Europe have been recognized as separate entities rather than members of a large migrant group but the position of such writers as Anne Michaels and Janice Kulyk Keefer cannot be underestimated.

exploratory, restless movement caught so well in the French rendition of the words *au-delà* – here and there, on all sides, *fort/da*, hither and thither, back and forth” (Bhabha 1994: 1, italics original). The need to go out or ‘beyond’ the concept of Canadian literature also in the literal movement to the country or place of one’s origins is a creative, productive and “innovative” (Bhabha 1994: 1) strategy of transculturality.

My aim and intention in this book is to show a tangled vision of Central and Eastern Europe, to discuss the territories that have once belonged to Poland, in both autobiographical and fictional renditions by authors who in the first or second generation come from the region in question. The methodological framework for the chosen texts, belonging both to the wide body of autobiographical writing and fiction, tackles the problem of rendition of memory, identity formation and transcultural dialogism performed by the writers and their characters. Škrabec rejects any linearity and imposition of a homogeneous and rigid framework on what is Central European (2013: 13-45) in order to privilege the active, dialogic, evolving conceptualization of this part of Europe as a concept which enters cultural studies and history (27-45). As Susanna Egan emphasizes, diasporas are in a dialogue, and thus their narratives are found in all the possible “refractions of mirror talk” (1999: 159). Although she is mainly concerned with various forms of autobiographical writing, her definition of writing from borderlands proves viable for the understanding of a fusion of transculturalism and re/imagining diasporic experience: “transitions and overlap, boundaries and their permeation, simultaneous inside / outside instabilities, hybridity, hyphenation, cultural creolization, are not experienced as linear and find fullest expression in narrative that is permeable, polygeneric, and significantly free from the constraints of time” (Egan 1999: 144). As a result of the adoption of such a vision, the theories employed in the study of particular texts are also to form an inclusive, interconnected, and discursive mode of looking at the after/images created in these texts.

In *Forgetful Recollections* I discuss various approaches to autobiographical writing and the transgression of the boundaries of the genre(s) into fiction and storytelling are presented in order to offer a wider perspective onto the challenges such texts face. From the earliest autobiographical texts and their position in literature to the most recent

responses to memory and forgetting, this book tries to address how these vast theoretical issues find their way into texts which offer images of Central and Eastern Europe. The fusion of life writing with fiction offers a unique perspective on Canadian diasporic literature and allows its readers to reconsider the concepts of transculturalism, which, as mentioned before, has recently evolved from multicultural experience pushed to its borders.

Dilthey (1976) claims that autobiography constitutes simply a narration of a man's reflection on his life. He argues that the best examples of such a reflection are seen in St. Augustine's *Confessions*, Rousseau's *Confessions* and Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, which is also referred to as *Bildungsroman* by Weintraub (1978). In these texts, the value is constructed within autobiography itself, and they always stem from the autobiographer's self-conception.

In his study of autobiography, Georg Misch (1950) in turn tries to systematize autobiographical writings according to the principle of chronology and linearity. He refuses St. Augustine the privileged position of having created the first account of the self and claims the roots of that genre go back to Egyptian tomb inscriptions. However, he admits that autobiography started to flourish in the Renaissance and its apex came in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when it was seen as indispensable for getting to know the world and man. Misch (1950: 4) understood that the boundaries of the genre are extremely fluid and difficult to define, for it often goes beyond first person narration by including other genres and written modes. Although Misch died in 1965, his understanding of autobiography as a genre comes close to the postmodern view on it. He was also the first to differentiate between autobiography and memoir. For him the former is an active and the latter a passive but deeper way of conveying knowledge of the self. In autobiography the life story is central, whereas in memoir there is an air of merely observing the world and narrating it, though the reason for it is to view history through memory. Laura Marcus (1994), while referring to Misch, calls his understanding of autobiography "a man's need for 'self-revelation'" (1994: 151) and claims that for him 'self-revelation' was the same as 'self-awareness.' Marlene Kadar tries to solve the discussion and bridge the unbridgeable by saying that "like autobiographies, then memoirs describe events in retrospect, and are usually written with eventual publication in mind. Memoirs, however, are often constructed more loosely than autobiographies, yet take their lead

from the historical circumstances and personages that have influenced the memoirist's recollections" (2002: 663).

Unlike Misch, Georges Gusdorf in his essay "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography" (1980) argues that this genre started indeed with Augustine and, what is more, it is limited in time and space. It had not existed before Augustine and appeared only in the West. According to him, autobiography consists of constant oppositions between self and image, subject and object identity, and also the writing 'I' and the written 'I.' Gusdorf also disagrees with Misch, and praises memoir for being deeper by saying that it is a simple representation and falls very close to writing a history. The difference also lies in the conviction that an attempt to write history 'as it was' is seen as inconceivable. He also sees the great development of the genre of autobiography in Romanticism together with its fascination with individuality and seeking the reasons for and results of it. All of the quoted scholars study the development of autobiography outside the English language, whereas Sikorska (1996: 133) points to the beginnings of autobiographical writings in the English literature of the Middle Ages with *The Book of Margery Kempe*, wherein the eponymous mystic tries to recreate "her Self through her body" (172). Linda Anderson (2011 [2001]) also addresses the history of the autobiography as a genre from the time of St. Augustine to the postcolonial and postmodern approaches. What is especially important in her book is the fusion of history with the various conceptualizations of memory from Halbwachs, through Ricouer, to Casey and Nora. In the Canadian context, however, it must be noted that various life writing practices "came to Canada with European explorers and settlers and (...) contributed to the evolution of distinctly Canadian cultures" (Egan and Helms 2004: 217). Therefore, Canadian life writing is said to have started with *Relations des Jésuites* (*The Jesuit Relations*), published in 1896-1901 but narrating the times of the 17<sup>th</sup> century exploration of Canada (Egan and Helms 2004) through Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852), and *Life in the Clearings* (1853), to First Nations' accounts such as Jane Willis's *Geneish: An Indian Girlhood* (1973) and Lee Maracle's *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel* (1990), to name only a few after Kadar (2002) and Egan and Helms (2004).

While all of the above-mentioned critics concentrate on the meaning or categorizations of autobiography, Freeman (1993) goes deeper to trace the influence of memory on the process of writing. He claims that it can

be called a recollective process as it tries to gather those memories that have been scattered or lost. He, like Gusdorf (1980), understands that memory plays a very important role in creating autobiography, as it serves not as a way to recall the past but to make sense of it (1993: 29). In that light, he sees Augustine's *Confessions* as simply a chronicle retelling what happened when, and not an actual autobiography. Freeman, like Lloyd (1993), emphasizes the fact that the meaning of autobiographical texts is constructed both by writer and reader and is more made than found. Moreover, the process of creating meaning is an active one and the results are therefore fragmentary, full of gaps and failures. The reason for such fragmentation lies undoubtedly in the deformations of memory. And all of the above-mentioned critical responses to writing from or via memory cast light on the creative process in various genres, including life writing and fiction. They also show how it is possible to trace the position and value of memory both in autobiographical as well as fictional texts.

Hayden White in his book *Figural Realism. Studies in the Mimesis Effect* (1999) claims all historical narrativization has to be seen as interpretation because "there is no such thing as a real story. Stories are told or written, not found. And as for the notion of a true story, this is virtually a contradiction in terms. All stories are fictions. Which means, of course, that they can be true only in a metaphorical sense" (White 1999: 9). The contemporary theories of memory, similarly to those referring to history, emphasize the creative character of writing memories down. The process of memorizing consists in the way of preserving information in the human brain. As it has been proved, the bits of knowledge, memories or information people preserve are not stored passively. They are subjected to constant reorganization, which can take the form of selection, adjustment, or reconstruction; as Ian Chambers (1998: 81) states, "memory (...) knows the impossibility of ever fully knowing either itself or the past. What are transcribed and translated are traces, residues, shadows and echoes." There are also two different aspects of memory that influence the so-called result, in other words our remembrances, which is remembering and forgetting. Papalia and Olds (1985) point out that the modern psychological scheme of remembering includes perception, encoding, storage and transfer, and finally retrieval. It is already visible here how active this process becomes, especially during the storage and transfer stage defined by Atkinson and Shiffrin (1968). They proved that the information or image people try to remember goes through various

steps ranging from sensory, through short-term to long-term memory. The transfer that operates within these steps can change or group certain bits into larger units. As a result of such processes, information can be displaced or even pushed out of the human brain.

It is worth noting that due to the above-mentioned processes, memories are not permanent. Forgetting is closely related to the subject of this work, as some of the writers try to grasp the memories of their dying parents who have lost memory due to Alzheimer's disease (Appignanesi in *Losing the Dead* and Karafilly in *Stranger in the Plumed Hat*). According to Freeman (1993: 33) "the *history* one tells, via *memory*, assumes the form of a *narrative* of the past that charts the trajectory of how one's self came to be" (italics original). These processes are also stimulated by people's emotions and attitudes towards certain pieces of information. As a result of this, the visions that all of the writers in question propose, filtered through memories, are tinted with this change, be it selection or reconstruction. If memory falls prey to *ars oblivionis* (Ricoeur 2004: 505), then the textual worlds created by both fiction and non-fiction remain within the same categories of truthfulness. Acknowledging this, however, does not mean to eradicate the reliability of the experience of a child of a Holocaust survivor, for instance. Meditating on the inseparability of memory and forgetting, Edward S. Casey states that "we have not only forgotten what it is to remember – and what remembering *is* – but we have forgotten our own forgetting. So deep is our oblivion of memory that we are not even aware of how alienated we are from its 'treasures' and how distant we have become from its deliverances" (2000 [1987]: 2, italics original).

As a result, instead of striving to reclaim memory as such in the cases which require the memory of a particular place, Casey offers the question, "Why is place so potent as a guardian of memories?" (2000: 201). In the case of diasporic writing wherein a drive to write about one's past is frequently a journey to the place one comes from (in a direct or indirect sense: being the first, second or third generation of immigrants) to confront memories of particular places with the actual sites, Casey proposes:

We can be moved back into this place as much as, and sometimes more than, into the time in which the remembered even occurred. Rather than thinking of remembering as a form of re-experiencing the past *per se*, we might conceive it as an activity of *re-implacing*: re-experiencing

past places. By the same token, if it is true that all memory has a bodily component or dimension, the memory-bearing body can be considered as a *body moving back in(to) place* (2000: 201-202, italics original).

Canadian ethnic writing, and especially writing by people of Central and Eastern European descent, has been involved in this ‘re-implacing’ both within the wide spectrum of life-writing as well as fiction. All texts included in the following chapters have tackled this troubled issue of trying to reconsider a place from the past. It is done through voyaging to the Old World but also through re-inventing it as well as re-imagining what has been irretrievably lost. Thus, the attempt to recreate a place through memory is in the Canadian ethnic writing of Central and Eastern European descent closely bound with the notion of site of memory.

Pierre Nora and Maurice Halbwachs note the tension and opposition between memory and history. Nora, in his focal essay “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*,” emphasizes the opposition between these two, calling it “fundamental” and claiming that “Memory is life (...) and History (...) is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of *what is no longer*” (Nora 1989: 8, emphasis mine). This stance explains the decisions of the writers discussed in the present book to escape being considered as writers of histories in favor of writers of non-fiction and fiction who tell stories from memory. If “memory is life,” as Nora sees it, then it is the only way to bring the previous generations, the past images, and the after/images into being. Even the novel by Eva Stachniak, one of the most recent books in this selection, resurrects the after/images of pre-World War II multicultural Poland as well as the troubled vistas of German-Polish Breslau/Wrocław. Therefore, even if contaminated by its loss, forgetting, or oblivion, memory proves central to the texts, the *axis mundi* for the characters in both non-fiction and fiction. Janice Kulyk Keefer, Lisa Appignanesi, Irena F. Karafilly, Norman Ravvin, Eva Stachniak, and Anne Michaels, in spite of their origins, places of birth, and the diasporas that they have more or less consciously joined, have become the carriers of memory, and their writing, which is especially visible in the texts chosen for interpretation here, has become the means through which their memory is realized. These texts pulsate with the images and memories “of what is no longer” (Nora 1989: 8). According to Nora, “Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present (...) memory, insofar as it is affective and

magical (...) nourishes recollections that may be out of focus or telescopic, global or detached, particular or symbolic." (Nora 1989: 8) Halbwachs thus discusses the same dynamism of memories, a process which is conducive in the creation of personal and collective identity:

We preserve memories of each epoch in our lives, and these are continuously reproduced; through them, as by a continual relationship, a sense of our identity is perpetuated. But precisely because these memories are repetitions, because they are successfully engaged in very different systems of notions, at different periods of our lives, they have lost the form and the appearance they once had. They are not intact vertebra of fossil animals which would in themselves permit reconstruction of the entities of which they were once a part. (1992: 47)

The projections of memory in literature, however troubled by forgetting as they are, create a film, a thin transparent layer, covering the contemporary map of Eastern and Central Europe like a sheet of carbon or tracing paper in an atlas, reshaping the view into a personal vista from the past. The intimate picture that is achieved in such texts recreates the sites of memory as defined by Pierre Nora:

The *lieux [de mémoire]* we speak of, then, are mixed, hybrid, mutant, bound intimately with life and death, with time and eternity; enveloped in a Möbius strip of the collective and the individual, the sacred and the profane, the immutable and the mobile. For if we accept that the most fundamental purpose of the *lieu de mémoire* is to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial (...) all of this in order to capture a maximum of meaning in the fewest of signs, it is also clear that *lieux de mémoire* only exist because of their capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of their meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications. (Nora 1989: 19, italics original)

This vision of the site of memory is based on the idea of change and alteration. It highlights the lack of a stable, objective, and only 'true' image of the phenomenon, and thus privileges the personal, forgetful after/images of places discussed in this book. The rampancy of the Second World War and the erratic routes of migration from Eastern and Central Europe, as well as the dramatic changes the war and the Cold War period left in the region, have led to the recreation of "what is no longer,"

of sites which are reconstructed predominantly in memory, not necessarily identical with the ones documented in historiographic discourse.

Similarly, as Erll notes, Maurice Halbwachs sees history and memory as “two mutually exclusive forms of reference to the past” (Erll 2011: 17). According to him, “history and memory are irreconcilable,” as history is “universal” whereas “collective memory, in contrast, is particular” (Erll 2011: 17). Halbwachs sees the preservation of memories as unavoidable but argues that “these are continually reproduced; through them, as by a continual relationship, a sense of our identity is perpetuated. But precisely because these memories are repetitions, because they are successfully engaged in very different systems of notions, at different periods of our lives, they have lost the form and the appearance they once had” (1992: 47). As a result of this, memory cannot stand for the past or past-reconstruction, as it always incorporates a dose of alteration – Nora’s metamorphosis, a personal account. It does not mean, however, that memory invalidates the past, the historical; it adds a new dimension to the recently developing studies on oral history, testimony, archives as well as memory studies, of course. Therefore, both Halbwachs and Nora see memory and its sites as “*loci* in the broadest sense of the term, which call up *imagines*, the memory images (...) Such sites can therefore include geographical locations, buildings, monuments and works of art as well as historical persons, memorial days, philosophical and scientific texts, or symbolic actions” (Erll 2011: 23, italics original), and even “the historian has become no longer a memory-individual but, in himself, a *lieu de mémoire*” (Nora 1989: 18, italics original). The strife to recreate after/images from memory, which is a main topic of all the texts discussed in this study, stems from Nora’s rudimentary stance: “There are *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, the environments of memory,” and “we speak so much of memory because there is so little left of it” (1989: 7, italics original).

Finally, central to my interpretation is the notion of traumatic post/memory. Marianne Hirsch and Eva Hoffman have written widely on the effects of the Holocaust on the generations who came after the Shoah and experienced the trauma through their parents’ testimony. However, even if the forefathers decide to silence the memories, they are still transmitted in a series of inherited and often unexplainable pains and

fears. Therefore, the concept of post/memory is supplemented with a discussion on trauma as offered by Caruth (1995) and Laub (1995). This theoretical stance can probably be stretched to all migrants being haunted by the ghosts of the past, although the Holocaust is indubitably a singular event within history. The effects of dislocation can be juxtaposed with the need to adapt to the new, Canadian environment from before the Multicultural Act to see how the former generations silenced the memories of their pasts, although at the same time they imperceptibly left their children with the legacy of the Old World.

Since in each chapter, a slightly different aspect of memory-identity quandary is discussed, there are different theoretical angles which adhere to particular texts in question. The most fundamental theoretical approach applied to a varied extent in the whole book comes from Marianne Hirsch's *Family Frames. Postmemory, Photography, Narrative* ([1997] 2002), which serves as an essential source of my understanding of post/memory: identity formed on the basis of inherited memory and the epistemological problem of narrating the tricks of memory.<sup>4</sup> Hirsch's understanding of "postmemory," more precisely "Holocaust postmemory" (2002: 243), is "the memory of the children of survivors (...) [who] have not themselves lived through the trauma of banishment and forcible separation from home and the destruction of that home, [but, who] remain marked by their parents' experiences" (Hirsch 2002: 243). Taking into consideration the fact that Hirsch borrows the terms "absent memory" from Fresco and "*mémoire trouée*" from Henri Raczymow, I have decided to expand the term itself to refer to all the children of survivors of war and banishment trauma, to concentrate on Hirsch's conceptualization of "the condition of exile" (243) which the term postmemory always approaches.

Despite the fact that Hirsch's interest in the location of family photography is mainly concerned with pictures and their dialogic discourse within literary texts, what remains the most essential for the current inquiry is her discussion of the term postmemory. Here, "the 'post' (...) signals more than a temporal delay and more than a location in an aftermath. It is not a concession simply to linear temporality or

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<sup>4</sup> The term 'postmemory' is frequently spelt as 'post/memory' in the present study to indicate the interconnectedness of two generations of immigrants as the memory of immigrants become the postmemory of their children at the same time. The only instances of the usage of the term without a slash are direct references to or quotations from Marianne Hirsch's text.

sequential logic” (Hirsch 2012: 5). Her involvement has been mostly located within the study of post-Holocaust postmemory, yet Hirsch claims at the beginning of her book that she tries to embrace the whole of “postmodernity – the monumental shifts in individual and collective consciousness that occur in the period following World War II, the Holocaust, the Gulag, the moment of decolonization and the Cold War” (2002: 12). Therefore, not only Holocaust narratives ideally fit Hirsch’s perspective, but non-Holocaust works can also be incorporated in this perspective as ones coming from the formerly colonized worlds (involved in various aspects of decolonization as well as neocolonization), afterimages triggered by the contemporary discourses of privileging the marginalized, the Other, the immigrant. Similar as these stances are, Hirsch also firmly claims “that the violent destruction of the Jewish communities and the Jewish cultures of Eastern, Central, and Western Europe – the destruction not only of the people but of the records and memories of their existence – is of a different order than the displacements other Europeans had to suffer because of the two world wars, painful though they must have been for many” (2002: 242). Therefore, the notion of post/memory can and cannot be analyzed through the same lens in the texts referring to the Holocaust and other traumatic displacements. Yet, having taken the discrepancies into consideration, the loss of the place (though not people and family members) and the inability to restore the past worlds is crucial as well.

This is why, bearing in mind all of Hirsch’s reservations, in the present study I attempt to apply the term post/memory to all texts taken here into consideration. According to Hirsch, for dislocated people, both authors of memoirs, their parents and grandparents as well as protagonists of fiction narrated by authors who have been touched by the legacy of their own or their parents’ migration, “[h]ome’ is always elsewhere, even for those who return to the Vienna, the Berlin, the Paris, or the Cracow their families had to leave, because the cities to which they can return are no longer the cities in which their parents lived” (2002: 233). She explains that “[t]his condition of exile from the space of identity, this diasporic experience, is a characteristic aspect of postmemory” (2002: 233).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> By the juxtaposition of the above-mentioned quotations from Hirsch, I would not like to exert an impression that the experience of Anna from *Necessary Lies* (who leaves Poland just before the proclamation of Martial law in 1981) is identical to the experience of Holocaust survivors. It is enough to look at Anna’s ‘condition of exile,’ which allows

Moreover, in her recent book, *The Generations of Postmemory*, Hirsch also acknowledges the necessity of the expansion of this approach when she claims:

I am also sensitive to the fact that (...) after the brutal dictatorships in Latin America; after Bosnia, Rwanda, and Darfur; during the aftermath, globally, of the events of September 11, 2001; and in the midst of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict – the Holocaust can no longer serve simply as a conceptual limit case in the discussion of historical trauma, memory, and forgetting. (Hirsch 2012: 18)

Since Hirsch sees the need for looking at trauma and memory from the wider perspective of the contemporary conflicts, it is also possible to apply her conceptualizations of postmemory and site of memory to other discourses concerning uprooting and forgetful memories of traumas.

What Marianne Hirsch calls postmemory, Eva Hoffman calls “postness,” (Hoffman 2005: 25). She claims that “as knowledge about the Holocaust has grown, we can see that every survivor has lived through a mythic trial, an epic, an odyssey” (Hoffman 2005: 12). This Odyssean quest fuses a few aspects: the trauma experienced by the survivors and their children, the need to forget and silence it in the face of new living conditions, not infrequent anti-Semitism, and the urge to tell one’s story.

All of the six authors in the seven texts discussed in *Forgetful Recollections* refer to the problem of the Old World, the lost, and sometimes forgotten, homeland from the perspective of their Canadian experience. As a result of the mixed origins of the majority of the authors (and, thus in the case of autobiographical texts, their characters) they are defined in Canada in different ways: as Ukrainian-Canadians (this is Janice Kulyk Keefer’s declared identity), Jewish-Canadians (Norman Ravvin, Anne Michaels), Russian-Polish-Jewish (Irena F. Karafilly), and Polish (Eva Stachniak). However, it is because of their roots located in the non-spatial region of Central and Eastern Europe, once called Poland, once the Ukraine, once the Austro-Hungarian Empire, that the historical

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her to recreate the after/images of e.g. Hassids in pre-World War II Poland, her grandmother’s loss of her hometown of Tarnopol, as well as baffling, even to herself, after/images of German Breslau.

sketch in Chapter One deals predominantly with the history of migration from Poland. By ‘Eastern European’ I mean here writers of mixed Polish-Jewish, Polish-Russian, Polish-Ukrainian, Polish-Galician and also Belarus, Lithuanian, Ukrainian, Russian and other descent, all the people whose roots go back to the territories which have been claimed as ‘Polish’ in the course of history. However, naming these territories as only Polish would be problematic and inaccurate, as there are other origins and traditions they feel indebted to as well.

*Forgetful Recollections* comprises four chapters and discusses seven texts: three memoirs and four novels by the aforementioned writers. My main focus is to look at the tangled intersections of memory and identity and their representations in contemporary Canadian immigrant writing. Since there is no coherent and systematic study of Jewish-Polish-Ukrainian-Canadian writing (if such a study is possible at all) my attempt is to show a selective, yet possibly wide and inclusive rather than exclusive, portrait of immigrant writing coming from the first, second and even third generation of immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe.

Chapter One of *Forgetful Recollections* is an introductory part and its main aim is to present a historical, cultural and literary background to the issues discussed in the following chapters. As a result of this wide spectrum, it delineates some aspects of history of Central European immigration to Canada with a special emphasis on Polish and Ukrainian displacements. The data quoted in the chapter come from various historical and sociological studies of immigration and focus in particular on the Jewish or Polish-Jewish immigration to Canada (especially from the interwar and post-World War II periods).

The starting point for Chapter Two, titled “Post/Memory of the ‘Old Place’: Janice Kulyk Keefer’s *Honey and Ashes* and Lisa Appignanesi’s *Losing the Dead*” is a discussion of the ways post/memory affects the children of immigrants or those who emigrated from Poland, as in the case of Appignanesi, at a very early age. In both memoirs, Kulyk Keefer and Appignanesi stress the fact that it was very difficult for them to get to know the stories from the past of their parents and grandparents. They were brought up on fragments that they were allowed to hear, overheard conversations, bits of the Ukrainian and Yiddish languages, and post/memories inherited in the form of fears and fascinations. Chapter Two explores the psychological and literal void the authors feel between the Old World and Canada and the attempts they undertake, to fill in the

gap of memory through a voyage to the Ukraine and Poland. The slash which I purposefully add throughout the chapter to the term post/memory indicates the blurred condition of Appignanesi's status as, being born in Poland, and having lived in Łódź for the first three years of her life, she has been infected with post/memory to a very large extent, similarly to the immigrants born outside the country of origins, mainly due to the fact that her parents hardly ever discussed openly their traumatic memories of the Second World War. It also refers to the fact that I expand the term to non-Jewish immigrants as well and apply it to the condition of immigrant Janice Kulyk Keefer, a Ukrainian-Canadian, exhibits in her memoir.

The main axis of Chapter Three, "Memory Lost/Memory Retrieved: Irena F. Karafilly's *Stranger in the Plumed Hat* and Lisa Appignanesi's *The Memory Man*," is a discussion of the consequences of losing memory. Memory loss which, on the one hand erases the past, becomes on the other one also a stimulus to regain it. Here I juxtapose two texts: a memoir, *The Stranger in the Plumed Hat* (2000) by Irena F. Karafilly and a novel, *The Memory Man* (2005) written by Lisa Appignanesi. In both cases, despite the generic difference, the books show memory loss as a result of Alzheimer's disease in Karafilly's text and psychologically known syndrome of denial and suppression in Appignanesi's text. In the former, it is Karafilly's mother, who paradoxically by losing memory as a victim of Alzheimer's disease recalls some shards of memory from the past and induces the memory gain partially in herself but also in her daughter. The latter text is focused on the character of Bruno Lind, a victim of suppressed memories of the Holocaust, a neuroscientist interested professionally in brain functioning, who through a serendipitous flow of events, travels to Poland to regain his childhood memories and thus refigure himself as a Polish-Canadian Jew. This chapter employs the theoretical standpoint towards the notion of corporeal memory of John Locke (also discussed by Whitehead 2008) and the trauma theory of Dori Laub (1995) and Cathy Caruth (1995) as well as a selection of Holocaust theories. It also looks at "*ars oblivionis*" (Ricoeur 2004) which links the art of forgetting with the art of remembering.

Chapter Four, titled "Novelistic After/Images: Rediscovery of Home through the Canadian Experience: Norman Ravvin's *Café des Westens*, Eva Stachniak's *Necessary Lies*, and Anne Michaels's *The Winter Vault*," undertakes an attempt to show after/images of Polish cities seen from Canada and recreated mainly in memory. The main theoretical framework

for this chapter comes from Hirsch's concept of postmemory with reference to the transcultural experience which Canada offers and, through it, shapes the immigrants' conceptualization of one's homeland. The visions of the former hometowns of the main characters in the three novels (Mława/Mlava, Wrocław/Breslau, and Warsaw respectively) show how memory filters the images and at the same time how after/images of these sites are preserved by memory. The rediscovery of these towns: Wrocław seen through the Breslau perspective, Mlava as a Jewish shtetl analyzed through the concurrent transformation of Calgary and, last but not least, Warsaw re-encountered as a replica is achieved through a transcultural perspective offered by Darias Beautell (2000), Vautier (2003), and Kamboureli and Miki (2007). Inextricably connected to Canadian experience as it is, the immigrants in these novels recreate the after/images of Polish towns and only for Anna, a character from *Necessary Lies*, it is possible to compare and contrast the images of Wrocław she arrived with to Canada as well as recollected from post/memory with the realism of Wrocław/Breslau upon her travel to Poland after many years. The comparative discussions in this chapter are united by the theoretical concept of *lieux de mémoire* proposed by Pierre Nora (1989). In his approach, Nora stresses the active aspect of memory which never settles down and fades away, but constantly influences the "eternal present" (1989: 8).

*Forgetful Recollections: Images of Central and Eastern Europe in Canadian Literature* is a book which approaches the role of post/memory in identity-formation processes. It tries to embrace various texts under the tricky aspect of forgetful post/memories, the play of words which combines the idea of preserving memories, memories which offer forgetfulness, and *ars oblivionis* which offers liberation and enables one to live. By addressing both forgetting and remembering at once, I try to grasp "the apparent contradiction of an event's presence in memory and its simultaneous disappearance" (Bernard-Donals 2009: 3). At the same time, as the motto from Anne Michaels's poem indicates, we "rise from our histories" (2000b: 9) – we inherit memories even if we do not remember facts. In this sense, we are our post/memory because, as Nora claims, "memory is life" (1989: 8).

## **Chapter One**

# **Writing Memory: Central and Eastern European Immigration to Canada. Multiplicity of Images/Diversity of Literary Voices**

### **Polish and Eastern European Immigration to Canada**

The history of Eastern European, and especially Polish, immigration to Canada dates back to the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>1</sup> Historians dealing with the history of Canada of the period hardly mention this early Central and Eastern European immigration at all. This omission is mainly due to the fact that in these early stages there were very few migrants from Central and Eastern Europe; furthermore, the aforementioned centuries are seen as formative in the history of Canada, and the chief position is usurped by the history of the conflicts between the United Kingdom and France over Canada, and the events which led to the emergence of the Confederation of Canada in 1867. Although the history of the presence of migrants from Central Europe in Canada is long, they have not been very powerful or visible within the country, for various reasons (Reczyńska 1997: 9; Grabowski 2001: 285-291). The first phase of migration from Central and Eastern Europe to Canada to be well researched and documented is the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This situation is mainly connected with a huge influx

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Jan Grabowski's *Historia Kanady* (2001), where, in the chapter devoted exclusively to the history of Polish immigration, he refers to Andrzej Wilk, a Pole from Gdańsk, who came to Canada in 1686. In Jacek Kozak's book *How the Polish Created Canada* (2011), he is referred to as Andre 'the Pole' Loup, as well. Henry Radecki and Benedykt Heydernkorn in *A Member of a Distinguished Family. The Polish Group in Canada* (1976) mention the year of 1752 as the date of the arrival of the first Polish immigrant. A very interesting article on the phases of Polish immigration to Canada has been recently published in *Nieuwse wyobcowania* (2014) by Anna Reczyńska, author of *Piętno wojny. Polonia kanadyjska wobec polskich problemów lat 1939-1945* (1997).

of immigrants from this region. Moreover, as has been mentioned in the Introduction, the very concept of Central and Eastern Europe is open to different interpretation and evades clear definitions and boundaries. Migration from Central and Eastern Europe has undergone many changes over the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The most important alteration concerns the social position the migrants achieved: from being merely peasants at the beginning of the century to achieving a higher status of entrepreneurs, lecturers and other middle-class citizens at the end. Another important aspect characteristic of the Polish diaspora is that, as a result of living in many various Polish clusters and settlements, they have never formed a single Polish center and have been scattered virtually from Vancouver to Halifax, with major Polish settlements in Toronto (Reczyńska 2014: 23), Mississauga, Ottawa, and Winnipeg, to name only a few.

We must remember that the early 20<sup>th</sup> century immigrants (and also earlier migrants) from the region frequently emigrated as citizens of Poland after 1918 even though they were often of Polish, Ukrainian, Jewish, and other origins. Similarly, during the period of Partitions, the Ukrainians (or Galicians, as they are also called) had Austrian citizenship<sup>2</sup> and Poles and people of Jewish origins inhabiting different sections of the partitioned country had citizenships respective of the part they came from. These factors both influence the history of Central and Eastern European emigration and blur the data found in the statistics. ‘Nationality’ is therefore a dubious term and controversial label in this context. However, it cannot be sometimes avoided in this historically anchored chapter.

By contrast, the notion of ‘imagined geography’ borrowed from Edward Said purports to offer a wider perspective and inclusive, instead of exclusive, boundaries to Central and Eastern European migration. Michael C. Frank notes that “Imaginative geography (...) is a strategy of identity construction which equates (spatial) *distance* with (cultural, ethnic, social) *difference*, associating the non-spatial characteristics of ‘self’ and ‘other’ with particular places.” (2009: 71, italics original) When this identity construction is applied to the conceptualization of Central (and Eastern) Europe one needs to go beyond the strictly defined country boundaries due to the tangled history of the region in question. As Simona

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<sup>2</sup> Many immigrants from Russia, the Ukraine, and Romania were treated as Germans or Austrians and as such they were suspected of being anti-Canadian during and after the First World War. Some of them were even made redundant, arrested and closed in camps. (Grabowski 2001: 194)

Škrabec notices, the inquiry into Central Europe broadens the perspective of research, which stems from the fact that the concept of the region is still elusive (2013: 11).

In the context of Central and Eastern European immigration to Canada one can distinguish many ethnic groups; among these the Ukrainian one would probably be the largest and the most distinguishable in Canada. Each and every group has its own representation in Canadian history. However, *Forgetful Recollections* undertakes an attempt to discuss literature written in Canada in English by immigrants and descendants of immigrants from the region of Central and Eastern Europe which in the course of history had close bonds with Poland in its many different shapes.<sup>3</sup> As a result of these historical occurrences, the official Polish minority group in Canada is not as significant as other groups (e.g. Chinese-Canadians or Japanese-Canadians) as they have often been dispersed all over Canada and have been classified as members of other ethnic groups simultaneously because of mixed origins. In contrast to the Ukrainian diaspora in Canada, Poles have never formed a strong, prosperous group which would remain unified over the centuries. It is true that, especially during the initial phase of Polish immigration, they were united by their religion (Reczyńska, 1997: 7-38; Reczyńska 2014), but they were also displaced geographically, which hindered communication and the establishment of closer bonds. Furthermore, there have been many internal conflicts among groups and burgeoning immigrant associations.

### **Influx in Phases**

Radecki and Heydernkorn in *A Member of a Distinguished Family* (1976) distinguish five phases of Polish migrations from the territory of Poland<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed study of Polish policies concerning ethnic minorities inhabiting Poland of the interwar period in the context of Canada, see Radecki and Heydernkorn 1976: 5-17.

<sup>4</sup> By ‘Polish immigration’ I mean here immigration from the terrains of Poland in the respective periods, which includes ethnic Poles but also various other ethnic groups apart from Poles, who had either Polish citizenship, or defined themselves as Poles. The history of Jewish migration to Canada for example usually starts with the persecution of Jews during the Second World War and, thus, migration of Jews prior to this period is not widely distinguished in history (Grabowski 2001). Morris only briefly mentions the creation of Jewish ghettos in Montreal at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century which was met with contempt in Canada as the immigrants settled down in French Canada with “customs and

to Canada. Nevertheless, bearing in mind that his book was published in the 1970s, the Solidarity immigration should be taken into consideration today and treated as the sixth phase. Radecki and Heydernkorn (1976: 18-35) propose the following pattern of immigration: the first phase which includes “Notables, Kashubs, and Others,” the second phase consisting of “The Galicians and Others,” the third being “the Poles,” the fourth one “Post-War Refugees and Exiles,” and the fifth one “the Latest Newcomers.” As can be inferred from this division, they divide the phases of migration into both national and chronological stages and do not restrict themselves to people of solely Polish nationality. Apart from the very early example of Andrzej Wilk and his younger brother, there were very few other Polish immigrants in Canada throughout the seventeenth century. Grabowski (2001: 284-285) sees the beginning of the permanent settlement of Poles in Canada as coinciding with the end of the war between Great Britain and France over the colonies in North America, when New France was occupied by the British. He mentions Polish soldiers who fought in the army, and claims that this influx continued during the American War of Independence. One of the most distinguished immigrants of the period was August F. Gobeński, who stayed in Canada, “married a French Canadian and practiced medicine in St Eustache, Quebec. His three sons served with distinction in the Canadian militia during the war of 1812, and one of them, Maximilian, played a prominent part during the rebellion of 1837” (Radecki and Heydernkorn 1976: 19).

The beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw post-November Uprising immigration (Grabowski 2001: 286) and the influx of former members of the Polish Legions. Kozak mentions “De Meuron settlers” (2011: 13) – a group of Polish soldiers who, after becoming disillusioned with Napoleon’s promises, joined Swiss and British regiments. Among the participants of the November Uprising of 1830 was Casimir Gzowski, who “has been the symbol of the contribution the Poles have made to the development of Canada and Canadian society” (Kozak 2011: 14), and whose list of achievements is extremely long, ranging from military to engineering (Radecki and Heydernkorn 1976: 19). As an acknowledgement of his involvement in the development of Canada, he gained the position of

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language even stranger and more unwelcome than the English and Irish.” (2000: 157-158) Moreover, the French Canadians were sure these migrants would assimilate quickly. Another important remark, which has to be added here, is that not all Jews coming to Canada came from Central and Eastern Europe.

governor of Ontario and was granted the nobility title of Sir (Kozak 2011: 20; Radecki and Heydernkorn 1976: 19, Grabowski 2011: 286).

Another important group of the 19<sup>th</sup> century immigration from the territories of Poland were migrants coming from the region of Kaszuby. Radecki and Heydernkorn refer to them as the Kashubs (21), who formed a strong and visible settlement in Ontario, in the village of Wilno. Although, as Kozak claims, only sixteen families initiated the process of immigration (2011: 34), Grabowski mentions that by the end of the century almost one hundred thirty thousand people had left the region of Kaszuby in Pomerania and settled in Canada (2011: 286).

Kozak refers to all Polish immigrants who came to Canada during the period of the Partitions of Poland in his book *How the Polish Created Canada* (2011). Moreover, the problem of nationality, which the immigrants chose to declare, and the country of origin, which did not exist at that time, shows the immigrants' deep bond with the Poland erased from the maps for over one hundred years, but it also reflects the complexity of identity in Eastern Europe. People coming from the Kaszuby region, although they have formed a separate minority group seen as a separate ethnic group as well, or the Lemkos from the south-east of Poland, who inhabited today's borderlands between Poland and the Ukraine, while being interrogated about their nationality and country of origin realized they had faced the famous "Canadian" question: where are you from? And who are you? They, as very simple and frequently illiterate people, did not ask this question themselves, but the historical complexity forced them to define these issues. Kozak summarizes the problems and identity dilemmas that the Canadian authorities had while admitting the Central and Eastern European immigrants:

Not only did they speak an outlandish-sounding language and spell their names in an incomprehensible manner, but they also usually insisted they came from a country that had not at that time existed on the map of Europe for almost 100 years. Thus, in immigration and settlement documents, the immigrants were described as German or Galician (if they came from Austria), and their Polish nationality was often officially lost (Kozak 2011: 35-36).

In their summary of the first wave of Polish immigration to Canada, Radecki and Heydernkorn note

that this phase of immigration was small, the size cannot be ascertained with any certainty at present because of lack of adequate information, ambiguous criteria utilized for identification by the Canadian authorities, and dispersion over great distances (...) There were 40 people of Polish origin in British Columbia, 29 of them in New Westminster, 31 in Manitoba, 187 in Ontario, with 97 in Toronto, 236 in Quebec, with 176 in Montreal; 191 in the Territories and a few in Nova Scotia and new Brunswick. Obviously these numbers are incorrect if the size of the Kashub group alone is considered (1976: 24-25).

The problem with identification of the latter ethnic group mentioned here by Radecki and Heydernkorn was a distinct one in Canada as well. The measures would be different for Kashubs depending on their choice of nationality in the Canadian census. They usually called themselves Polish, according to Kozak (2011: 37), but if the problem is stretched to other ethnic groups in Canada coming from Central and Eastern Europe the difficulties with identification only multiply. As can be seen from Radecki and Heydernkorn's data, based on the Canadian census, Poles were scattered all over the country. They did not really form any unified group, though there were smaller and larger settlements.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was another wave of mass immigration to Canada. It was mainly a group of farmers who were looking for land where they could settle down and start farming. Grabowski (2011: 286) writes about one hundred thousand Polish immigrants coming to Canada at that time, and Kozak (2011: 43) mentions an influx of fifty to eighty thousand people. The majority of this pre-World War I immigration comprised some of the poorest people in Poland. This coincided with the Canadian policy of immigration of the period, as Minister Clifford Sifton, responsible for immigration in the government of Wilfrid Laurier, claimed that Canada predominantly needed farm workers to inhabit the prairie provinces (Radecki and Heydernkorn 1976: 26, Kozak 2011: 45) of Manitoba and Alberta. Immigration agents visited the territories situated in Eastern Europe known popularly as a region of peasants in order to promote this type of immigration. Such relatively large groups of Polish people, mainly illiterate immigrants, were not protected by any laws, and they most frequently did not speak either English or French, so they had to rely on what they were able to grasp or quickly learn the language, which was a severely hindered process due to their lack of ability to read and write. Despite the abundance of land and work on the farms, they faced true

hardships. What Radecki and Heydernkorn emphasize as an important factor of their difficult situation is the fact that there were no official organizations and no deputies of any Polish government (as Poland did not officially exist at that time) in Canada (1976: 30). Jacek Kozak also underlines the need for spiritual care from the clergy that Polish immigrants exhibited. He mentions two missionary brothers, Wojciech and Jan Kulawy, who “traveled constantly from one settlement to another, performing all Catholic rites whenever needed. They said Mass at private homes or in barns, they received confession, performed marriages, baptized newborn children and preached” (Kozak 2011: 51). Their journeys to visit Polish settlements ranged all over the prairies, and the two priests were eventually replaced by another one, Father Paweł Kulawy, who stayed permanently in Alberta (Kozak 2011: 53). Undoubtedly, Polish farmers dominated the second wave of migration to Canada. Although this might already be called a mass immigration because of the numbers of Polish settlers in the Prairies,

unlike Germans, Finns, Icelanders or Ukrainians (...), the Poles arriving in Manitoba at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were unorganized. Neither in Canada nor in Poland was there a systematic effort at settling the immigrants in a specific area, even in a semi-organized manner (...) The Poles were left, by Canada, and by their native land, to their own devices. Thus, they followed the pattern of immigration by infiltration, rather than planned settlement (Kozak 2011: 63).

The years of the Great War slowed down the process of Polish immigration in Canada since Poles were obviously involved in the conflict. Despite the creation of an independent country in 1918, the newly formed Poland had to face the 1920 war with the Bolsheviks. Therefore, this third phase of immigration was varied in terms of numbers. Radecki and Heydernkorn state that “between 1919 and 1931, 51,847 Polish immigrants came to Canada (...) [and] between 1932 and 1939 only 3,497 Polish immigrants arrived” (1976: 31). The sharp fall in the number of Central European immigrants coming from Poland in the later period was caused by the Great Depression<sup>5</sup> of the 1930s in North America, which also struck Canada. Many Canadians themselves could

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Apolonja Maria Kojder's *Marynia, Don't Cry* (1995), briefly discussed in this chapter. Grabowski also mentions the problem of wages of immigrants (2001: 290).

not find any work at that time, so there were virtually no enticements to leave Poland, which, though devastated after the war, still offered hope for the reestablishment of a free and strong country.

The fourth wave of migration is closely connected to the Second World War. The very first years of the war did not see a mass Polish migration to Canada, but between 1941 and 1942 the new influx started, mainly via Great Britain, where many well-educated Polish people found refuge. According to different estimates, from six hundred and fifty to almost one thousand skilled professionals emigrated to Canada (Grabowski 2001: 290, Radecki and Heydernkorn 1976: 32). Then, gradually, throughout the years of the war as well as afterwards, the numbers grew due to the arrival of groups consisting of soldiers from demobilized regiments, from the Middle East (various routes of evacuated Polish soldiers, families, nurses, etc.). An important source of immigration after 1945 was connected with the existence of numerous refugee camps in Western Europe, mainly in Germany, where displaced persons waited for chances to find a place to live. Many of them, especially from the Eastern parts of pre-war Poland, did not want to go back, as their villages, either completely or partially destroyed, were then located in the Soviet Union as a result of the annexation of these terrains and the decisions made at the Yalta Conference in 1945. They had also usually survived traumatic experiences, with no living relatives left, so the decisions to emigrate were easier to make.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, as Anna Reczyńska states, many Polish-Canadian organizations became active just before the outbreak of World War II, and also afterwards many of them tried to help both the Polish government in London and Polish immigrants to Canada. There were, however, many critical responses to the new influx of educated immigrants (Reczyńska 1997: 124-129).<sup>7</sup> The arrival of more educated, and definitely more skilled, professionals after World War II is seen by Jacek Kozak as a continuation of the tradition begun by Gzowski, Globenski and Kierzkowski (2011: 65). He reports on many individuals who contributed to the development of

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<sup>6</sup> An example of a displaced family who came to Canada from a refugee camp in Germany is depicted in Mary A. Drzewiecki's memoir *Born and Raised Under a Straw Roof: A True Legacy of the Human Spirit* (2001), in which the author depicts the process of government-sponsored immigration to Canada in 1949.

<sup>7</sup> Anna Reczyńska's book *Piętno wojny. Polonia kanadyjska wobec polskich problemów 1939-1945* (1997), is an invaluable source of information about this period and the fourth wave of Polish immigration to Canada.

Canadian industry and technology. Among numerous names, a Polish test pilot named Janusz Żurakowski is mentioned, as well as Zbigniew Brzeziński, whose political career was initiated at Canadian universities. By the 1980s, around 60,000 Polish immigrants came to Canada (Kozak 2011: 117), settling in both towns and rural areas, and “the Canadian ethnic mosaic of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century comprised about 60 different ethnic groups; Poles were statistically in the eighth or ninth place in this ranking” (Kozak 2011: 116).

As mentioned before, Radecki and Heydernkorn distinguish only two separate waves of post-World War II immigration dividing it into two chronological groups: the people who came to Canada between 1945 and 1957 as a direct result of the warfare and post-World War II Displaced Persons influx, and the group constituting the fifth phase ranging from 1957 to the 1970s. Their perspective should then be further developed, and, as mentioned above, the sixth phase, the so-called ‘Solidarity wave’ of the 1980s, has to be incorporated. No matter which outlook on post-World War II phase(s) one acknowledges, the post-1980 wave turns out to be substantial and influential in Canada. As Jacek Kozak states:

The Solidarity wave was comprised of political activists ‘exported’ outside Poland’s borders, of people who did not wait and struggle for true independence of Poland from Communists, and of people who were trapped beyond their homeland by the events of December 13 and were afraid to go back to their country because of a distinct possibility of Soviet intervention (...) The wave also included (...) people who were accidentally dispersed all over the world by the historic events. (...) The size (...) is still a matter under discussion. Provisional estimates vary from 500,000 to two million people leaving Poland between 1981 and 1989 (...) Canada accepted about 80,000 of these immigrants. (Kozak 2011: 147-148)

If numbers are not suggestive enough, it is important to note that the status of this Solidarity wave has acquired quite an important position in Canada.<sup>8</sup> Though still grouped in many different locations and not fully unified in Polish diasporic organizations, they have become, roughly speaking, consolidated around such places as Toronto and Mississauga,

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<sup>8</sup> Grabowski stresses the fact, however, that the Polish diaspora has been gradually losing its status due to the rapidly growing communities of immigrants from Asia and Africa (2001: 291).

which have been known as “centers of Polish immigrants” (Reczyńska 2014: 23). Despite the multiplicity of organizations and cultural activities Polish-Canadians have been involved in as well as the number of places Poles have inhabited in Canada, and thus the sheer impossibility of summarizing the position of Polish-Canadians in Canada nowadays, it has to be stated that Poles have been visible in almost all fields of activity ranging from politics and industry to art and humanities.

### **The Predicament of Galicia and Ukrainian Immigration**

This introductory sketch of Polish immigration to Canada as a preface to the study of Polish, Jewish, Central and Eastern European literature in Canada needs to be supplemented with yet another important element, that of the Ukrainian diaspora. The Ukrainian group in Canada is substantially more visible than the Polish one. There are various reasons for this, but the most important one would definitely be the fact that Ukrainians have outnumbered the Poles in Canada for many years. It is also true, and is reflected in Janice Kulyk Keefer’s *Honey and Ashes*, discussed in Chapter Two, that the fates of people inhabiting the Polish-Ukrainian borderlands in the past were inextricably interconnected. This interconnectedness is, therefore, a factor which frequently makes these two nationalities inseparable despite a very distinctive feeling of nationhood possessed by the two groups in question, and a difficult history of coexistence in Eastern Europe.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Janice Kulyk Keefer refers to this very same predicament of fluidity of borders in the autobiographical essay “‘Coming Across Bones’: Historiographic Ethnofiction,” in which she writes: “I was born into a family that occupied if not a marginal then a distinctly off-centre position in the Ukrainian-Canadian community in Toronto. My father was born somewhere in southern Ontario (he has no birth certificate) in 1914, shortly after his parents ‘got off the boat.’ They had fled from Galicia, now part of Western Ukraine, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, so that my grandfather could avoid being conscripted into the Austrian army. My mother was born in what used to be Poland and is now part of Ukraine, and at the age of fourteen emigrated with her parents and sister in 1936. Thus, my family belonged neither to the prairie Ukrainians established in Canada since 1880s, nor to the D.P. Ukrainians who came over after long periods of internment in refugee camps following World War II. There was an added complication, as my maternal grandfather was half-Polish, and the enmity between Poles and Ukrainians is something that has not entirely subsided, even on the ‘neutral’ ground of Canada” (1996a: 85). This statement explains why Kulyk Keefer, despite being

In terms of its timeline, the Ukrainian immigration to Canada followed the same pattern of a 19<sup>th</sup> century influx of farmers and unskilled workers, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century period and the post-World War II phase of migration. Weronika Suchacka, in her doctoral dissertation, offers a thorough study of Ukrainian-Canadian literature preceded by an insightful commentary on the history of Ukrainian immigration.<sup>10</sup> Lisa Grekul (2005) distinguishes three main waves of Ukrainian settlement in Canada: the first one from the 1890s to 1914 when about 170,000 Ukrainians went to live in Canada, the second one dating to the years between 1919 and 1939, when 68,000 people of Ukrainian origin settled down there, and the third one from 1947 to 1952 when about 32,000 people came to Canada. It is interesting to note that despite the fact that the majority of the Ukrainians were welcome in the west of Canada and they worked as miners and as peasants in the fields, and took up some labor in the forests and in the railroads building, and in spite of a pressure to assimilate popular in Canada at that time, they managed to preserve their ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity.

Suchacka also notes that, depending on the period of immigration, Ukrainians were perceived differently by Canadian officials, as the Ukraine belonged to different countries and empires in different periods: the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Romania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and, finally, the Soviet Union (Suchacka 2010: 82). Grekul (2005) would add people from Galicia, Bukovina, and Transcarpathia suggesting the lack of national homogeneity within the Ukrainian diaspora itself. While acknowledging that the Ukrainian immigration to Canada intensified at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Grekul distinguishes the twofold perception and status of this diaspora as seen from the perspective of majority groups. Since this first, mass wave of immigration consisted of uneducated workers predominantly, they were seen as desired in order to populate the west of Canada on the one hand, and “were simultaneously seen as ‘other’ to the Anglo-Canadian ‘self’: not only culturally different, but culturally undesirable; inferior, backward, and even threatening to Anglo-Canadian

defined as a Ukrainian-Canadian, is a ‘perfect’ example of an ethnic writer to be included in a study on Eastern European writing in Canada.

<sup>10</sup> Weronika Suchacka, 2010. ‘*Za Hranetsiu*’ – ‘*Beyond the Border*’: *Constructions of Identities in Ukrainian-Canadian Literature*. Greifswald, unpublished manuscript. The thesis is also available in the University of Greifswald library: <http://ub-ed.ub.uni-greifswald.de/opus/volltexte/2012/1271/> (date of access: 19.09.2013).

society” (Grekul 2005: 3). Apart from the fact that the Ukrainian diaspora, larger in numbers than the Polish diaspora, has always been better organized and united, Kozak also mentions that especially in the prairie provinces

the Poles (...) came in contact with Ukrainian settlers. Fellow Slavs were a welcome sign: at least the two groups had no major problem in communicating because the Polish and Ukrainian languages are closely related. With time, the ties between the Polish and their much more numerous Ukrainian neighbours became even closer, the two communities enjoying not only ease of communication but also the closeness of faith. (2011: 63)<sup>11</sup>

Although this view might strike with its very optimistic tone, despite various estimates saying that at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were three times more Ukrainians than Poles in Canada (Grabowski 2011: 286), both ethnic groups were frequently referred to as Galicians and were often mixed and undistinguished as separate ethnic groups in Canada due to similarities in religion, customs, clothing, and languages. However, during the economic crisis of the 1930s in Canada, when conflicts over the scarcity of work erupted among immigrants, both groups of immigrants recollected upon the past history and conflicts between Poles and Ukrainians back in Eastern Europe (Grabowski 2011: 287).

### **Polish, Central and Eastern European Diasporic Writing in the Canadian Context**

In her *Scandalous Bodies: Diasporic Literatures in English Canada*, Smaro Kambourelis, offers a list of anthologies of literary texts by ethnic minorities published in Canada. Among various titles ranging from anthologies of texts written by authors of Chilean and Arab descent, for instance, there is no text created by an author of Polish roots, although she mentions *Yarmarok: Ukrainian Writing in Canada since the Second World War*, edited by Jars Balan and Yuri Klynovy. Another famous example of

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<sup>11</sup> Radecki and Heydernkorn briefly mention the Ukrainian diaspora but they also state that although “the Canadian government did not encourage block settlements (...) some ethnic concentration took place nevertheless. Polish immigrants wanted to live near other Poles or at least people familiar to them; if there were no Poles, Ukrainians were chosen as neighbours” (1976: 29).

Canadian-Ukrainian literary partnership is *Two Lands, New Visions. Stories from Canada and Ukraine*, edited by Janice Kulyk Keefer and Solomea Pavlychko<sup>12</sup>. What this brief listing makes visible from the start is the fact that those are definitely writers of Ukrainian descent who have formed not only a larger and stronger community in Canada, but who have established a literary community and thus have been better represented in literature.<sup>13</sup> Despite various attempts to create a common forum for artists of Polish descent in Canada, the Polish diaspora of prose writers has not been anthologized in a similar way. Writers of Polish and Eastern European (except for Ukrainian) descent do not really form any particularly recognized group. Recently, they have become more and more recognized on the Canadian literary market owing to the successes of individual writers such as Eva Stachniak, from the latest wave of immigration, or Anne Michaels, the child of a Polish immigrant, who have won prestigious literary awards. Anne Michaels and Norman Ravvin, discussed in this book, are, however, usually referred to as Jewish-Canadian writers, and the fact that their ancestors' Jewishness developed for many years in Poland is usually neglected and not mentioned at all. It is also important to remember that the disunity of Polish writers has resulted to a large extent from a similar disunity among Polish immigrants as a whole. Anna Reczyńska in her *Piętno wojny. Polonia kandyjska wobec polskich problemów lat 1939-1945* discusses in detail the conflicts within the Polish group of immigrants, their organizations and a certain disintegration of the Polish diaspora, which have all inevitably led to the lack of establishment of a strong Polish immigrant group of writers.

In Kamboureli's *Making a Difference. Canadian Multicultural Literature* (1996) there are a few texts written by writers coming from Central and Eastern Europe (seen as vast and rather undefined), like Frederick Philip Grove, Vera Lysenko, George Faludy and A.M. Klein,

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<sup>12</sup> For a more comprehensive discussion devoted to the appearance of the Ukrainian diaspora in Canadian canonical writing see Grekul (2005), who presents such texts as Sinclair Ross's *As For Me and My House* and Margaret Laurence's *A Jest of God*, as well as Struk (1981) who widely analyzes a whole range of texts by writers of Ukrainian origin published in Canada both in Ukrainian and English, and translated from Ukrainian to English. For a broader study of the short stories included in the anthology, see Drewniak (2008a).

<sup>13</sup> Weronika Suchacka, in the previously mentioned doctoral dissertation, offers a deeper inquiry into this topic. (2010: 78-86)

but the only writer in the anthology who is said to have come from Poland is Helen Weinzweig who did not refer substantially to the country of origin in her writing.<sup>14</sup> The lack of writers of Polish descent in the anthology is also an outcome of historical processes going on in this part of Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as simply there was not such a country in the official data. There is, however, one interesting example in *Making a Difference*, which shows the Canadian perspective and a different understanding of history than an average Pole would have. In a short biography preceding the poetry of Rachel Korn, who was born in 1898 in Galicia, Kamboureli notes that Galicia was “a region of the Austrian Empire annexed by Poland in 1919” (1996: 31). This example perfectly illustrates the tangled vision of Central and Eastern Europe as Korn, writing in Yiddish, escaped with her family to the Soviet Union, lived in Moscow, then Łódź, where she was an active member of the Yiddish Writers’ Union after the Second World War, and then emigrated to Montreal in 1949. Among the texts selected for the second volume of Cynthia Sugars and Laura Moss’s anthology *Canadian Literature in English. Texts and Contexts* (2009) devoted entirely to the 20<sup>th</sup> century literature, the representation of Central European writers is also very poor and they do not appear, except for the already canonical writers such as Leonard Cohen, and Frederick Philip Grove, both already perceived as mainstream Canadian.

Yet another interesting article, although too short to have grasped the whole range of the research and literary output, was published in 1981 under a suggestive title “The Unheard Voices: Ideological and Literary Identification of Canada’s Ethnic Voices.” Judy Young’s aim in this text is to be the “megaphone” (1981: 104) for the unheard ethnic voices from precisely the region explored in this study, although Young actually focuses on the Ukrainian literature in Canada. She admits, however, that in order to deal correctly with this body of work “one must be a linguist genius, literary critic, historian and sociologist” (Young 1981: 106), thereby shedding light on the difficulty of the undertaking. One example of such convoluted patterns which Young provides us with the “first anthology of Ukrainian Canadian songs” published in 1908 and entitled *Pisni pro Kanada i Avstriiu (Songs about Canada and Austria)* (1981: 108), which proves how extremely difficult it is to arrive at any

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<sup>14</sup> For an interesting essay on Helen Weinzweig and her writing, see Rzepa 2014.

categorizations and conclusions about Central and Eastern European literature in Canada. Without close reading of the anthology, it may be stated that even its title displays the lack of consistence in the use of terminology as in the original title the word ‘Ukrainian’ (used in the English version) is changed into ‘Austria’ denominating the songs coming from the Ukraine formally belonging to Austria at that time.

There are many reasons for the poor literary visibility of the Polish and Eastern European group in Canada. The fact that Polish immigration in Canada has always been lower in numbers than other groups is only one reason, and does not explain the whole issue. Both Kamboureli in her study of ethnic writing and Eugenia Sojka in her invaluable essay on the writing of the Polish diaspora in Canada quote the famous example of an anthology of Chilean texts (*Chilean Literature in Canada* (1982), edited by Naín Nómez). They emphasize the fact that the Chilean diaspora, which has only about 26,000 members in Canada, is anthologized despite its size.<sup>15</sup> This comparison strongly suggests that it is not only in numbers that the ‘advantage’ of some groups in Canada over others lies. Since the 1970s and 1980s, after the implementation of the policy of multiculturalism in the form of legislation (in 1988 the Canadian Multiculturalism Act was passed by the Parliament) and rights granted to all minorities (in 1971 Trudeau declared the adoption of the policy, in 1982 it was recognized by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms), all groups of ethnic origin have been allowed to cherish their ethnicity and, thus, have created more diasporic narratives. However, it happens that some groups are more visible than others, and the division does not run only through the dichotomies between visible versus invisible minorities.

Another interesting reason for the current situation is the past multiculturalism of Eastern Europe itself. This, seen in this study as an advantage, has still contributed to a certain disarray of identities in Canada, which in the long run has had an influence on Polish diasporic writing. The problem is sometimes intractable to a large extent as there are complications with definitions and labels people attach. Does the label ‘Polish-Canadian’ refer to a person born in Canada from one or two Polish

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<sup>15</sup> The essay titled “Twórczość polskiej diaspy w Kanadzie a kanadyjski dyskurs literacki. Prolegomena do współczesnych badań” by Eugenia Sojka was published in 2010 in *Państwo-Naród-Tożsamość w Dyskursach Kulturowych Kanady*. The estimated number of Chileans living in Canada is quoted after *Encyclopedia of Canadian Peoples*: <http://www.multiculturalcanada.ca/Encyclopedia/A-Z/c9/2> (date of access: 2.10.2013).

parents? Or perhaps to a Polish-born writer who has emigrated to Canada? Another question would then arise concerning the number of previous generations that would ‘preserve’ immigrants’ roots. The choice of writers in this book is highly arbitrary, although the chief aim behind such a choice is to show the insolubility of the predicament of roots, origins, and affiliations, as they are not a straightforward result of the place of birth and the origins of parents. They can also be mixed, reflecting the troubled history of the widely understood Polish-Eastern European lands (the hyphen is a conscious choice here). Polish borders have shifted frequently as Polish alliances and adversaries have shifted as well. Moreover, it has to be remembered that Poland was erased from the map of the world during the Partitions, and thus the identity and nationality of many generations of Poles were connected with a land that no longer existed as a country. Furthermore, the inclusion of different nationalities (Jewish being only one of many, but the most important example) and intermarriages (Polish, Russian, Belarus and Ukrainian, to name only a few) blurred the concept of Polish nationality and identity. Therefore, even in Eastern Europe Poles already formed a highly multicultural and heterogeneous group, despite a certain historical strength of the concept of pure Polishness in Poland.

Therefore, the literature of Polish writers in Canada is displaced and appears as a fragmented archipelago of interesting texts and artists. The scholarly debate on this phenomenon also reflects this problem. Nevertheless, critical inquiry into ‘Polish-Canadian’ (however awkward and undefinable the term is) writing is also visible among Polish scholars interested in Canadian literatures. Apart from the comprehensive essay by Eugenia Sojka (2010), mentioned above, there are a few other publications. The pioneer study being *Obraz Kanady w Polsce* (2003), edited by Mirosława Buchholtz, which comprises essays on various topics, including a text by Professor Nancy Burke, founder of the Canadian Studies Center at Warsaw University, and The Laboratory of French-Canadian Culture and the Literature of Quebec, led by Professor Józef Kwatek. Mirosława Buchholtz also published *Polska w Kanadzie Kanada w Polsce* (2008), which includes poems by Maria Magdalena Rudiuk, a short story by Ewa Stachniak, and essays by leading scholars in the fields of history, politics, and literature, as well as photographs by Andrzej J. Cieśliński. Within the field of francophone literature by writers of Jewish-Polish descent, *Récits odysséens* by Piotr Sadkowski has to be mentioned, wherein the author discusses the work of Régine Robin,

among others (2011). Another recent publication *Niuanse wyobcowania. Diaspora i tematyka polska w Kanadzie* (2014) edited by Anna Branach-Kallas is worth mentioning as it joins both English-Canadian and French-Canadian texts referring to Poland and the Polish diaspora in Canada.

While publications on the literature of the Polish and Eastern European immigrant writers in Canada are relatively scarce, there is quite an abundant body of literature written in Polish in Canada. The phenomenon of the Polish diaspora undoubtedly enriches the picture of the literature in question. It also blurs the boundaries of the concept of Polish-Canadian literature and encroaches upon the discussion of classification of ethnic writers. Despite the fact that it gives voice and visibility to the extremely important trend of writing Polish literature (and not one by Canadians of Polish descent, or Polish-Canadian one) within Canada, it may have also contributed to the lack of unity of Polish-Canadian writers, as the line of division lies within the language as well. A seminal publication in this context is *Antologia poezji polskiej na obczyźnie 1929-1999 [An Anthology of Polish Poetry in Exile 1929-1999]*, published in 2002 by Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza Czytelnik and Polski Fundusz Wydawniczy w Kanadzie and edited by Bogdan Czaykowski, which, despite the fact that it includes a whole range of poems that have been created outside of Canada, illustrates the philosophy of Czaykowski, who wanted to give voice to the poetry group Continents first and foremost, but very consciously created the idea of Polish poetry written abroad.<sup>16</sup> Bogdan Czaykowski, who emigrated to Canada in 1962, together with Wacław Iwaniuk, Florian Śmieja, Zofia Bogdanowiczowa, Andrzej Busza, Adam Tomaszewski and Maria Magdalena Rudiuk, to name just a few, have created the concept of Polish literature in Canada, which is seen as a continuation of the great tradition of Polish immigrant literature (especially poetry), but which, at the same time, by being distinct and separate from Canadian literature hinders the creation of a unified concept of Polish and Eastern European literature in Canada. Their literary output was presented to a Canadian reader in the form of an anthology entitled *Seven Polish-Canadian Poets* (1984) which is discussed in detail by Kryszak (2003: 251-266). As it is detached from Canadian literature, it is, as Zyman argues, not literature of the Polish diaspora but Polish literature *sensu stricto* (Zyman quoted in Sojka 2010: 287). The fact that these writers and poets publish mainly in Polish is also reflected in the

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<sup>16</sup> Czaykowski explains his aims in the Foreword to *An Anthology...*, 2002: 5-16.

critical acclaim this literature gets, as the study of Polish literature in Canada is being done primarily in Poland by the Department of Contemporary Literature of the Institute of Polish Literature and Chair of International Polish Studies at the University of Silesia. The work of these scholars has resulted in two volumes: *Urodzony z piolunów. O poezji Bogdana Czaykowskiego* [Born out of Wormwood. On Bogdan Czaykowski's Poetry], written by Bożena Szałasta-Rogowska and published both in Canada and Poland by Polski Fundusz Wydawniczy w Kanadzie and Wydawnictwo Gnome, Katowice, Poland in 2005, and a volume of essays by various authors titled *Literatura polska w Kanadzie. Studia i szkice* [Polish Literature in Canada. Studies and Sketches], edited by Bożena Szałasta-Rogowska and published in 2010.

The afore-mentioned texts strive to incorporate the study of Canadian literature written by authors of Polish descent, which might be seen as the first, pioneer attempts to make these two dispersed literatures come closer. It would be unnecessary to repeat the theses from the introductory text from *Literatura polska w Kanadzie. Studia i szkice* [Polish Literature in Canada. Studies and Sketches] by Marek Węgierski ("Pisarze polskiego pochodzenia w Kanadzie (rekonesans)") ["Writers of Polish Descent in Canada (An Introduction)"] (2010: 20-26) and the above-mentioned text by Eugenia Sojka (2010: 284-334), but it is important to stress the conclusion which emerges out of these studies. There is a significant group of authors writing in Polish in Canada, as well as Polish and Central and Eastern European writing in Canada (or Polish-Canadian and Eastern European-Canadian) in English and French. These two groups are not deeply interconnected, as the loss of the Polish language by the second and third generation of Canadian writers makes it impossible for them to read texts by their Polish colleagues and forebears. Moreover, the group which is of interest here is definitely heterogeneous, comprised of authors of various mixed ethnic backgrounds whose main impulse in writing is frequently to give voice to their migrant experience, both in fiction and non-fiction, rather than to contribute to any of the arbitrarily established diasporic tradition.

### **Polish-Canadian Literature – A Scattered Image**

As emphasized above, the study of contemporary Canadian writers of Central European origins poses many difficulties of various kinds. First of all, the problems widely discussed here with defining particular authors as

of ‘Central or Eastern European,’ ‘Polish,’ ‘Jewish,’ ‘Russian,’ or ‘Ukrainian’ roots involve certain omissions and ambiguities due to the historical background of many of the writers in question and the tangled fates of the families they come from. This, however, proves the phenomenon of Polish multi- and even transculturalism from before the hecatomb of the two World Wars. Secondly, the scarcity of critical sources is also problematic, and appears highly detrimental. Furthermore, the inquiry into Polish-Jewish-Ukrainian (if such a body exists at all) writing in Canada frequently collides with literary stereotypes concerning Canada in Polish literature, established by books such as Arkady Fiedler’s *Kanada pachnąca żywicą* (1935)<sup>17</sup>, Jarosław Abramow-Neverly’s *Pan Zdzich w Kanadzie* (1991) and Melchior Wańkowicz’s *Tworzywo* (1954). Despite the immense value of these texts, and taking into consideration the transcultural perspective of many of the authors, the average Polish reader does not associate any other writers of Central European origins with Canada. The majority of readers would not see the authors discussed in this book as having Central European (including Polish) roots. As a result of their foreign-sounding names, their mixed origins, their decisions to stand outside the particular closed circles of immigrants and their literary aspirations which are definitely directed at being seen as Canadian authors, they do not fall into any of the accepted categories.

Among the writers of Central and Eastern European origins, are also writers who have not been included in the discussion in the analytical part of this book, still they contribute significantly to the ethnic literary scene in Canada. Their presence on a literary market in Canada has been noticed both in Poland and in Canada. Apart from the already mentioned text by Eugenia Sojka, being seminal in shaping the image of Polish/Central European writing, there has been another interesting project launched recently. It is Eva C. Karpinsky’s inclusion of the discussions on Eva Hoffman and Apolonja Maria Kojder in her *Borrowed Tongues. Life Writing, Migration, and Translation* (2012) which constitutes a proof of emerging visibility of this literature in Canada.

Within the frame of life-writing, the powerful memoir *Marynia, Don’t Cry: A Mother’s Legacy*, published in 1995 and written by Apolonja Maria Kojder, has to be mentioned. The author discusses the hardships that the Kojders had to overcome when arriving in Canada. The family came to

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<sup>17</sup> See Agnieszka Rzepa “Kanada Arkadego Fiedlera” (2003).

Canada in two phases; first the father, Jan, emigrated to Canada in 1925, his arrival coinciding with the Great Depression which Canada faced in the 1930s. Then his wife Marja (Marynia) and daughter Helena came in the second phase of immigration after World War II. Their fates are a reflection of the two phases of Polish immigration to Canada with the initial demand for unskilled farm workers and rail workers (the father would be an example here), and the next, post-World War II transfer of frequently educated workers from the evacuated continent, whose route of emigration went via Siberia, India, Persia and Great Britain (like Kojder's mother), and had to undergo a difficult period in Canada. In the case of Kojder's mother, it was proving one's skills as a nurse, earning less than equally skilled Canadians and fighting with estrangement in the new homeland. Another focus of Kojder's text is the portrayal of a circle of women, mother-daughter relations, as well as the nature of the legacy that is transmitted through the female line depicted in the book. In a recently published book, Eva C. Karpinsky sees this text through the spectrum of Derridean 'otobiography,' within which this personalized memoir operates (2012: 123).

In the same volume as Kojder's memoir, Barbara Głogowska's story called *Three Generations (The Deputat Family)* has been included. Written by a friend of the Deputat family, and translated into English by Irma Zaleski, Głogowska's story is an account of the fate of Mike Deputat and his history of migration to Canada in 1928 from the small village of Rudawka on the Polish easternmost borderlands. This text is mainly a documentary story about Deputat's hardships and successful immigration, concluded with Deputat's son denying the necessity of insisting on multiculturalism, claiming, "it's good to know who we are and what our roots are. But above all, we're Canadians. I don't believe we should live in our own little ethnic groups, but should strive to become one nation, one culture from all these different traditions" (Głogowska 1995: 190-191). The simplicity of this story divests it of a more profound analysis and tone apart from the emphasis of a self-made Pole in Canada.

Mary A. Drzewiecki's memoir *Born and Raised Under a Straw Roof: A True Legacy of the Human Spirit* (2001 [2000]) is yet another example of a memoir of a Polish-Canadian who pays tribute to her parents who have survived the War and DP camps, and risked a lot to provide their children with a peaceful and affluent life in Canada. Meticulously researched, documented, and supplemented with photographs, Drzewiecki's book is a story of the family's exile from Wołyń, part of pre-

World War II Poland, through Germany to Canada, and their successful, though difficult, life there. Devoted to their Canadian experience only to a small degree, the memoir is nonetheless an important example of Polish settlement in British Columbia.<sup>18</sup>

Among fictional responses from writers of Polish origin, Andrew J. Borkowski's acclaimed short story collection *Copernicus Avenue* (2011) deserves special attention. Andrew J. Borkowski was born in Toronto and spent his childhood among the Polish community of the city. The short stories in the cycle are sometimes interconnected and form a discursive cycle devoted to various aspects of life of different people of Polish origin living around the eponymous Copernicus Avenue, which brings the famous Roncesvalles Avenue in Toronto to mind, a major site of the Polish settlement in this town. Borkowski's narration revolves around the Second World War as well as the post-war legacies of varied characters from Poland. Borkowski touches upon the painful moments in Polish history, such as the slaughter of the inhabitants of the small village of Baranica in Polesie, on the Polish-Belorussian borderland. The whole cycle is in one way or another devoted to the theme of memory, its power over humans and the role it plays in immigrants' lives. As one of his characters concludes in "Twelve Versions of Lech," "it is a silent agreement we all have with ourselves, that nothing will ever make us prisoners again, not even a memory" (Borkowski 2011: 128). In her article on Borkowski's writing, Anna Branach-Kallas emphasizes the motif of trauma in *Copernicus Avenue* (2014). She stresses different kinds of traumatic experiences shaping the diasporic identity of Borkowski's characters.<sup>19</sup>

One of the most recent responses from a Canadian author of Polish origin is the novel *Giant* (2012), written by Aga Maksimowska. The author was born in 1977 and emigrated from Poland at the age of eleven,

<sup>18</sup> A more detailed, comparative study of the three texts by Kojder, Głogowska and Drzewiecki has been published by the author in *TransCanadiana* 2013 (6).

<sup>19</sup> Apart from this study on Andrew J. Borkowski's *Copernicus Avenue* published in *Niuanse wyobcowania* (2014), Anna Branach-Kallas conducted an interesting interview with the author of the short stories cycle (published in *Niuanse wyobcowania* as well). She is also the author of "Polish Immigrants' Search for the Peaceable Kingdom: Andrew J. Borkowski's *Copernicus Avenue*" (2013), where she stresses that despite the painful visions of trauma, "*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" (Branach-Kallas 2013: 203).

in 1988; she thus belongs to the very late generation of immigrants. Educated at Canadian universities, Maksimowska undertakes a novelistic search for the identity of a Polish girl who emigrates to Canada with her mother and has to deal with an identity split between Communist Poland, where one cannot buy anything but where her closest relatives live, especially her beloved grandparents, and affluent, colorful Canada, where she has to strive for acceptance at home and school. Given her extraordinary grandiosity, she has to confront her growing up into a woman, her tangled past which stretches back to Gdańsk, the city of Solidarity, and her communism-infected grandfather, as well as her new friends at a Canadian school, who are full of stereotypes about Central and Eastern Europe. Although she has modeled the main character on herself, giving her the same year of birth and emigration, Maksimowska has, like Stachniak in *Necessary Lies*, chosen the form of a novel, in order to confront her character with more diverse situations and burdens and thus focus on various aspects of migration and diasporic experience in the converging lens of storytelling.<sup>20</sup>

### **Ukrainian Voices**

The problem of Polish representation in Canada is also rooted in the very idea of Polishness. In spite of the firm concept of nationhood, Poles have at times experienced a weakened identification with the Polish nationality. This has usually been due to intermarriages, a centuries-old inclusion of various ethnic minority groups, a geographical position situated on borderlands and, last but not least, a historical background (Partitions, two World Wars, Communism and closed borders, to name just a few examples of historical determinants). This is why the classification of writers as Polish has often become problematic and blurred by historical events and various alliances. Writers of Polish descent in Canada have therefore gained much less attention than those of Ukrainian origin because writers whose roots go back to Poland (however vague this concept might have been in the course of history) are sometimes listed under other ethnic and national labels. This is evident in W. H. New's *A History of Canadian Literature* (2003 [1989]). Among "active markers of identity," he lists

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<sup>20</sup> A pioneering text on Maksimowska by Ewa Bodal has just been published in *Nieuanse wyobcowania* (2014).

authors of the following “categories (...) Christian, Jewish, Ukrainian, Italian, Black, Asian, gay, lesbian, female, male, worker, urban, Maritime, Northern (... )” (New 2003: 322). This list perfectly exhibits the problem, as firstly the Ukrainian group is almost always listed separately as being very strong and prolific in terms of literary output, and secondly, although the category of Polishness is not mentioned directly, writers of mixed Polish-other roots may be found among those listed under at least a few of New’s labels, be it Jewish, Christian or urban. Continuing his inquiry into ethnic literatures of the last decades, New claims that “the range of ethnicities that contemporary Canadian writing represents includes Arabic, American, German, Greek, Hungarian, Icelandic, Irish, Italian, Norse, Polish, Russian, Scottish, Turkish (... )” (New 2003: 323, emphasis mine), showing that these are the languages in which Canadian literature has been frequently produced, apart from the two official languages. This reflects the Canadian emphasis on multiculturalism, of course, but also shows the position of Polish literature. The only writer mentioned in this section of New’s discussion is Bogdan Czaykowski, whose collection of poetry written in Polish has gained recognition, whereas writers such as Apolonja Maria Kojder and Irena F. Karafilly, writing in English, are not mentioned in this history of literature.

It is unquestionable that writers of Polish origin have not had such a strongly visible literary representation in Canada as Ukrainians have had thanks to the writing and social involvement of Myrna Kostash. Her writing has given voice to Ukrainian-Canadians and she has contributed to the discussion on multiculturalism (since her first publications appeared in the 1970s, the debate on assimilation and the status of minorities was still in its initial, vibrant phase) and feminism. Her books, such as *All of Baba’s Children* (1977) and *Bloodlines. A Journey into Eastern Europe* (1993), have become seminal in the formation of Ukrainian-Canadian identity. Her books have also responded to a growing demand for non-fiction, travel memoirs and historical texts, while *All of Baba’s Children* has even been classified as a “classic” of non-fiction (George Melnyk, on the cover of the 1992 NeWest edition of the book). Myrna Kostash has also been involved in a number of discussions on ethnicity, race, feminism, and the position of the Ukrainian diaspora in Canada. She is the author of an essay, “The Shock of White Cognition” (2004) that can shed some light on the understanding of ethnicity, in which she analyzes her discovery of the altered boundaries of otherness. Having been placed as a member of an

ethnic diaspora for years, she has recently discovered a shift in the classification: “I discovered that, in the new terms of the discourse, I was white. I was a member of a privileged *majority*” (Kostash 2004: 135, italics original). Padolsky refers to this predicament in his discussion of “power politics of ethnicity” and “the Canadian politics of race” (1998: 27). He also alludes to Kostash’s rhetorical questions concerning the Canadian perception of Europe.<sup>21</sup> This redefinition of ethnicity and placing of invisible Canadian minorities automatically into the position of the majority blurs the idea of multiculturalism and the meaning of post-colonialism in Canada, as the members of invisible minorities, the whites (including immigrants of Jewish origin, for instance), as they are also called by Kostash, become somehow associated with the Eurocentric point of view with which they frequently had no chance to identify in their home country. What needs to be taken into consideration as well is the fact that many immigrants are already not the first generation immigrants. It seems that their position is different exactly because they have become integrated into the Canadian society and exist within it on radically different terms than their grandparents.<sup>22</sup>

Janice Kulyk Keefer, whose *Honey and Ashes. A Story of Family* (1998a) is discussed in the next chapter of this book, is a perfect example of blurred and mixed origins. She is a Ukrainian-Canadian writer and scholar who repeatedly returns to her origins in a range of books she has published, such as *The Green Library* (1996) and *The Ladies’ Lending Library* (2007). Her inclusion in the present study is a conscious choice, for at least three reasons. Firstly, the aim is to give voice to a writer of truly mixed Polish-Ukrainian origins. Although both of her grandparents, Tomasz Solowski and his wife, Olena Levkowych Solowska, both of mixed Polish-Ukrainian origins, were holders of Polish passports<sup>23</sup> and

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<sup>21</sup> Kostash asked: “... if you are going to accuse me of Eurocentrism, you’d better be specific. The centre of *which* Europe, exactly? Are serfdom, famine, and pogroms in Europe? Are the death camps? The gulag? (...) Are all these ‘European’?” (1992b: 41-42, italics original).

<sup>22</sup> For a more personal stance on the issues discussed here, see the text by Margery Fee, Sneja Gunew and Lisa Grekul (2002: 114-144), which includes an interesting interview with Myrna Kostash as well as “Imagination, Representation, and Culture” published by Kostash in 1998.

<sup>23</sup> The village, they came from, Staromischyna (Staromiejszczyzna), is a perfect example of a place located in the borderlands as it once belonged to Poland, once to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, then to the Ukraine and the Soviet Union.

left Poland from the free city of Gdańsk, the cultural legacy they gave their children was Ukrainian. This was done for a variety of reasons, one of them political, as Tomasz found “it impossible to live under Poland’s repressive martial regime” (*Honey* 1998a: 14). Another reason was cultural and anthropological, because language and culture in the form of nursery rhymes, children’s basic education,<sup>24</sup> was passed on by the mother, whose Ukrainian roots were definitely stronger. A further reason was connected with religion, as the family’s religious affinities were indisputably with the Eastern branch of Christianity, under the sign of St. Nicolas – both physically, as their parish church was named after St. Nicolas, as well as symbolically, seeing this saint as a patron saint of the Eastern churches. Having acknowledged Kulyk Keefer’s affiliations with the Ukrainian diaspora in Canada, her autobiographical text serves as an opening in a discussion on cross-generic hybridity, the mixture of historical account, travel narrative, memoir and autobiography, and biography. Furthermore, Kulyk Keefer’s text illustrates the notion of post/memory – not in Marianne Hirsch’s basic application of the term to the children of survivors of the Holocaust, but as Kulyk Keefer states in her story: “(...) families are more than gene pools: their stories travel through and map us, too” – “[w]e may try to flee this fate, but as we run, we carry it inside our very cells” (*Honey* 1998a: 15). *Honey and Ashes* therefore offers a discourse of the children of immigrants who try to define themselves against their Canadian homeland. Thoroughly researched (Kulyk Keefer included endnotes as well as a selected bibliography at the end of her book), the story finishes with a certain inconclusiveness at the coda where she discusses the concept of home “that is open, conflicted, uncertain” (*Honey* 1998a: 329).

In her comprehensive, yet selective article on the subject, Dana Patrascu-Kingsley (2010) discusses both early and recent publications coming from the Ukrainian, Romanian, Hungarian, Czech and Polish immigrants (or their children) to Canada. As far as Ukrainian-Canadian writing is concerned, the text mentions Vera Lysenko’s *Yellow Boots* from 1954, as well as Myrna Kostash’s two previously mentioned texts, seen as seminal to the understanding of the writing of the Ukrainian diaspora and formative for Kostash as a writer, scholar and activist. Kulyk Keefer’s novel *The Green Library* (1996) and her memoir *Honey and Ashes*.

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<sup>24</sup> This notion is further developed in Chapter Two.

*A Story of Family* (1998) have been placed in the foreground by Patrascu-Kingsley. She stresses Kulyk Keefer's fascination with the undiscovered or perhaps silenced stories that also contribute to one's understanding of ethnicity. Patrascu-Kingsley rhetorically asserts: "The 'dark corridor' of forgotten history, or trauma that one prefers to forget, shapes one, Kulyk Keefer suggests, as much as histories remembered" (2010: 153)<sup>25</sup>.

Another significant writer of Ukrainian origin is Marusya Bociurkiw, the author of several books, for example *The Children of Mary* (2006) and *Comfort Food for Breakups. The Memoir of a Hungry Girl* (2007). The former refers to a community of Ukrainians living in the farmlands of Canada between the two World Wars, while also analyzing Toronto-based queer women at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. By juxtaposing rural with urban, heteronormative with queer, the 1930s with the 1990s, Bociurkiw discusses the changing concepts of diaspora, ethnicity and race. Patrascu-Kingsley calls the book a "fruitful transcultural dialogue, [which] questions notions of 'visible' difference, and shows the ways in which ethnicities can be re-defined by second and third-generation Canadians" (2010: 155). In the latter text, which is a memoir incorporating a variety of recipes, Marusya Bociurkiw discusses the problem of memory, trauma and the role of ethnicity and queerness in identity formation. She alludes to the fluidity of memory discussed by other writers of diaspora. Through her recollection of recipes, she tries to recover memories of people, places, and tastes, posing questions similar to the ones affecting Kulyk Keefer's writing. She also asks, "Between recipes and stories, I will ask myself a thousand times: who owns these memories? How is it that each of us remembers in a different way? If my way of remembering makes it to print, what does it do to theirs?" (Bociurkiw 2007: 16).

Among other outstanding Ukrainian-Canadian authors, Suchacka (2010) mentions Illia Kiriak, Vera Lysenko, George Ryga and Lisa Grekul. W. H. New adds to this list the works of Maara Haas and Yar

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<sup>25</sup> The 'dark corridor' evoked in Patrascu-Kingsley's quotation is an excerpt from *Honey and Ashes* (1998: 320). It is worth rendering an extended (in comparison to Patrascu-Kingsley's) version of it: "What should I make of this – what can I make? Is it a question of making, or of accepting the one certainty in this mess of shadows? (...) Are we, in the end, only what we can remember? Or are we also all that lies deep inside us, stored in the niches of a long, dark corridor whose door we shut behind us long ago? The painfulness of remembering – the physical process of recall. How we speak of triggering memory, as if it were a loaded gun."

Slavutych (2003: 229), claiming that in their texts they all (along with Janice Kulyk Keefer and Myrna Kostash) “resisted the label ‘immigrant,’ probing instead the representative life of workers, mothers, and other individuals whose ‘immigrant status’ in the New World tended to block other estimations of their quality, character, social role, or options for the future.” With all of this in mind, Suchacka (2010: 1-6) points out that it is the idea of a reinvention of their identity as Ukrainian-Canadians, which allows them and their characters to be free to pursue the other roles awaiting them in Canadian society. In an article on Ukrainian-Canadian women’s fiction, Suchacka (2009: 230) also pinpoints the Ukrainian problem with identity, which stems from the “political circumstances of Ukraine’s subjugation to the rule of such empires as the Austro-Hungarian and Russian,” which in turn displays certain similarities to the identity problems other ethnic groups originating from Central and Eastern Europe have. Nevertheless what seems to have influenced the visibility of Ukrainian-Canadian writing and culture is the status of Kostash and Kulyk Keefer in Canadian literature, which is described by Suchacka as a factor contributing to “the maturation of a Ukrainian ethnic awareness” (2009: 231).

### Czech and Hungarian Voices

It was not until 1968 that the Czech immigration to Canada was noticed by scholars and publishers. The late 1960s, abundant in significant political events in Czechoslovakia, resulted in an increasing number of immigrants leaving the country, some of whom reached Canada. Josef Škvorecký was one of the most significant, prolific and acclaimed Czech authors who lived in Canada after 1968. Among his literary achievements, such as *The Engineer of Human Souls* (1984), for which he received the Governor General’s Award, or *Dvorak in Love* (1986) (which was published in the Czech language in Canada), referred to as “a bleakly comic novel” (New 2003: 229), there are also screenplays (he was known for his cooperation with Milos Forman), and poetry. Furthermore, Škvorecký taught English and American literature at Canadian universities and translated American literature into Czech. His publishing work is also worth noting, as in 1971 he established a publishing house called 68 Publishers which “target[ed] the Czech diaspora” (Dvorak 2004: 173), and published texts which were banned in Communist

Czechoslovakia at that time by Václav Havel, Milan Kundera, and Ludvík Vaculík, among others (Solecki 2012, Martin 2012). Another prominent Canadian figure of Czech origin is Jan Drabek, whose work as a writer, political activist and filmmaker is frequently mentioned in passing (New 2003: 229). He is based in British Columbia and visits the Czech Republic quite often.

The year of 1956, as well as the years that followed, witnessed a growth in Hungarian immigration to Canada, and, similarly to the Czech immigration, some of the Hungarian immigrants worked on behalf of Communist Hungary. One of the earliest Hungarian-Canadian writers was John Marlyn<sup>26</sup>, who came to Canada as a small child at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In his *Under the Ribs of Death* (1957) he described Depression-stricken Manitoba and showed the poverty and lack of perspectives of immigrants together with the spiritual drain that immigrants face in Canada. It has been stated that Marlyn “turned the immigrant character into a figure of contemporary exile” (2003: 161) wherein the immigrants’ attention is drawn to survival rather than anything else. “Peddling is their highest aspiration. (...) This is spiritual death” (Marlyn 1964 [1957]: 216). This spiritual death becomes the burden of the older generation.

The most recent generation of Canadians of Hungarian, as well as Jewish, origin is represented by two well-known authors, famous for their non-fiction writing: Anna Porter and Elaine Kalman Naves. Anna Porter is a well-recognized Hungarian-Canadian writer and publisher. She left revolution-torn Hungary in 1956 to stay first in New Zealand, and then in 1969 moved to Canada. In addition to the mystery novels she has written, she is mostly acknowledged for her memoir *The Storyteller. Memory, Secrets, Magic and Lies. A Memoir of Hungary* (2000), a biography titled *Kasztner’s Train. The True Story of Rezső Kasztner, Unknown Hero of the Holocaust* (2007), and finally *The Ghosts of Europe. Journeys Through Central Europe’s Troubled Past and Uncertain Future* (2010). In the memoir, she returns to the old stories and memories of her parents and numerous members of her family from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, trying to discover the nature of relationships, mysterious choices of certain

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<sup>26</sup> Born in the Nagybecskerek in 1912, John Marlyn also represents the tangled fate of Central European history, as the place once belonged to Hungary, then the Austro-Hungarian Empire and now it is located in present-day Serbia.

people and the convoluted fates of her family. Furthermore, what is alluded to in the subtitle of the book is the panoramic view that Porter wants to achieve by juxtaposing the story of her family with the general history of Hungary. Through this compilation of micro and macro histories, she gains a personal view of what Hungary has gone through. As with all Central and Eastern European texts, this one is also an excavation of secrets and pains in the vast body of stories offered, which gives testimony to the European coiled pattern of coming from a few places at once, as parts of Hungary once belonged to Slovakia, and at other times to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, convergent with many other texts discussed here.

*Kasztner's Train. The True Story of Rezsö Kasztner, Unknown Hero of the Holocaust* (2007) is a meticulously researched and widely awarded<sup>27</sup> biography of a person who rescued Hungarian Jews from war-stricken Hungary, when the country was suffering a painful immersion in fascism. Compared to Oskar Schindler (by Irving Abella of York University, Canada, on the cover of the book), Rezsö Kasztner becomes not only a Hungarian war hero, but also one of the most important people in Jewish history, who received his own place among “the Righteous” (Porter 2008 [2007]: 438). Alarmingly, if it had not been for Porter’s biography, the story of Kasztner would probably be forgotten today.

Anna Porter’s *The Ghosts of Europe. Journeys Through Central Europe’s Troubled Past and Uncertain Future* (2010) is a project which emerged from the desire to experience post-1989 Europe, its triumphs and defeats on the basis of historical data and travels to Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary. Porter’s point of departure is the assumption that “Central Europe (...) is a state of mind” (2010: 19), which makes her inquire about it in a series of talks and discussions with various people on nationality, identity, politics, and history, as well as culture and literature. A very special place is granted in the book to the contemporaneity of Central Europe, its painful lacerations, the problems of early democracy, as well as the ways in which it attempts to deal with history – these eponymous ghosts haunting Central Europe and its inhabitants.

Central to Elaine Kalman Naves’s writing is the legacy of Jewishness, which she has inherited from the former generations of her extended

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<sup>27</sup> It is worth noting that Porter was awarded Writers’ Trust Award for Non-Fiction and Canadian Jewish Book Award for *Kasztner's Train*.

family. Kalman Naves, pushed to record the stories of her family by her father's fatal illness, has written two texts: *Journey to Vaja* (1996) and *Shoshanna's Story. A Mother, a Daughter, and the Shadows of History* (2003). Through the lens of her father's experience in death camps and immigration to Canada, Kalman Naves explores the history of Jewish settlement in Hungary, trying to recollect the images of the agricultural plains that nurtured the various generations of the Weinberger family that Kalman Naves belongs to. Immersed in the history of Hungary and thoroughly researched, the text becomes a tribute to Hungarian Jews in general, but also to Kalman Naves's closest relatives.

*Shoshanna's Story. A Mother, a Daughter, and the Shadows of History* (2003), awarded the Quebec Writers' Federation Award for Non-Fiction in 2003, has brought to Kalman Naves, a resident of Montreal, further acclaim as a memoirist. In the complicated story of her family's immigration to Canada and their first years in Montreal, what she analyzes is not only an attempt at the assimilation process but predominantly the mother-daughter relationships which, exposed to the habits and routines of a North American, Western culture, turn out to be the most intriguing. Having suffered through a painful period in Hungary, the family undergoes a difficult phase of trying to fit in, which for the girl whose "knowledge of English was nearly non-existent" (2006 [2003]: 135) and who knew she was Jewish but was instructed by the family to hide this fact, virtually meant a total inability to integrate into the new Canadian world.

### Lithuanian Voices

Quite distinctive, though not represented in much criticism, is the Lithuanian-Canadian representation in literature. In the context of North-Eastern European writing in Canada, two writers must be highlighted for sure: Irene Guilford and Antanas Sileika. The former, Irene Guilford, is the author of one novel, *The Embrace*, which appeared in 1999 in Canada. Having graduated with a diploma in Mathematics and Computing, she has not produced an outstanding number of texts, although her literary output has been anthologized. She is also the editor of a volume devoted to Alistair MacLeod (*Alistair MacLeod. Essays on His Works*, 2001). *The Embrace*, however, turns out to be an insightful voice of a Lithuanian-Canadian concerning the impossible relationships of two branches of a

family torn apart by the Second World War and the Communist regime. It is interesting to see that Guilford in her novel does not offer easy reconciliations after the years of separation. The two branches of the same family, the Canadian one and the Lithuanian one under Soviet dominance, meet both in the Soviet Union and in Canada, and neither of these trips brings them closer to each other. During the first trip to Lithuania, Aldona and her father, a Lithuanian who stayed in Canada after World War II, are involved in family discussions which show, in this profoundly powerful story, the inability to comprehend the differences between the two worlds: the West and the East from behind the Iron Curtain. As Aldona's narrative voice notes, "It's not that I'd expected weeping and embracing, a falling upon one another's necks, like in stories of long parted families that finally meet. Our separation has been too harsh, our Cold War silence too long and deep" (Guilford 1999: 14). In spite of the problems in communication, both linguistic and emotional, or perhaps in order to compensate for the affluent life in Canada, Aldona's father visits a store for foreigners and uses his dollars to buy a whole range of things that are unavailable in the Soviet Republic at that time, from a car and a refrigerator to almost thirty pairs of sneakers. Under the close inspection of the Soviet secret police, as one might guess, the Lithuanian part of the family does not feel safe or comfortable during this visit. During this gift-giving ceremony (the Lithuanian family also tries to offer them as much as they can spare), what they miss is a true conversation, a relationship that might be somehow, at least partially, restored.

The other two sections of the novel refer to the past and the future. In the section devoted to 1965, Aldona becomes close friends with her Lithuanian relative, Daiva, whom, by the year 1985, she does not really comprehend. And she observes her father and grandparents, who demonstratively try to remain Lithuanian and cling to their origins, speaking in Lithuanian, preparing traditional dishes and predominantly pressing Aldona to follow in their footsteps. This chapter is full of identity questions and depicts the confusion of a child who tries hard to create her own concept of being a hyphenated, hybrid Canadian: "I am different (...) I was born here. I am not you" (Guilford 1999: 50) are Aldona's declarations. Having experienced a regular Canadian childhood, and being pushed to attend a Saturday Lithuanian school and summer camps with other children of immigrants, Aldona comes to the following conclusion: "I don't fit in anywhere. Not among the Canadians where

I was born. Not among the Lithuanians who came here. Not in Lithuania, a place I never left. I am invisible" (Guilford 1999: 54).

This inability to define oneself is further deepened in the third section of the novel, when, in 1990, after the fall of Communism, the Lithuanian part of the family comes to Toronto. The idea of the American Dream, well-known for the Lithuanians, makes them decide to stay in Canada as illegal immigrants. This pushes Aldona, happily married to a Canadian and leading a comfortable life, to reformulate her ideas of family, which is definitely very difficult. This period of her life is full of guilt, identity questions and impotence in expressing her thoughts: "East and west, we sit, two islands of untalk, an ocean between" (Guilford 1999: 106). This citation summarizes Guilford's idea behind the novel, the quandary of whether there is a chance to find common ground for a discussion having such separate and distinctive experiences. Is it possible at all to bridge almost half a century, or are such members of parted families 'two solitudes' (to use Hugh MacLennan's term in this context)? Having been determined by the lack of coherent conclusions, this novel by Guilford offers the comprehension of a hybrid identity, of a discourse split in the immigrants' minds as well as in their children's. In the last passage of the novel, Aldona voices the post/memory she inherited, stating: "Home (...) is an imaginary place. A time before our births. A place we can never visit. A land where we wait, arms reaching towards the embrace" (Guilford 1999: 150). These statements correspond to the opening paragraphs, coming from the author herself: "The ghost of my life in Lithuania exists, though I have never lived there. It lives in the minds of my grandparents and parents, my aunts, uncles and cousins. They see it, and I never having seen it, see it also. It is grey, like a shadow, and sad" (Guilford 1999: 6). These shadows are the same ones Kulyk Keefer sees in *Honey and Ashes*, which is discussed in detail in the subsequent chapter. Moreover, Guilford's personal experience in the form of the ghosts of the past haunting her gave way to her novelistic writing. Like Eva Stachniak, Irene Guilford inscribes her emotional identity and migrant experience into her fictional characters.

Rūta Šlapkauskaitė, a scholar from Lithuania, discusses *The Embrace* in two texts of hers. One of these, a comparative study of Guilford and Antanas Sileika, through a comparative study of the two authors, shows how these writers "mediate their concerns for the ancestral culture" (Šlapkauskaitė 2008: 66). In her article, Šlapkauskaitė explains the

incomprehension of the two parts of the same family, claiming that “the Lithuanian characters in *The Embrace* operate as a metonymy of the oppressed nation: they are the native informants (...). As such, they are largely perceived as a single mass – inarticulate and indiscriminate” (2008: 70). Therefore, Guilford’s novel can be read in the Self-Other dialectic and becomes an illustration of a painful fissure supplied with inextricable solutions due to the oppressive dominance the members of the same family have been subjected to on a different scale. According to Šlapkauskaitė, “[t]hus, Aldona’s search for cultural identity in Lithuania marks her attempts to convert the Other into the Same, while at the same time keeping the Other at a safe distance to avoid cultural contaminations” (2008: 70).

Conversely, the texts by Antanas Sileika offer a more ironic outlook on the problem of double belonging and hybridization in multicultural Canada. He has written several books devoted to various topics: *Dinner at the End of the World* (1994), *Buying on Time* (1997), *Woman in Bronze* (2004), and *Underground* (2011). In the context of the present discussion, it is especially *Buying on Time* that is worth mentioning. It is a collection of linked short stories describing the Lithuanian DPs in Canada. Sileika tries not to overwhelm the reader with the history of Lithuania and the trauma the family of Agata and the Old Man experienced, but in a tone that is rather detached and at times ironic, he offers a range of attitudes to the Canadianness of the Lithuanian immigrants. As Šlapkauskaitė points out, “Sileika refuses to gratify an ignorant Western audience with colourful bits of ethnic exotica” (2008: 72). Although Sileika juxtaposes a Lithuanian immigrant with a Canadian already in the first story of the cycle (the title of the story is ‘Going Native,’ wherein the word ‘native’ suggests Canadianness and is the only option one has to undertake if he wants to assimilate in Canada), Sileika distances himself from his characters. Despite the grim past of the protagonists, who have emerged from World War II, the overall tone of the stories is ironic: “We see suburban Toronto through the eyes of these newcomers and it is a ridiculous sight. But this is not really a satire on the venality of suburbanites or the aridity of Anglo-Canadian culture. Sileika’s humour is gentle and even-handed. The ‘English’ are funny, the DPs are funny. Everyone is funny” (Taylor 1997).

The cycle of short stories by Antanas Sileika grouped in the collection *Buying on Time* does not offer clear-cut conclusions about the ways immigrants construct their identities in the new country. Sileika shows the

dichotomy as well as dynamism of powers governing the shifting concepts of Otherness and Sameness. At the same time, he is far from glorifying or condemning anybody, and gives a voice to immigrants from Lithuania, also incorporating examples of immigrants who do not want to be perceived as such and would prefer to divest themselves of the Lithuanian ‘burden’ in the history of their lives.

### **Jewish and Yiddish Literature in Canada**

Inextricable as it is, Jewish literature in English and in Yiddish in Canada shapes Canadian immigrant literature written both in English and French. It is, however, highly difficult to characterize the group of writers of Jewish origin. This is because most frequently the same writers are also of Ukrainian<sup>28</sup>, Polish, Belarus, Russian and other descent. Having had such a long tradition of Jewish-Canadian literature represented by authors such as Mordechai Richler, Leonard Cohen, and A. M. Klein, to mention only the most famous, canonical and iconic writers of the group, Central and Eastern European writers of Jewish descent have also found their place in Canada. The divisions into Jewish and Yiddish literature have functioned in criticism (Anctil 2007, Ravvin 1997) but are at the same time blurred. Obscured by the fact that these literatures have been written simultaneously, they fall into the two categories mainly because of the language used. This is a result of which generation of immigrants – first or second – in the diaspora they belong to. If the need to categorize prevails, then what might be recognized as the first great wave of Jewish immigration to Canada was the one at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, until the beginning of the First World War. Anctil notes that “by 1901 the number of Jews in Montreal had risen to 7,000 persons. In 1931, there were 60,000 Yiddish-speaking Jews in Montreal” (2007: 120), and “Toronto had a little more than 46,000 Jews and Winnipeg, slightly more than 17,000. Altogether, there were almost 157,000 Jews residing in Canada (...), 56% of whom had been born outside the country, mostly in Russia, Poland and Romania” (Anctil 2007: 124).<sup>29</sup> Since people of Jewish origin settled

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<sup>28</sup> Howard Aster and Peter J. Potichnyj published a very thorough study of Jewish-Ukrainian immigration to Canada: *Jewish Ukrainian Relations. Two Solitudes* (1983).

<sup>29</sup> Anctil, however, too directly attributes Jewish cultural heritage to Russia and the tsarist Empire, as the Jews, having come from such varied backgrounds, whether assimilated in their home-country culture or not, had mainly responded to their *shtetl*

mainly in Montreal, Toronto and the rural prairie provinces to the West of Canada, and came from many different countries including Russia, Poland, Lithuania among others, they created vibrant communities speaking Yiddish, which, until they or their children learned English or French, became a *lingua franca* for them, enabling communication and also artistic expression. Anctil even claims that “from 1905 to the early fifties, East-European Jews formed the largest cultural community in that city [Montreal], and their mother tongue, Yiddish, became the third most frequently used language after French and English” (2007: 119). Ravvin, however, adds one more role to the Yiddish-speaking turn-of-the-century communities in Canada, namely that of ethnographers recording and recreating the life of an Eastern European *shtetl* (1997: 3).

Notwithstanding, it is Yiddish and, more widely, Jewish literature, that has influenced the Canadian immigrant discourse to a large extent. Among the early activists and writers contributing to the development of Yiddish literature were Mishe Shmuelsohn of Ukrainian origin, as well as Jacob-Isaac Segal, Sholem Shtern, and Hershl Noval from Poland, who contributed to what Anctil calls the golden age of Yiddish belles-lettres in Canada (Anctil 2007: 118-142). Their contribution to Canadian literature is not to be neglected, since not only did they publish in Yiddish, recreating the core of Jewish culture of Central and Eastern Europe, but their texts were also issued in French and English, which had a huge impact on Canadian immigrant writing as a whole.

A very interesting insight into the literature by immigrants is offered by Christian Lammert and Katja Sarkovsky in their *Travelling Concepts*

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cultural legacy. He claims that “an important proportion of Canadian Yiddish speaking authors were born in Poland, that of 35% of the total found in Fuks dictionary, while 25% were natives of the Ukraine, 14% of Belorussia and lastly 13% of Lithuania, leaving only about 10% to account for more marginal countries such as Romania, Hungary, Latvia and Israel. This essentially means that the Yiddish literary realm in Canada (...) bore a direct and close relation to the Russian sphere of influence. In fact, it is not an exaggeration to state in this respect that the political and cultural history of the Russian Empire, and its successor states, came to bear immensely on the artistic and aesthetic development of Yiddish literature in Canada” (Anctil 2007: 124). Although Russian culture and language were the dominant ones within a diversified body of Jewish culture in Canada, calling the above-mentioned states the ‘successors of the Empire’ might be an oversight and oversimplification within the context of the independence movements that were strong in these countries at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

(2010), wherein the authors emphasize the lack of clear-cut terminology to name many contemporary literary and cultural phenomena. Not only in national categories but also in the literary output do critics encounter the question of diversity and cross-linguistic, cultural, literary attempts. This phenomenon of fusing many quandaries together may correspond to the way British criticism described writers entering the literary scene after 1979 as being writers of the floating world.<sup>30</sup> As an intriguing example of diversity in Jewish/Yiddish-Canadian writing, Lammert and Sarkovsky include Julie Spergel's essay on Chava Rosenfarb, whose place in world literature is unquestionable. Born in Łódź, a survivor of the Holocaust and the Łódź ghetto, Chava Rosenfarb emigrated to Canada, where she lived until her recent death in 2011. She wrote poetry and prose in Yiddish, among which *The Tree of Life: A Novel about Life in the Lodz Ghetto* (Yiddish edition 1972; English translation: 1985) holds a primary position, although it has raised some controversy, not by its content, but rather by its categorization. As Rosenfarb claimed in an interview, her book cannot be placed in the category of Canadian literature:

there is not a speck of Canada in that book. Not only it's not about Canada but it is written from a different perspective not a Canadian perspective from a specifically Jewish ghetto perspective. It is the Holocaust. This is a corner where Jews lived with their entire beings, their minds, their bodies in the Holocaust, which didn't belong to Canada, had nothing to do with Canada. I didn't even know that a Canada existed at that time. You can't make it Canadian in any way except for the fact that I wrote it here (Spergel 2010: 129).<sup>31</sup>

Problematic as this stance is for a scholar of Canadian literature, Julie Spergel insists on calling Chava Rosenfarb a Jewish/Yiddish-Canadian writer, and she claims that

accepting Rosenfarb into Canadian literature would not necessitate an abandonment of the novel's significance to Yiddish literature. Similar to her blending of history and memory, fact and fiction, Rosenfarb transcends tradition by being inspired by one and by inspiring the other. *Tree of Life* is therefore a Canadian book for two only seemingly contradictory reasons. First, it contributes to the heteroglossia that make

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. Malcolm Bradbury. *The Modern British Novel* (1994).

<sup>31</sup> This and the next quotation are tapescripts of a telephone interview, hence the syntax and grammar typical of spoken language.

up a multicultural nation not phased by its citizens' transnationalism (...) identities, even national ones, are never static. Second, it is a Canadian book because mainstream Canada ought to embrace it in order to live up to its own standards of multiculturalism (Spergel 2010: 143-144).

Since the Yiddish version and its English translation are somewhat different (Ravvin 1997: 85-98) with the novel not only translated but also rewritten by Rosenfarb herself and rendered to the public in English, the text should be seen as an important voice of a diasporic writer testifying to the grim memories of the Holocaust. Through this act, Rosenfarb brought the testimony of a witness and a writer into the domain of the English-speaking world, Canada inclusive. Locating Rosenfarb at the very center of Yiddish literature in Canada, Goldie Morgentaler does not have the doubts (2000, 2003) which Rosenfarb herself had, and puts her writing in the position of literature of double exile, as Yiddish literature in Canada responds to this phenomenon of being "doubly exiled – firstly from Israel, traditional homeland of Jewish people, and secondly from eastern Europe, traditional homeland of Yiddish-speaking Jews" (2000). It is beyond doubt that Chava Rosenfarb's position in the Yiddish language is unquestionable in Canada as she "maintained a tenacious – and increasingly isolated attachment to the Yiddish language" (Simon 2006: 93) which for her constituted "a vehicle of memory" (Naves's CBC documentary 2000 as quoted in Simon 2006: 93).

In her anthology of critical essays on the writing of Jewish women, *At Odds in the World. Essays on Jewish Canadian Women Writers* (2008), Ruth Panofsky claims that, apart from her primary aim to discuss Jewish-Canadian literary tradition and give voice to Jewish women, who are often neglected or shown in a negative light, she wanted to grasp a larger picture, and has "mined (...) [her] preoccupation with cultural identity to unearth a literary portrait of how it feels to be Jewish, Canadian, female in a world that is often hostile and unaccommodating" (2008: 4). The essays collected in this volume discuss the oeuvre of such female writers as Miriam Waddington, Adele Wiseman, Anne Michaels, Helen Weinzweig, Nora Gold, Lilian Nattel, Fredelle Bruser Maynard and Joyce Maynard. Although some of them, Lilian Nattel in *The River Midnight* (1999) for instance,<sup>32</sup> responded to their heritage by using Yiddish to illustrate the

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<sup>32</sup> For a more detailed study of Nattel, see also Dagmara Drewniak: "'There, time juggles fire...' – a Jewish *shtetl* revisited in Lilian Nattel's *The River Midnight*" (2012).

atmosphere of the small Central European *shtetl*, these writers have already switched to English as a language of their artistic expression. Helen Weinzweig, born in Poland, or Anne Michaels, born in Canada of Polish-Jewish descent, can be characterized as Jewish-Polish-Canadian authors, but, according to Panofsky, they should rather be discussed as writers who “write as Canadians, out of a deep, intuitive understanding of their homeland” (2008: 4). This is why the same group of authors could be listed in another section of this book and labeled as Canadians of Eastern European descent. This only shows the fluidity of origins on the borderlands and the immense difficulties one encounters while trying to impose national categories in the multicultural context of pre-World War II Central and Eastern Europe as well as post-Second World War Canada.

A similar approach is visible in a short book by Dominika Stasiak-Maziarz entitled *Representations of Jewish People in Canadian Literature of the 1940s and 1950s* (2011). Stasiak-Maziarz also emphasizes mixed-roots of Jewish writers. The writers studied in the text, such as Henry Kreisel, Miriam Waddington, Gwethalyn Graham, and Adele Wiseman frequently represent multiple identities as they are of Russian, Jewish, Ukrainian, and Polish origins. For Stasiak-Maziarz, the authors in question as diasporic writers “try to create their own space, in between cultures, where they can be themselves and be free to present their cultural hybridity” (2011: 8). What is highlighted throughout the book, apart from the artists’ hybrid identities, is also a mixture of genres they create, ranging from travel writing, through life-writing and poetry, to novels.

Furthermore, a noteworthy text contributing to the panorama of Jewish-Canadian writing is Bernice Eisenstein’s *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* (2006), which is a response to the predicament of writing on the Holocaust. Created by a visual artist, the book is in the form of a graphic memoir. Eisenstein, a child of immigrants herself, was born in Toronto after World War II and worked as an artist and editor. Her autobiographical project also evolved into an animated film adaptation created in cooperation with Ann Marie Fleming, and is now available on the Internet. In her text, Eisenstein deals with post/memory, the legacy her parents left to her, and claims, “The Holocaust is a drug and I have entered an opium den, having been given my first taste for free, innocently” (Eisenstein 2006: 20). As a result of the “high H gives” (2006: 20), Eisenstein tries to cope with her post/memory by analyzing her parents’ lives in scholarly ways at times, and fighting erratically with

the memory of the tragedy of Jews from Miechow in the south of Poland. The story is supplemented with illustrations that become a discursive element of the book. Recently, Bernice Eisenstein, in collaboration with Anne Michaels, published the book *Correspondences* (2013), a combination of portraits and poetry.

Francophone literature cannot be excluded from the consideration of Jewish-Canadian texts, although a detailed study of this writing lies beyond the scope of this book. Writers of Jewish origin in Canada writing in French have formed a rich and vibrant community, and some of their texts are also available in English and Polish translations. In the context of the present study, three authors should be mentioned: Alice Parizeau (née Poznańska), Tecia Werbowski, and Régine Robin. Born near Cracow in 1930, Parizeau took part in World War II as a member of the Polish Home Army, for which she was arrested and spent some time in Bergen-Belsen. After the liberation of the camp, she went to Paris to study at the Sorbonne, where she met the politician Jacques Parizeau, who later became premier of Quebec, with whom she went to Canada and settled in Montreal. She published many texts, including *Voyage en Pologne* (1962), *La Québécoise en Europe "rouge"* (1965), and, posthumously, *Une Femme* (1991). She died in Canada in 1990. Tecia Werbowski in turn was born in Lviv, and spent her childhood in hiding in Cracow as well as in Prague, where her mother worked at the Polish Embassy. After the Second World War, she divided her time between high school in Warsaw and studies in Prague, followed by her 1968 emigration to Canada. She has written a selection of books, including novels, fiction and non-fiction both in French and English: *Bittersweet Taste of Maple* (1984), *Zegota – The Rescue of Jews in Wartime Poland* (1994), *Le mur entre nous* (1995), and *Prague Memories* (2004), among others (Tecia Werbowski's website). Her books and stories are not translated into Polish and she remains virtually unknown in Central and Eastern Europe although her writing gains attention in Canada and France (Żurawska 2014: 127-128). As to Régine Robin, she was born as Rivka Ajzersztein to Jewish-Polish parents in Paris in 1939. After studying at the Sorbonne and the University of Dijon, she emigrated to Montreal in 1977, where she continued her academic career and started to publish her texts: both fiction and non-fiction. Her most acclaimed books include: *La Québécoite* (1983), translated into English as *The Wanderer* (1989), *Kafka* (1989), *L'immense fatigue des pierres* (2001) and *Le Réalisme socialiste: Une*

*esthétique impossible* (1987), for which she received the Governor-General's Award (Sadkowski 2011). Many of her books have been translated into English, and a selection of her short stories can be found in Polish as well, for instance "Gratok. Język życia i język śmierci," published in *Midrasz* (2000 (9): 50-52), and "Nieznanego dybuk," published in *Kwartalnik literacki TEKA* (2005/6 (5-6): 120-132). The reason for which these francophone authors are mentioned here is the fact that they tackle the topic of memory and the migrant, diasporic outlook on the memories of the past as well as their fluid roots and affiliations, which make them writers of many legacies at the crossroads of a Jewish-Canadian diaspora and Central and Eastern European heritage.

Regardless of an author's personal decisions concerning whether to visit the country of his or her origins or not, Central and Eastern Europe are parts of the legacy the writers in question address. Some of them have consciously decided to travel to Poland, the Ukraine and Russia (or formerly the Soviet Union), Hungary, Slovakia and other places – countries which have preserved the legacies of their tangled histories. This is the case with Kulyk Keefer and Lisa Appignanesi, as well as Norman Ravvin – a Jewish-Canadian author whose roots go back to Poland and Russia, and who at the same time feels "a westerner by birth" (Ravvin 2002: 15). Ravvin uses the term 'tragic tourists,' borrowed from Lucy Lippard, to depict the group he belongs to, and he admits: "I have always, quite unconsciously, thought of my family story as having taken place in Europe" (Ravvin: 2002: 15), despite the fact that barely any relatives of his spoke of their roots except for the maternal grandmother. Such is frequently a perspective of those infected by their parents' and grandparents' memories, even if their ancestors left Europe prior to the Second World War and thus avoided a tragic fate. This outlook offers a different picture of post-Holocaust Central and Eastern Europe, although the traces and echoes of the Holocaust, even if its visions are not included *par excellence*, are present in the narratives. Ravvin admits that he has wanted "to imagine Poland before the War, as a place of living Jews, and after the War, as a place of living Poles, to some extent haunted by the Jewish dead (...) to tell a good story, but also to examine what Canadian Jews might mean when they refer to 'our story'" (Ravvin 2002: 16). This attempt is not an easy task and also quite unique, as in his *Café des Westens* Ravvin avoids mentioning the Holocaust as such (the family left Poland earlier), but the silence about it makes the tragedy even harder to omit.

Bearing in mind the fact that it is genuinely impossible to include every attempt to narrate Central and Eastern European diasporic response to the quandaries and predicaments of post/memory, site of memory, and the Canadian experience, it has to be stated that the texts discussed in this book (both briefly in this sketch or in detail in the subsequent chapters) are a part of the larger, much imagined concept of Central and Eastern European writing in Canada. Central European writers living and publishing in Canada have frequently narrated their immigrant experiences and given testimonies to the troubled fates of the places of their origin through travelogues, various forms of life-writing, and biographies, as well as novels. Despite the fact that these texts deal with places other than Canada, in a majority of cases they offer a voice to silenced and forgotten stories. Given the fact that they excavate personal hi/stories, they also acknowledge the general history of Central and Eastern Europe and “create Canada out of their earliest and most intense sources of knowledge” (Egan and Helms 2004: 220). With some exceptions usually of writers popularly seen as Canadian (for example Anne Michaels), texts by writers from Central and Eastern Europe have been underscored by Canadian criticism as having roots in this part of the old continent. In conclusion it can be added that it is only recently that their texts have been shortlisted for and have won important literary awards (Stachniak 2000, Michaels 1996, 1997<sup>33</sup>, Borkowski 2012)<sup>34</sup>. Still, in the eyes of the general public as well as Canadian and international criticism they have not been recognized widely.

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<sup>33</sup> As has been mentioned, Anne Michaels is a specific example of a writer who, despite her continuous literary returns to Poland (Biskupin in *Fugitive Pieces*, Warsaw in *The Winter Vault*) is usually treated as a Canadian poet and novelist and not a Canadian author of Polish-Jewish origin.

<sup>34</sup> Stachniak received the 2000 Amazon.com/Books in Canada First Novel Award; Michaels got Books in Canada First Novel Award (1996), the Trillium Book Award, Orange Prize for Fiction and the Guardian Fiction Prize for her first novel (1997), whereas Borkowski was granted a 2012 Toronto Book Award.



## **Chapter Two**

### **Post/Memory of the ‘Old Place’: Janice Kulyk Keefer’s *Honey and Ashes* and Lisa Appignanesi’s *Losing the Dead***

The question of Canadian identity appearing repeatedly among immigrants and their children or even grandchildren has been one of the focal issues of Canadian immigrant texts for decades. To a large degree the idea that “in Canada we are all immigrants” presented by Woodcock (1993: 98) still prevails and as such triggers a search for identity. The ethnic experience remains inherent to Canadian literature or recurrently reappears, notwithstanding whether the narratives are written from the perspective of the first or second generation of immigrants. In their discussion on various forms of life-writing in the Anglophone Canadian literature, Egan and Helms (2004) claim that since the setting of these autobiographical stories is exotic, Canada plays the role of the audience for them, and “in some cases, immigrants’ stories would not be interesting in their country of origin” (2004: 219). While theoretically this statement might be viewed as well-founded, the books based on personal experiences of migration are frequently interesting to readers in the ‘Old Place,’<sup>1</sup> to use Kulyk Keefer’s phrase to name the home country or country of one’s origin, provided that they know English or the texts are translated. They give voice to the silenced stories, facts and fates, which in the Communist times were not debated and sometimes such themes as exile, Polish-Ukrainian conflicts, the trauma of the Holocaust or anti-Semitism, to name only a few, have been painful, thus rarely-discussed, issues.

Every minority narrative gives a rendition of a particular experience. Every form of life-writing, autobiography, memoir, autofiction, the ideal

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Old Place’ is a term Janice Kulyk Keefer uses in her book to refer to the village of Staromischyna cf. *Honey* 3). For the purpose of this chapter the term has been borrowed to denominate both Kulyk Keefer’s roots as well as Appignanesi’s place of origin and, therefore, at times it will be used in a slightly broader sense here.

term would constitute a fusion of all of these and many other sub-genres<sup>2</sup> – relies on a subjective and personal account. The whole body of ethnic literature may be, however, seen as an interesting panoramic view of the ways in which Canada influences immigrants and shapes their desires to start seeking their roots. It is very common in life-writing that after years of adapting to the Canadian way of life, years of learning new languages and customs, not rarely at the end of their lives, first generation immigrants start recollecting their past and their early diasporic experience. Their own or their children's return to the country or place of origin is thus stimulated by the Canadian experience of multiculturalism and sheds new light on the re-discovery of their families' pasts.

In the context of immigrant writing, the interconnectedness of the triad history / memory / place seems to be grounded and substantiated. The inclusion of history into literature has always created tension regarding truthfulness and the urge to collect historical facts. Canadian authors of various backgrounds have dealt with the issue in at least three different ways. Firstly, like in the case of Apolonja Kojder's *Marynia, Don't Cry* or Mary Drzewiecki's *Born and Raised Under a Straw Roof*, the writers insist on narrating "the truth" in the form of a memoir and include many photos and documents supporting their accounts. Secondly, authors such as Michael Ondaatje, in his seminal *Running in the Family*, consciously cross the boundaries of autobiographical writing and immerse themselves in practices which result in the contamination of the genre. Linda Hutcheon, when dealing with Ondaatje's ability to merge different genres, states:

*Running in the Family* is, perhaps, the culmination of Ondaatje's challenges to boundaries, at least thus far: its fragmented collection of memories, research, poems, and photographs works to reconstruct a more immediate and personal history – the writer's own. But to write of anyone's history is to order, to give form to disparate facts; in short, to fictionalize. (Hutcheon 1985: 302)

This is why it is possible to call the book an autobiography, bearing in mind nevertheless, that it has been fictionalized. Moreover, Ondaatje did

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<sup>2</sup> Saul lists a range of recently used terms within the body of life-writing and they include: "autofiction, autobiographics, autobiography, biofiction, self-portraiture, life narrative, autobiographie, and of course biotext" (2006: 5). While some of these terms are used interchangeably in this book it should be noted that it is sometimes difficult to clearly define differences between them.

not create simply his own autobiography, but by fashioning it also into a biography of his father and the whole family, he in fact constructed the text which indeed can be called autofiction or biotext. Hutcheon, both in *The Canadian Postmodern* (1988) and the essay quoted above, emphasizes Ondaatje's ease in crossing the boundaries between the genres, which explains the difficulty of categorizing his text as a novel or an autobiography. Other scholars claim, however, that the book cannot be referred to as autobiography, since Ondaatje employs many different genres, such as:

biography, the novel, and self-portraiture (...) the meaning of *Running in the Family* is inscribed in the registers of its many genres which deconstruct the autobiographical privileging of self-referentiality (...) autobiography in relation to *Running in the Family* is not a genre but a rhetorical trope which reveals the subject's double desire to see the self, verified by writing and to imitate writing. (Kamboureli 1988: 81)

Furthermore, Verhoeven calls the book a "novel-cum-autobiography-cum-biography-cum-travelogue" (1996: 104), and compares it to Barthes's *Roland Barthes*, in which the "family romance" is merged with the "autobiographical journal." More recently, Joanne Saul lists *Running in the Family* as a perfect biotext, suggesting that George Bowering's concept of a biotext is "an extension" (Bowering 1988: 34) of a writer and "a way of privileging literary form as the place where the writer of a specific poem or fiction finds him- or herself" (Saul 2006: 4).<sup>3</sup> Similar cross-generic experiments are visible in other immigrant Canadian authors such as Fred Wah, Aritha van Herk, Daphne Marlatt to name just a few. In their biotexts, the authors/narrators' role is not only to present their life stories but also expose the play with the form of the texts, which becomes an equally important aspect of a given book (Saul 2006: 4). Ondaatje's already classical example and also the texts selected for this study prove the rejection of one-sided categorization and objectivization of them. Also, W. H. New notices the importance of such life writing not as solely

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<sup>3</sup> A closer analysis of different variants of life-writing, including 'fictionalisation,' 'biotext,' and others from many ethnic backgrounds has appeared in Egan and Helms (2004). A different, yet extremely interesting perspective, is showed by Marlene Kadar in her *Essays on Life Writing*, where she views this kind of writing frequently as a chance for feminist expression and divides such texts into high-culture and non-high culture personal narratives (Kadar 1992).

narratives of personal approaches to exile or trauma but claims that such writers as Lisa Appignanesi and Janice Kulyk Keefer, among others, have “used the experience of particular heritage to focus more generally on how memory invokes history or how language constructs any quest for truth” (New 2003: 307). In his study, New calls these texts “autobiographical travel narratives” (2003: 307), which refers to yet another dimension of these texts: the aspect of traveling back to the countries of the authors’ roots and their rediscovery of the Old Places.

As a result of having such contexts and intertexts, Canadian writers of Central and Eastern European descent have frequently crossed the boundaries of the genre of autobiography or memoir in an equally creative way. The memoirs offered by the Central and Eastern European immigrants or the second generation already born in Canada address the notions of their parents’ and grandparents’ remembering and forgetting as well as enable the silenced family stories to find their ways into the world. Thus, due to the inescapable argument acknowledging the existence of the subjective patterns of storytelling leading to fictionalization of such accounts, these narratives should not be treated as objective histories of the countries they refer to or the patterns of emigration; even within family discourse they frequently remain in the position of narratives rather than historical diaries or accounts.

The three autobiography-based books discussed in *Forgetful Recollections* have uniformly transgressed the need to always seek and find the truth. Kulyk Keefer, in *Honey and Ashes. A Story of Family* (1998), and Lisa Appignanesi in *Losing the Dead. A Memoir* (1999), traveled to the countries of their origins (the Ukraine and Poland) to discover the Old World and to look for the remaining traces of their forefathers, but at the same time found no birth certificate in the archives (Appignanesi), and no orchard of her grandparents in the village where they had lived (Kulyk Keefer). Karafilly’s search in Poland undertaken earlier and depicted in *Ashes and Miracles. A Polish Journey* (1998) enriched her perception of her mother’s loss of memory due to Alzheimer’s disease, which coincidentally revealed aspects of her past in Russia, Poland, and Israel, the account of which is recorded in *The Stranger in the Plumed Hat. A Memoir* (2000).<sup>4</sup> These notions of

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<sup>4</sup> Although *The Stranger in the Plumed Hat* is subtitled *A Memoir*, the title page is followed by the Author’s Note which says: “Though I have had to change most of the

nothingness encountered by the writers do not invalidate the search or the personal truth found in the quest.

Apart from the aforementioned conventions of writing, i.e. memoir/autobiography and biotext or autofiction, the third type of approach to the migrant experience is to write a novel in which the point of departure is a feeling, a piece of experience, or even a date or a coinciding fact from one's biography which would evolve into a fictional quest for identity. This is what happens in the case of Eva Stachniak's *Necessary Lies* (Anna goes on a scholarship to Montreal in 1981, similarly to Stachniak herself), of Anne Michaels's *Fugitive Pieces* and *The Winter Vault* (in which the characters approach World War II and the Holocaust as a way of dealing with Michaels's Polish-Jewish origins), and of Ravvin's need to rediscover his grandmother's Mlava and Radzanow in *Café des Westens*. The fictional veil does not, however, blur the textual image; conversely, it may actually sharpen it since the authors are allowed to put more into their stories than they have really experienced.

Concurrently, while the three approaches may be creatively transgressed, there is another layer which adds to dialogic practices of diasporic writings. Marlene Kadar, in her entry on life writing, claims that "Canadian life writing, in English and French, is at the forefront of experimental and creative revisions of so-called autobiographical truth, having led the way in generic innovation: consider the creative and fused forms of life writing" (Kadar 2002: 661-662). This is why, fiction which draws on the experience of the author might offer a rendition of the emotional truth of an immigrant writer. Kadar stipulates that "life writing is the first genre of autobiographical writing that privileges the 'I' of the narrative and unmistakably declares its presence to the reader" (2002: 662).

The first generation of immigrants put the effort of making a decision concerning migration, which was in the past an irreversible one and, traveling to a distant and unknown Canada, usually struggled to make their living, to get to know languages of Canada, to make their children's

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names in this book, and once or twice, the chronology of minor events, this is a factual account of my mother's story – the story she kept trying to tell" (Karafilly 2000: no page given). This suggests a departure from a factual memoirist's task of a meticulous narration, in favor of a partially recreated by the daughter, story of Karafilly's mother. The difference is clear when one compares typical autobiographical memoirs such as Kojder's or Drzewiecki's with the whole range of documents and photos supporting the texts to such texts as the ones written by Kulyk Keefer, Karafilly and Appignanesi.

lives easier in the new country. That is why they did not usually write any autobiographies, unlike the first explorers and settlers with their desire to narrate the new place. Typically, these narratives come from the second or third generations of immigrants who feel a need to discover the family history and thus explain their own identities first to themselves and then to others. They are often triggered by their parents' losing memory and, in many cases, by the fact that the closest relatives pass away and there is no one to consult and ask about the family's past. The awareness of not being able to reclaim memories speeds their decisions up and makes the children of immigrants undertake the physical and spiritual quests back. It is usually not their own memory they can rely on, which does not however mean that they do not have any remembrances of their parents' behaviors, words, glances, and silences.

As mentioned in my Introduction, this process of gathering the past out of facts discovered in a quest but also memories and feelings stored and felt by those who have not directly witnessed or remembered certain events or places is defined by Marianne Hirsch as 'postmemory.' The term is employed here to serve the analysis of chosen texts. Anxious of the precise connotations of the concept, Hirsch explains, that the particle 'post' does not directly refer to the idea of being "beyond memory and therefore (...) purely in history" (2002: 22) and states that she views "postmemory [as] (...) distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection" (2002: 22). Post/memory plays an important role in the authors' minds as the process of gathering silenced memories from the parents, who either cannot recall anything due to suppression of memories or do not want to infect their children with their burden, is probably never completed. Hirsch refers in her text to Nadine Fresco's study in which she discusses a similar syndrome but names it 'absent memory' or 'hole of memory' (Fresco quoted in Hirsch 2002: 22, 243). Indeed, the children of Holocaust survivors, as this group is of the main interest to both Fresco and Hirsch, usually have no access to their parents' memories but the existence of the very gap makes it a memory itself, often a terrifying void engaging the minds of their children and thus triggering their search. It is, however, claimed in the present work that the concept of 'post/memory' can refer to any generation devoid of their parents' memories or knowledge about their past for various reasons, also because of not infrequently traumatic past.

The memoirs by Kulyk Keefer and Appignanesi selected for this chapter present an interplay between the need to narrate one's life story (or rather one's parents') and thus look for roots and identity, and the desire to confront their ancestors' memories with the places they refer to. Therefore, both Kulyk Keefer and Appignanesi come back to the Ukraine and Poland respectively to rediscover the Old Places and sieve the memories they have managed to gather from their family through the strainer of time. Both texts explored in this chapter have subtitles, too. Kulyk Keefer's *Honey and Ashes* is followed by *A Story of Family* while Lisa Appignanesi's *Losing the Dead* by *A Family Memoir*. The texts are closer to memoirs or travelogues but some features of a biotext cannot be excluded and will be further discussed in reference to the notion of storytelling and interdiscursitativity, which play an important role in the discussion on the role of lost languages and their impact on shaping one's identity.

### **Janice Kulyk Keefer's *Honey and Ashes. A Story of Family*<sup>5</sup>**

Reading Kulyk Keefer's *Honey and Ashes* is a challenging task for readers. For those of Polish, Ukrainian, or mixed origins (as Kulyk Keefer is herself), it requires a deep and thorough reconsideration of historical perspectives on the mutual Polish-Ukrainian relationships, which were problematic if not painful in the past. The story Kulyk Keefer offers invites another overview of and critical reflection on this past. For Canadian (or other English-speaking) readers not being emotionally tied to the history, the book may pose a certain difficulty not only in the reading of transliterated Ukrainian and Polish names and other words, but also on the referential level, as the author takes for granted some basic knowledge about the past of the lands of today's south-eastern Poland and the Ukraine. It is, however, also the challenge Kulyk Keefer witnesses herself when she undertakes the journey to the Ukraine, as she is simply afraid of traveling through this part of Europe, seen as dangerous in the West, to rediscover the past of her family.

Janice Kulyk Keefer, born in 1953 in Toronto (Sanderson 1997: 610) and educated at the University of Toronto and University of Sussex, is currently a professor at the University of Guelph, a writer and literary

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<sup>5</sup> Parts of the discussion that follows were originally published in Drewniak (2006) and Drewniak (2008).

critic. Although, as mentioned before, her grandparents were of mixed Ukrainian-Polish descent, she was brought up in the Ukrainian culture. In an interview she says: “My father was born in Toronto two months after his parents got off the boat. He’s Ukrainian and that was his first language (...) My mother was born in Poland of a Polish father and a Ukrainian mother” (Nicholson 1992: 400). Being of mixed origins, brought up as a Ukrainian-Canadian, she has been “fascinated by the stories immigrant parents tell their children” (Nicholson 1992: 405) and has written a number of books ranging from poetry, through prose, to a memoir, and critical essays, all of which have addressed this fascination in a certain way. Janice Kulyk Keefer has won many literary prizes, including a nomination for Governor General’s Awards for *Under Eastern Eyes: A Critical Reading of Maritime Fiction* (1987) in 1987 and for *The Green Library* (1996) in 1996. She has also been shortlisted for Books in Canada First Novel Award for *Constellations* in 1988 and received the 1999 Marian Engel Award for her whole literary output as well as the 2008 Kobzar Literary Award for *The Ladies Lending Library* (2007) (Ledohowsky 2013). Kulyk Keefer acknowledges that her interest in where she comes from originated at home where she never received a coherent, smooth, ‘full’ story of the family’s past. This gathering of family’s story is never easy as

what you get is snatches, fragments: you get occasional conversations that you overhear – fascinating anecdotes that you can’t connect adequately in a wider structure of meaning (...) You have to depend on chance overhearings between adults: or sometimes they would volunteer information that comes out of the blue. You feel that you are a part of a puzzle that you know you’re never going to complete, in which the spaces are never going to be filled (Nicholson 1992: 405).

The search for the lost puzzle of a jigsaw and the confrontation with family memory is what Kulyk Keefer predominantly explores in *Honey and Ashes. The Story of Family* (1998a). The desire to look for her origins and her post/memory defines her as an artist situated “on the margins of (...) [her] highly fractured ethno-social group, belonging not to those Ukrainian-Canadians who are part of the prairie homesteading saga, nor to those descendants of prairie pioneers who became émigrés to Toronto, but to those Ukrainians who arrived in Toronto just before or after the Second World War” (Kulyk Keefer 1998b: 97-98, italics original).

*Honey and Ashes* depicts Kulyk Keefer's return to the place of her origin both physically and mentally in order to try to confront the stories based on her parents' memories with the reality of the present day Ukraine. As a result of that, she connects readers of various types: immigrants, Poles, Ukrainians, people of mixed roots, and anybody interested in the processes of searching for one's past, and those who are interested in the diasporic experience.<sup>6</sup> In *Honey and Ashes* she represents the generation of children of immigrants and thus, having some personal insight into the tangled historical relationships, she admits that this other world seemed "as different from the world [she] was born as long-legged storks are different from television aerials" (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 13). *Honey and Ashes* is also the story of the author's grandparents who immigrated to Canada and began a new life far from their family and soil. But at the same time it is a story about their granddaughter, Janice, who tries to discover the past (not necessarily the truth) for herself to make her legacy as a Polish/Ukrainian-Canadian richer and fuller. Kulyk Keefer tries to collect the old family stories from the past, the meaning of repeated words in languages other than English, the image of the mentioned members of her family, as well as places – the *summa* of her familial gift and burden – this "equal spill of beauty and blood," (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 14) "honey and ashes," (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 55) and "poison and ointment" (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 93) that have become her own baggage throughout the years. She comments on the reasons for writing this book in the following way:

For me, *Honey and Ashes* is a bridge between past and present, private and public history, sanctioned and secret stories, and the fraught, often tragic narratives of Poles, Jews, Ukrainians, all of them sharing the charged ground of 'the Old Place' (...) It will be a controversial text,

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<sup>6</sup> This concept is not only explored by Kulyk Keefer in her books, but also in her critical essays. She discusses ethnicity in more philosophical terms as well as the history of her family's migration to Canada in "Personal and Public Records. Story and History in the Narration of Ethnicity" where she claims that ethnicity is the "lived experience of otherness, of difference from the 'given' or imposed sociocultural norm [and it] has been for me both positive and negative: otherness can be a matter of addition as well as subtraction (...) a source of imaginative richness, as well as of anxiety and humiliation" (2000: 5). Another detailed analysis of ethnicity in literature is offered by Kulyk Keefer in "Coming Across Bones": Historiographic Ethnofiction."

and its eventual reception by my family, as well as the Ukrainian, Polish, and Jewish communities in Canada will, I'm sure, be problematic. (Kulyk Keefer 1998b: 108)

This topic has been raised by her in a few other books, prior to the publication of *Honey and Ashes*, in the *Green Library* (1996) where the main character, Eva, visits Kiev as a result of eye-opening discoveries about her past in Canada and thus approaches her Ukrainian heritage from a different angle. This was followed by other books including for example the 2006 *The Ladies' Lending Library* and a theoretical study of the artistic output of William Kurelek and Natalka Husar in *Dark Ghost in the Corner: Imagining Ukrainian-Canadian Identity* from 2005, which is an example of Kulyk Keefer's interest in promoting artists of Ukrainian-Canadian origins.<sup>7</sup>

### **Language**

These tangled Polish-Ukrainian relationships and the whole 'body historic' of the countries in question are referred to in many aspects of the book. One of the first striking elements pertaining to the unsolvable knot of bonds is the language. It is again to be understood in different dimensions. On the one hand, for Kulyk Keefer as a Canadian writer it is obviously English, which becomes the basic means of expression for a Canadian born in Toronto, and this first language serves as the fullest reservoir of expression. On the other, however, her task is to encapsulate her parents' and grandparents' emotions and memories in the story which already pertain to the sphere from before the era of Canada and thus are stored in other languages than English, mainly in Ukrainian but also in Polish and Russian. Yet, there is an overlapping territory of Kulyk Keefer's childhood when she was exposed to the mix of these languages as various songs and nursery rhymes or overheard conversations were coming to her in the mother tongue(s) of the previous generations, which made these languages also in a way Kulyk Keefer's first languages. Nevertheless she never acknowledges

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<sup>7</sup> Kulyk Keefer, apart from her prose works, which include novels, a memoir, critical essays, and short stories, is also the author of poetry, which she usually tries to enrich by adding reproductions of pictures, paintings and drawings. She has included some works by Natalka Husar in one of her recent volumes of poetry *Midnight Stroll* published in 2006 by Exile Editions.

them as her first languages and she has never really possessed a perfect command of them and felt their 'fullness.' Her Canadian education made her grow linguistically in English but at the same time her home made her aware of some otherness, some past to which she did not have access in childhood (Kulyk Keefer 1998b, 2000).

The linguistic problem is one of the first elements which Kulyk Keefer makes her readers conscious of at the beginning of the text<sup>8</sup>. Among the first preliminary information which the author offers is the note explaining the choice of foreign lexis with some hints to the pronunciation of several items and the reasons for mixing certain languages and spellings. The Author's Note (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* xiii-xiv) highlights the transliteration of proper names and names of places, like Tomasz, Katarzyna and Staromischyna, Kyiv, Lwow, Ternopil, and Zbruch. The Ukrainian transliteration prevails over the Russian and Polish ones especially in the names of places, whereas sometimes the Polish names are preserved in their original forms as the families used such versions of their names. Kulyk Keefer also gives the basics of pronunciation to make Canadian readers realize the sounds by comparison to English or French ones.

In the Prologue, the author directs the readers' attention to the perspective she gains as an immigrant turning back in time and space, comparing her task to "looking through the wrong end of a telescope" (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 3), when everything is reversed in scale. She at the same time recalls that migration is not the only reason for this feeling as it dates back to the history of the place in question. The village of her ancestors, Staromischyna, "a name that means roughly, 'the Old Place' (...) belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire; twenty years and a world war later, [her] (...) mother was born in the same village as a citizen of a newly created Polish Republic. Twenty-three years on, after yet another world war, Staromischyna became part of the Soviet Union" (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 3-4). In a very brief note the author thus explains the 'Babel tower-type' nature of her experiences. The stories she was offered as a child together with her observations of her grandparents who, as

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<sup>8</sup> Apart from the motto, there are maps of Eastern Europe from pre-world war period and from post-Communist era and a family tree offering an organized insight into the histories of the two families. The genealogical tree reflects the convoluted history of these terrains as the theoretically Polish and Ukrainian sides of the families both exhibit a mixture of names never really sustaining their 'Polishness' or 'Ukrainianness'.

émigrés, had always felt lost in Canada, triggered her need to express the tangled emotions in the book. The intricate languages, she uses in *Honey and Ashes*, seem to illustrate this enormous toil.

Kulyk Keefer's commitment to making the story personal, and as 'truthful' as possible is evident in the inclusion of the family tree and unchanged names of her family members. There is also a temptation to introduce a larger, historical perspective:

Remembering the stories I was told of the Old Place, I began to ask myself about the larger world surrounding them – what were its politics, its history? Who else besides my family lived within its borders, whose stories hadn't I heard? (...) This curiosity meant following what had been private images, family myths, into the vortex of context – a public world full of other people and events that the storytellers of my childhood had never known, or had forgotten or suppressed (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 4-5).

That is why there is a constant switch in *Honey and Ashes* from the personal to the historical dimension, from the local, village based experience to the global and political emanation of history. The author admits her unawareness of these issues till she reached the age of forty, when it is probably natural to ask questions concerning origins. It may coincide with the decease of the generations of one's parents and grandparents. Frequently, it becomes not only the moment of a recapitulation but also the last chance to ask the departing from this world about the past. A very similar range of motives can be found in Lisa Appignanesi's *Losing the Dead* (1999) and Irena F. Karafilly's *The Stranger in the Plumed Hat* (2000), where it is both dying and losing memory that push the authors to try to reclaim the past from their last relatives. It seems, however, unfeasible to escape from one's past, as Kulyk Keefer writes:

Why do we become obsessed with where and whom we come from? With that country mapped by genetic repetitions that gives me, for example, my grandmother Olena's near-sighted eyes, my grandfather Tomasz's height and temperament? Repetitions, variations, borne by my children and whatever children they may have. Family, it's been written, 'is all we know of infinity, the insolence of fate.' (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 15).

Impossible as it is, it is rather a matter of necessity to make head against one's memories than to try to suppress them, even though they may

assume the shape of an unbearable burden. As the texts analyzed in this book demonstrate, once explored, this burden becomes frequently exchanged into a gift, a reward full of treasures, though reaching them is not infrequently a result of a painful process of self-discovery<sup>9</sup>.

The earliest memories of Kulyk Keefer's childhood refer to the safety of her family, in the vicinity of western parts of Toronto where she was born and brought up in the 1950s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Despite the reasonable peace of such existence she recalls the feeling of being haunted "by another house, another landscape" (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 13) and this intense feeling of living in a double state of mind is multiplied during Kulyk Keefer's early years by language: "when I was a child, and my mother spoke in her own language that was never mine, shouted or laughed at something I'd done just as her own mother had shouted or, far more rarely, laughed, I hardly knew where or when or even who I was. Except that I was split and doubled: wanting nothing else than to be haunted" (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 13-14). This summoning of the ghosts of the past becomes almost like a narcotic trance requiring more and more input and, once the stories are exploited, Kulyk Keefer resorts to an undertaking (still seen as a journey into the unknown as the 1997 Ukraine must have seemed) both captivating and dangerous, the travel to the Staromischyna, the Old Place, to visit the house of her mother's birth.

However, her knowledge of the places and of the earlier generations is initially shaped by what she hears from her parents. It relies on the nature of storytelling, selective and fallible from time to time, though simultaneously the most powerful source of inspiration: "Sometimes, as a story's being told, a chance word lights up years and years of forgetting, and I see my grandparents once more, if only the shape of their shadows" (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 15). It turns out that such conjuring up of ghosts is done on every day basis in her family and, being born and raised in Canada, "a place as blank, as free" (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 15), does not prevent her family from the Lockean practice of filling in the white sheet of their children's experience with the past stories. Therefore the *tabula rasa* of Kulyk Keefer's existence is satiated to a large extent with a language and tradition she does not understand.

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<sup>9</sup> This concept of burden and gift in Janice Kulyk Keefer's memoir is discussed in Drewniak (2006) and Drewniak (2008b).

Emotions of anger and joy are best expressed in the language which one knows fully, that is why Kulyk Keefer recalls the members of her family yelling and laughing in the foreign language. It created a barrier which she herself could not fully cross. As simple as such feeling are, she surely understood the emotions, though she did not recollect the profound communion with the words. It is the desire of the fullness of the relationship between a mother and a daughter, and a painful reconsideration of some foreign territory to which she has no access. In a reversed way, it is the same emotion that Eva Hoffman recollects in her seminal *Lost in Translation* (1998), saying: “I have only a memory of fullness to anguish me with that knowledge that, in this dark and empty state, I don’t really exist” (Hoffman 1998: 108). Hoffman longed for the fullness of expression which she knew from the Poland of her childhood and youth, whereas Kulyk Keefer becomes aware of the fact that she does not participate in the fullness her mother once felt, and that the linguistic border separating her from her ancestors’ world lies deep and is therefore a focal element of her own personality.

In a number of examples Kulyk Keefer gives in her memoir, one of the most suggestive refers again to the formation of a child’s psyche as she recounts abundant moments when she was being sung lullabies and nursery rhymes:

Perhaps the lullabies express it best, the kind of world in which children grew up without kisses, without toys. A lullaby like this one, which my mother writes down for me, adding, ‘It’s a good thing the babies didn’t understand the words’:

*ah-ah, ah-ah, ah-ah, ah,  
zily vovky barana  
a yahnychky zyily psy  
ochka zazhmury  
ty dytynko spy, spy, spy.*

(...) My mother, my aunt would have learned it with their bodies, their very breathing:

*ah-ah, ah-ah, ah-ah, ah,  
the wolves ate tha ram  
the dogs ate the lamb  
close your eyes, my little one,  
sleep, sleep, sleep.”*

(Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 100-101, italics original).

Having been shaped through such songs as well, Kulyk Keefer also realizes the psychological depths to which the past of her ancestors has

reached. Without the full comprehension of particular words, devoid of the awareness of this process of creating a double identity, she has been formed as a progeny of immigrants, being Canadian at the same time. The above quotation is not the only instance of Kulyk Keefer's mother using the language of her past as the book offers a whole ranges of examples such as: "moyeh poleh" (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 113, italics original). "shafa" (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 30, italics original) "skrynia" (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 45, italics original) and many others.

The reference to the phrase "moyeh poleh" requires some contextual explanation as it shows her maternal grandmother's attitude to emigration. She was dying with grief concerning her lost fields ("moyeh poleh" means 'my fields'), which were alluded to in her final words as well as reflected on the surveyor's maps and contracts for renting the fields she kept as a treasure still in Canada. Together with the bunch of other photos and documents from the past is the ticket for the transatlantic voyage undertaken in 1936 by Janice's grandmother and her children, which had been bought and paid for by her grandfather. This adds to this mixture of tongues as the tickets are from Gdynia to Halifax and Kulyk Keefer copies the Polish text (though without the diacritical marks); she also mentions a whole selection of languages in which the tickets were reprinted: Ukrainian, German, Finnish, Lithuanian, Hebrew and many others (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 111-112).

Language has always been a component conducive to the formation of one's identity. It is the subject matter of Hoffman's *Lost in Translation*<sup>10</sup> and many other immigrant stories. The language of Kulyk Keefer's parents' past which turns out to be a further mixture of the Ukrainian, Polish and Russian seems to have played a very important role in her own personality development. The powerful metaphor of crossing the river, which the author uses throughout the text, illustrates the problem as well. Wading in the waters of the bordering river is the sum of her experience as neither shore offers the full understanding. This epiphany comes to Kulyk Keefer when she sits on the bank of the Zbruch river in the today's Ukraine: "I could walk across the Zbruch as if it were still and shallow as paper. And (...) all I'd find when I crossed the water would be the same shore where I'm sitting now. (...) My skin feels written over with stories" (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 299).

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<sup>10</sup> It is discussed in detail in Drewniak (2009).

### **Hi/storytelling**

*Honey and Ashes* is subtitled *A Story of Family* and offers a photo of Kulyk Keefer's relatives on the front cover as well as a selection of pictures inside the book. With these aspects in mind, the text can be placed in the context of the rapidly growing section of auto/biography. But Kulyk Keefer's choice of subtitle must have been conscious and, despite her attempt to render the family history as close to truth as it is possible, she does not exclude the inevitability of fallible memory and lack of access to the 'truth'. She suggests that there might not be one 'Truth' that explains all decisions of her relatives at all. Being of both Polish and Ukrainian roots and living in the times when borders and state affiliation change faster than new generations arrive there is no simple and comforting truth which could create an umbrella shelter for all the – sometimes conflicting – stories she has learned about her family. Moreover, with the suggestive subtitle, Kulyk Keefer distances herself from her family and from the duty of being the ward of the only version of her history.

From the opening pages of the Prologue readers are informed unambiguously what kind of convention Kulyk Keefer uses when she explains:

*Honey and Ashes* is, more than anything, a story of family. I do not claim to know or tell The Truth about my family; what I am doing is sieving memory and retelling the stories that make memory material, and public. The difference between what I was told and what I heard; what memory hides and what imagination discloses – all this is part of the book I have written. (Kulyk Keefer *Honey* 5, capitalization original)

Notwithstanding the obvious cultural differences, similar endeavors are visible in Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*, where storytelling is the only possible mode to arrive at the family hi/story without any guarantee that it is fully objective. Here Kulyk Keefer tries to equip her text with certain paratexts which would make the whole story more reliable as, in contrast to Ondaatje, her aim is not to lie consciously<sup>11</sup>. At the very beginning

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<sup>11</sup> It is hard to claim that Ondaatje consciously "lies" in his book, but when, usually having already read the story, the reader spots the famous sentence included in the Acknowledgements saying that "... in Sri Lanka a well-told lie is worth a thousand

there is a page devoted to the memory of her grandparents Olena Levkovych Solowska and Tomasz Solowski with the dates of their births and deaths and an inscription in Ukrainian: *vichnaia pam'iat'* (original transcription), followed by a motto from Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*:

There is so little to remind us of anyone – an anecdote, a conversation at table. But every memory is turned over and over again, every word, however chance, written in the heart in the hope that memory will fulfill itself, and become flesh, and that the wanderers will find a way home, and the perished, those whose lack we always feel, will step through the door finally and stroke our hair with dreaming, habitual fondness, not having meant to keep us waiting long. (*Honey*, no page given)

These references to the power of memory and its futility at the same time shed some light on Kulyk Keefer's attempt to narrate the story of her family. These significant words concerning memory fulfilling itself are repeated near the end of Kulyk Keefer's story (*Honey* 323) to seal her desire to fuse the dead with the living, the two places, and both the retold as well as just imagined stories. Then there are two pages with maps of the terrains in question from 1936 and 1997, together with a concise description of the change in names of places to give the Canadian reader necessary background information about the history of the lands. Kulyk Keefer has also included a genealogical tree with the presentation of the two families and a short Author's Note mentioned in the subsection on language.

On the level of factual information, the book is a story of Kulyk Keefer's grandparents immigration to Canada and the lives that they, and their relatives, were able to make. What precedes the event, though not necessarily chronologically in the narration, is a discussion of the reasons for such a decision and of their mixed roots. Her grandfather Tomasz first left Staromischyna for Canada some nine years before his wife, Olena joined him<sup>12</sup>. She and her daughters reunited with him after almost a decade,

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facts" (Ondaatje 1984: 206), the approach to the objectivity of the narrated hi/story is subject to doubt.

<sup>12</sup> Kulyk Keefer explains her usage of her grandparents' given names as another element of the convention of storytelling because in her childhood she used diminutives. She has resorted to the use of more official names: "to gain enough distance to write of my immediate family, and partly to show the slippage between my family's actual lives and how I've presented them. Though I've tried to be as accurate as possible, I know

and after buying a small piece of land in Canada they were able to start thinking about the construction of a new home. At the same time, there are parallel stories of other relatives left in the Ukraine, both living and dead<sup>13</sup>.

Canada offers a better life for the children. It is not acknowledged by Olena at first and it is Tomasz who sees it. He is the one who consoles their daughters and who buys them the “everlasting candy,” as they call chewing gum, to make them happier in Canada than they would be back in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Poland, the Soviet Union, or the independent Ukraine, as this is the 20<sup>th</sup> century history of the lands of Staromischyna. Olena’s initial harshness with her daughters is softened by Tomasz’s love, but, when he dies, Olena has to live alone in Canada, a country which she has not chosen. It is unquestionable in *Honey and Ashes* that emigration and the search for a new home and new identity is not easy, both for the first generation of immigrants as well as their children and grandchildren. The author refers to it in different places of the book as the eponymous “honey and ashes” (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 55).

As Kulyk Keefer writes, being an immigrant makes one experience a double identity, and even the perception of the new world becomes shadowed by the past and consists of two contradictory aspects: the sweetness of honey, beauty and healing ointment and the torment of ashes, blood, and poison. Indeed, the burden of living in Canada has for Olena’s children, Natalia (Janice’s mother) and Vira, a taste of both a ‘prison’ of alien habits and conventions as well as the hardships of the initial period and freedom of opportunity. The girls were already determined to comply with the novelty of the lives to come during their voyage to Canada on the ship *MS Pilsudski*, where they had to start wearing shoes from the first day, not only on Sundays as it had been in Staromischyna. However hard for the girls, it is not the worst problem. When they settle down, Olena has to work

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I must have introduced errors into the stories I’ve retold. I also know that these stories, in being translated from one language to another, have had some of their most important resonances altered or extinguished. And as for the secret stories I have come across, they are no more or less The Truth than any of the others. For we never give ourselves entirely away, least of all to ourselves. We keep something back, even in the most urgent confession” (*Honey* 6, capitalization in the original). This offers another dimension of the hi/storytelling perspective that we are presented with. No one ever knows the whole truth and, as a result, any autobiographical writing partially takes up the form of a story.

<sup>13</sup> Parts of this discussion and conclusions that follow were originally published in Drewniak (2006).

very hard to earn their living as it turns out that Tomasz has a back problem and suffers from severe pains. Cheated in the factory where she works, Olena realizes she has to learn English to be able to fight for her rights. The burden of change “from a thatched and clay-floored cottage to a downtown rooming house, from the quietness of carts and horses to the screech and slam of the city traffic” (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 122) is difficult, and they start to doubt whether they are able to adjust. They experience the pain of unbelonging. What is even worse, they left the Old Place so far behind that it seems there is no way to go back. They have immersed themselves into a life that is totally foreign, and feel they will never be capable of adopting the manners of Canada. Even paying for food such as milk, eggs or bread is a shock. At home they rarely paid for anything, only for goods one could not produce in the household, such as tea. As a result, Vira notices that “home is a place where she never went hungry” (*Honey* 123). The lack of any command of English makes Olena even refuse relief money from the Canadian government, because she thinks it would be treated as a sign of not being able to support themselves, and the authorities would send them back to Poland.

With time, however, migrancy shows its positive side as well. It starts having the taste of the liberating freedom of choice and opportunities for the daughters. From the first day of shock, experienced when eating a banana to the following years of schooling (e.g. *Honey* 119-124), they start to perceive Canada as a land of plenty: both materially and spiritually. Education is one such possibility to have a better life. Having herself been deprived of it, Olena, decides that her daughters should get as little formal education as it is only possible. It is thanks to teachers that Natalia (Janice’s mother) went to the Toronto School of Design and Vira was given money to buy books and went to study medicine. With these first helping acts of their wonderful teachers, whose names are almost sanctified in the family, the new period of life starts for the immigrant children. The Canadian land of opportunities offers most of all freedom of choice. It is Natalia’s trip to New York as a novice designer and her first night not only far from her mother but alone in a hotel room that mark her perception of Canada. However, choices also require bravery to go against the American habit of getting richer and aspiring higher, when Janice marries poor and decides to live in a small, shabby, rented room, her mother comments: “This is the kind of place we had to live in when we came to Canada. Don’t tell your Nana [Olena] – it would kill her” (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 143).

The author mentions that memories of the past started to haunt her with great intensity when her children grew up and she became a middle-aged woman, probably because the fervor of youth, her own growing up and starting a family were also important aspects of constructing her identity (adopting the roles of a woman, mother, writer). Only then did she realize that in order to free herself from this memory trap, she had to pit herself against the place of her origin. By doing so, she could fill in this lack and enrich herself as well as change this burden into a positive bond. It is then that she decides to undertake a journey to the Old Place, to the place that was home for her grandparents and her mother. In order to understand the past, Janice Kulyk Keefer studies the troubled history of the lands that were annexed by the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy – Czechoslovakia, Poland, the Soviet Union, and the Ukraine. She also starts asking questions about the origins and nationality of her grandparents.

By looking into the roots of Olena and Tomasz and the history of their lives, Kulyk Keefer realizes it might be impossible to find one ready-made definition of their grandparents' belonging. It is true that they once had a place called home but it does not mean they did not struggle with the burden of identity back in Staromischyna. Tomasz Solowski, a Pole, with a typically Polish name, whose family feels Polish (his sister Adela lives in Poland and feels Polish) is a Ukrainophile who marries Olena Levkovych, a Ukrainian girl, whose mother also had a Polish surname (Sikora). Natalia says that asking about nationality in such a context "does not make sense" (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 173) and in this way signals that arriving at a homogenous definition of one's nationality is also out of the question. The Solowskis, as well as other similar families of the region, are torn between two cultures, languages, religions, and have migrancy in their hearts. Their home countries have often been subject to invasions and wars. The identity problem for the Solowskis' descendants is not only a question of coping with Canadian newness, but involves a confrontation with the mixed identities of the Polish-Ukrainians, whose relationship is one of the most troubled cases of hostility between nations in Europe.

Consequently, in order to verify her hypothesis about the torn identity of her family, Janice undertakes a journey to the Ukraine. It is both a physical and spiritual quest to the place of her mother's birth to see the roots of this split with her own eyes. To explain the necessity of such an undertaking that, still in 1997, causes doubts and dissuasions, she confesses:

For however Canadian I know myself to be, I feel defined in some way by this other country I've hardly set foot in, whose language I can barely speak. It's as though I looked down on a bright day to discover I had two different shadows, leaning in opposite directions, touching only at the base. Neither sketches my true shape. They will never merge into one. But I know that both will always be part of me, and that this journey I'm about to undertake is another way of looking for my shadows. (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 217)

The discussion concerning her perception of the Old Place as well as her mother's and grandparents' attitude to Canada as a homeland follow in the subsequent sections. What is important to establish at this point is the sense of the unknown that Kulyk Keefer has faced all her life, along with the profound conviction that she belongs somewhere else.

### A Fragmented Image

The appearance of stories in *Honey and Ashes* is inevitably connected with the gaps which emerge along the way for the narrator. Such a fragmented perception is typical of all the renditions of the past but it is the awareness of these gaps that makes the most selective memoir a truthful one. Staying as close to the truth of not remembering everything or not giving everything away even in the most truthful confession, to use Kulyk Keefer's words (*Honey* 6), constitute the foundations of this memoir. The fabric of the story is always full of holes (*Honey* 6), the weave never attaining the ideal perfection. It is so as a result of mixing history with fiction in the stories that are offered. Olena's and Tomasz's lives, after they marry in 1920, are in a symbolic way intertwined with the tangled Polish and Ukrainian history, which the Zbruch river represents; the latter being echoed in the victory of Marshal Pilsudski's army over the Red Army (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 18-19). Then, parallel to their emigration to Canada, Kulyk Keefer discusses Polish-Ukrainian painful history, including the actions of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army as well as the massacre in Volhynia. The author also mentions the policy of the Nazis towards these lands and their ethnic minorities (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 184-185).

Despite the necessity to at least briefly explain the large-scale, global history, what Kulyk Keefer does is a fusion of such accounts, including data about numbers of people killed, countries torn apart, together with

the enchanting storytelling of childhood (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 24-25). It is this period which made the future author desire to shape the world through stories. From stories about knights and princesses, through the old family stories of survival of winters with the salted pork stored in the attic and the embroidery of the pillows (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 24-25) to the stories of how Olena was beaten by her mother for the smallest faults and misdemeanors or Olena's beloved and long-awaited brother struck and killed by lighting at the age of seventeen. Another important example refers to Olena and Tomasz's marriage into which they entered without the familial consent due to the lack of proper land as well as religious and national tensions which started to be visible at that time (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 36-37). Kulyk Keefer tries to give an account of all these and many more stories relying on her mother's memories and what she was able to gather from various letters, texts, documents and photos, but there is always a conviction that "there would have been things unspoken or said beyond my hearing" (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 57). This statement, despite its direct reference to one of the aunts who visited them in Canada, has a wider reference to the whole process of storytelling as no one is ever able to give a full account of any family, any country, any hi/story. Apart from the quandary whether these are true and full accounts of the past lives, there are also missing stories in *Honey and Ashes*. One of the most mysterious is the story of Tomasz's half-brother, Volodko, of whom very little is rendered and known (*Honey* 26). These gaps in the weave trigger some other considerations.

Occasionally, Kulyk Keefer explains these gaps as sparks of illumination when she has to extract a story from her mother or to make up a story on the basis of photographs: "Sometimes, as a story's being told, a chance word lights up years and years of forgetting, and I see my grandparents once more, if only the shape of their shadows" (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 15). As far as photographs are concerned, the author declares: "They tell us nothing but the truth: the truth someone – if only the photographer – has wanted us to see. Or else the truth that's somehow drawn by the flash of light hitting their skin, truth startled into showing" (*Honey* 59). It is missing truth, or in other words, the gaps in the fabric, that makes Kulyk Keefer undertake a journey to the Ukraine to rediscover the place of her mother's birth and her grandparents' lives. She also sees these gaps as a trigger of the discussion on memory which the memoir at some point becomes. The question, asked probably by any immigrant,

'who am I?', pushes Kulyk Keefer to reconsider her identity as well to look into the past:

When they [the family members] talk of the manure heaps and blossoming orchards of the Old Place, or of the school where, for punishment, they had to kneel on mounds of dried peas, my aunt Vira, my mother Natalia become the most fascinating strangers to me: the children they once were. Or perhaps I take on through them the eyes and ears of childhood, so that the world becomes once more a startling place, all its dead skin peeled away. Sometimes, as a story's being told, a chance word lights up years and years of forgetting, and I see my grandparents once more, if only the shape of their shadows. (*Honey* 15)

Being mapped by stories and genes as well as by geographic origins, that is by the physicality of one's ancestors and the hi/stories they brought into one's lives, appears to be a central motive of Kulyk Keefer's travel. Yet another important element of the task is her realization that this might be the very last chance when she is still young and vigorous, and her children are mature enough to participate in the travel and to understand the need as well as the outcome of the knowledge that is supposed to be gained during the trip.

It, however, turns out that the finalization of the travel is a bit different as her son rejects the idea of looking for his great-grandparents' village and Kulyk Keefer travels with her husband alone fearing the long drive through Poland and into the Ukraine. It is both a physical and spiritual quest to the place of her mother's birth to see the roots of this split with her own eyes. Strangely enough, it turns out that the awareness of the impossibility of leveling this split and creating one homogenous identity is present in Kulyk Keefer. She knows from the very beginning that she will stay torn, yet the journey is necessary and inevitable in order to have a first-hand experience, to pay homage and to testify on behalf of her mother that the other world, the Old Place, still exists. The importance of the journey, not only as a means of physical discovery, but also a spiritual revelation, is immense. As Britta Olinder claims, it might be treated as "the effect of the journey of immigration on the next generation" (Olinder 2003: 50).

Before Janice and her husband, Michael, leave for the Ukraine, there are numerous problems connected with planning the trip. She is refused a Ukrainian visa in the London Embassy, and feels "the incomparable trauma of rejection" (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 224). Furthermore, she has

bad dreams of dangers awaiting them in the Ukraine. In Canada they are free and safe, Canada is ‘here,’ home, while the Old Place is ‘there,’ the risky and dangerous ‘Arctic.’ (*Honey* 220, 226-227). They also have to leave their sons, who are not interested in seeking for the ghosts of the past as they “don’t feel split or doubled but just Canadian, and (...) [they] carry different burdens than my own” (*Honey* 237).

Although the drive feels them with anxiety, journeying through Poland and the Ukraine turns out to be quite comfortable and safe (except for the conditions of roads), and the Polish-Ukrainian border appears not a place where only mafia rules but where Kulyk Keefer hears her grandmother, Olena at the back of her head saying “*The only reason we left home was so that you would never have to*” (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 241, italics original). Her leaving for the Ukraine was seen by Kulyk Keefer’s family as leaving home forever and exposing herself to a fatal danger. The false images of Poland and the Ukraine of 1997, as being still under a kind of regime that may close the borders without notice, negatively disposes Kulyk Keefer and her family towards this travail.

Not only the journey but the whole place seems different. The Old Place is not the Staromischyna that has survived in the memories of her mother and grandmother. The people living there are not the same as before the war as a result of war atrocities and displacement. Kulyk Keefer, who wanted to check the half-true stories against reality, comes to the conclusion that this task is totally impossible, and she feels as a “voyeur whose vision, even when corrected by glasses, will remain imperfect, only half-true” (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 244).

The people whom she meets do not remember much or cannot speak English or German. They also sometimes do not want to speak, since telling stories about the past might awaken the ghosts of the war, the victims of the unspeakable crimes committed by the Soviets and the Nazis. Kulyk Keefer knows she cannot press the people, but at the same time she feels she will come out with nothing. She does not find the graves of her mother’s siblings and the traces of her father’s half-brother. They are lost in the chaos of the two wars and the silence of gulags. The Old Place has been now converted into a Soviet type of village with tin roofs, electricity and complaining people who do not see anything wrong in turning the orchards in which her grandparents vowed love to each other into a field of potatoes. In terms of getting to know facts at the Old Place, the journey is therefore a failure, and when at the end Kulyk Keefer is “standing at the edge of this

blank and shrunken river, where reality seems to confound or abolish memory, enchantment stops" (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 299).

Nevertheless, there are brief moments when Kulyk Keefer feels she has done the right thing. These moments appear to be sacred not only because they happen in a church and cemeteries but also because they make her come as close as possible to the deceased members of her family. Getting to know one's roots is a hard business, as close to suffering as possible, but at the same time it is captivating and liberating, no matter how contradictory it seems to be as there are "[s]o many stories of love mixed up with fear, the way poison and ointment might mix together, making a salve that burns as it tries to heal" (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 93). Being mapped by stories and tattooed by places her mother and grandparents knew and loved, Kulyk Keefer's book once again inscribes itself into the great body of Canadian migrant writing, displaying an intertextual resemblance to Ondaatje's philosophy of narrating family stories.<sup>14</sup> The author realizes that the knowledge about one's identity is a process of self-discovery rather than the moment of reaching the goal. Such moments do not usually appear at all as the illuminative truths do not come easily: "Perhaps there's no such thing as a true story, just the echoes between different versions, and the desire to know, that keeps us speaking, and listening, at all" (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 62).

Having experienced many disappointments as well as enchantments, Kulyk Keefer discovers one important truth for herself. The inborn split is an inevitable aspect of the condition of a migrant. Being trapped among the memories of her family does not mean a lack of liberty. She understands that choosing between the Old Place and Ontario is not a solution; neither is deciding whether her antecedents were of Polish or Ukrainian nationality. Linda Hutcheon also claims that we should not become obsessed with the two sides of 'hyphenated' identities, since in Canada everyone can in fact be hyphenated when looking carefully, either as British-Canadian, Scottish-Canadian or Ukrainian-Canadian. It "bother[s] you if you need a single coherent sense of citizenship or nationhood. My postmodern soul feels happier with plurality." (Hutcheon 2000: 289)

In his explanation of the structure of investigation into the vast body of memory and history, Paul Ricouer says that "To remember is to have a

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<sup>14</sup> In *The English Patient*, Ondaatje explains his belief in being mapped forever by the experiences we have in life (1993: 261), whereas in *Running in the Family* the already mentioned storytelling is a means of mapping the history of a family (1984: 206).

memory or to set off in search of a memory" (2004: 4). This statement ideally fuses the quest for the missing memories with the very process of reclaiming and reaching them. For Kulyk Keefer it coincides with "Establishing our right to exist in relation to that past; claiming a place for ourselves in the future, for whatever we make to leave behind us" (*Honey* 95). This joint experience of both the past and the future is her answer to the quandary 'who am I'. Only through the attempt to look into the past, only through the endeavor to reach the hidden well of memories can she acknowledge the identity and a creative approach to it. The process of remembering or possessing memories is never completed as the Ukrainian village of Staromischyna is never fully rediscovered (it is not the Staromischyna her grandparents left many years ago after all): "I hold in the cup of my hand: lost home, remembered. Memory is a house we may visit again and again, as long as mind and body last" (*Honey* 157).

After Kulyk Keefer's leavetaking, she sums up her voyage as well as the importance of remembering in the following way: "Are we, in the end, only what we can remember? Or are we also all that lies deep inside us, stored in the niches of a long, dark corridor whose door we shut behind us long ago? The painfulness of remembering – the physical process of recall. How we speak of triggering memory, as if it were a loaded gun?" (*Honey* 320). For her, then, memory is not only what she can remember, as if physically, what she is able to name and express. It is also constituted out of these question marks in the quotation, out of the niches, and out of what is not remembered. Such a convoluted and perverse way of understanding memory seems to dominate the book. The only way to come closer to these missing links is to narrate the stories, that is to give the memories a shape of a narrative: "Memory [is] invisible until it becomes story, though story itself can be as different from what truly happened as the flood's milk-and-coffee colour is from the clearness of waters" (*Honey* 324-325).

The recurrent metaphor of waters and rivers which dominates in Kulyk Keefer's book coincides with a metaphor of borders. Crossing the physical borders between Poland and the Ukraine, Canada and Europe as well as psychological borders between the old and the new worlds, between sentiments and resentments, between the nationalities of her grandparents<sup>15</sup>, and between the past and the future require a map. The

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<sup>15</sup> An important, though, not fully developed motif of borders in *Honey and Ashes* is Kulyk Keefer's reflection on her grandparents' marriage as it was a marriage between a

desire to avoid being lost seems to be the chief motif in *Honey and Ashes*. The following citation appears to be an answer to the question about these borders and the response to the dilemma of hi/storytelling:

Borders take you under as well as over. Into places where the past is stored; into the present that's made up of this past, in the way valleys are made up of the rivers that once rushed through them. The past I venture into now is that larger public world holding my family's private stories. In them, this larger world possessed the transparency of ghosts, their visible elusiveness. I must look for it now on a different kind of map, one that will show me the places my family's stories skirted as if they were chasms. Places in a world where history and politics are a thick tangle of embroidery, with blood, not thread, stitching the pattern.  
Here I am, at the border between story and history, personal desire and a shared reality over which I have no more power than I do over my dreams. (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 162-163)

### The Old Place and Canada

The travel undertaken by Kulyk Keefer inevitably calls for a comparison of the two places her grandparents lived in and considered as their homes: the Ukrainian village of Staromischyna and Canada. Despite their young age,<sup>16</sup> Olena did not feel comfortable in Canada for a long time. In a way, she remained faithful to the Old Place by keeping the documents stating her ownership of a land she once possessed in Staromischyna, although she was informed of the Soviet nationalization of all such lands. Kulyk Keefer even recounts that “in many ways [her grandparents] brought the Old Place with them when they crossed the ocean, hiding the past in embroidered shirts, the folds of woven rugs” (*Honey* 14). Tomasz,

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Pole and a Ukrainian in the convoluted times of Poland’s brief period of independence. She refers to it in the book from time to time: “I wonder again at the transgression of my grandparents’ marriage – a Ukrainian marrying a Pole, even a half-Pole and Ukrainophile, as Tomasz Solowski was. And I wonder too (...) about the borders in her [Tomasz’s half-sister] own heart between Ukraine and Poland” (*Honey* 183).

<sup>16</sup> Kulyk Keefer’s grandfather, Tomasz Solowski, was 27 when he left the Ukraine for Canada; he came to the Ukraine once again in 1932 but did not approve of the political atmosphere pervading the country. Olena joined him in 1936 with their two teenage daughters, Natalia and Vira. In the meantime, after Tomasz’s leave-taking, two of their four children died (the twins: Ivan born and dead in 1927, and Marusia who died a year later) (*Honey* xii, 61-77).

however, adopted to the Canadian conditions more easily. Through his hard work, skills, and sheer goodness, he gained position and became famous for his political activism and talents for work (*Honey* 62-77).

It is due to the scattered memories that her mother offered as well as her post/memory, as defined by Hirsch, that two generations later, Kulyk Keefer still feels the Ukrainian part of herself and is inclined to travel back to the country of her origins. She is, however, tormented by the two self-exclusive feelings: the first is the need to find the place and the people who would remember her ancestors, the second, contradictory one of being aware (which does not equal an open testimony to it) of the inevitable changes that the Ukraine has undergone and the fact that there may be no traces of Tomasz and Olena's house, or even their village.

Kulyk Keefer's post/memory and awareness of these also mirror Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* which "block the work of forgetting (...) and materialize the immaterial" (1989: 19) and thus make Kulyk Keefer go back to the past. For Nora, a site of memory is an interplay of history and memory in its many tangled forms and, as such, corresponds to Kulyk Keefer's decision to face the shreds of memory. According to Nora, "It is no longer genesis that we seek but instead the decipherment of what we are in the light of what we are no longer" (1989: 18). She does not remember the place as she was born in Canada but she is the proof of the inherited site of memory and resolves to cultivate it in order to approach it in her own life. Nora's ideas have been mainly adopted within the context of the memories of Holocaust survivors in literature and philosophy so far. But the term can be stretched to other instances of migrant and diasporic experience even though it is not always connected with any particular traumatic past. Hartmut Lutz refers to the same phenomenon using the German term *Heimat*, which precisely defines one's emotional connection to the land of antecedents. He claims that "if *Heimat* is where people's memories know their way around, *Heimat* is also the place where their stories are anchored" (Lutz 2007: 16).

Having come from a small village far from the metropolitan center of Europe, Tomasz and Olena are significantly tied to the soil.<sup>17</sup> The

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<sup>17</sup> It is also mentioned, however, that Tomasz did not have much inclination towards farming despite the fact he was supposed to inherit lands from his parents and even multiply them through an arranged marriage: "In the Old Place people marry not for

possession of a field is treated by them as a sign of belonging and is identified with having a home. "The rich gravity of earth" is described as Olena's "one true home" (*Honey* 30), and Kulyk Keefer offers many stories showing her grandparents' connection to the soil. First of all, there are numerous stories her mother and aunt recall about harvest time, when Olena, as well as other mothers, went to work in the field throughout the whole day, even on Sunday. Their very small children were lying in the fields crying from hunger and loneliness, but nobody could comfort them. Other stories retell cases of children locked up in houses while their parents went to the fields. This attachment is illustrated by the fact that Olena starts feeling at home in Canada when they buy a narrow strip of land. It does not prevent her, however, from refusing to sell the fields left in Staromischyna, and till her very last days she thinks "of the Old Place, and how her house had been torn down after the war; how the fields she'd refused to sell were nothing now but pieces of paper" (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 87). At the beginning of Olena's stay in Canada, she also seeks comfort in nature, but it is difficult and painful for her to exchange the Carpathians for Saskatchewan and the vast coniferous forests for "flat, furrowed, dry" (*Honey* 75) land where one can find waving fields of wheat but no lakes.

At the beginning, Canada is perceived as "a place as blank, as free, as the future itself" (*Honey* 14) with hardly any connotations. Even when Tomasz was sending letters home depicting the place as well as chances for a better life there, it is compared in Olena's memories to "nowhere" and "emptiness" (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 28). Canada is to them at that time "so far away that is hardly exists" (Borges 1974) which ideally establishes an Eastern European perspective on the wider world at this time.

The first encounter with Canada is also highly unwelcoming as upon arriving in Halifax, Olena realizes it is by no means the city she imagined on the basis of what Tomasz had written to her. It is a small port rather than a big city. The impression is also worsened by the compulsory delousing that they undergo in a barn together with others, surviving the doctors' examination naked, then the train journey to Toronto on wooden benches (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 118-119). At the same time, however, Natalia and Vira are offered the first bananas in their lives (119), which comes as an unexpected surprise. Such clashes and juxtapositions would accompany

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love, but land: scattered ribbons of soil from which everything comes, not only wheat and rye and flax, but your entire past, your only future" (*Honey* 34).

them for the months to come. On the one hand, they feel absolutely lost when they encounter the constant differences and clashes between their previous and new lives. On the other, they have to learn to live the new life as small children require some stability. Nevertheless the shock is enormous as “In the Old Place there were no pharmacies, no hospitals, no doctors, unless you were on your way to dying” (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 149). It was the land and children that served as the only warrants of survival. Children’s lives were completely different because “in the Old Place childhood was a time of work, not play; children grew up quickly (...) Things are very different in Toronto, where my mother’s parents are faced with a phenomenon unknown in Staromischyna: adolescence” (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 39). Natalia and Vira are entering puberty, and Olena and Tomasz are unable to see that the changes the children are undergoing are not only a result of migration but would also have happened in Staromischyna. The parents do not know how to react seeing their daughters’ crimson nails or having their hair cut. It is the sign of a girl’s virginity and purity to have long hair and natural nails, this is why Tomasz brings her daughter soap and water to erase the nail polish which proves his total lack of awareness in these matters. Olena is faithful to “the village code of pride” (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 40) and offers her adolescent, in her view rebellious daughters the vision of Atwoodian death by drowning,<sup>18</sup> if they are mistreated by men as a result of having short hair and colorful nails: “If you ever get into trouble, you can walk straight into Lake Ontario” (40).

Kulyk Keefer herself asks questions referring to this transfer of places, lifestyles and values which are the typical questions asked but rarely univocally responded to by immigrants. She ponders over the sudden changes her grandparents had to adjust to: “how do Olena and her daughters survive these sudden, stunning leaps? How do they know who or what they are anymore?” (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 122). This normality that the children had to feel was partially guaranteed by school where they learned English, an immensely important aspect in their growing up, but they also acquired knowledge of who they are step by step and through the speed of everyday life they took part in. Kulyk Keefer sees it as an advantage that her “grandmother had no time to mourn for the Old Place, or lament the new” (*Honey* 30). At the same time, as she writes, school years multiplied the

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<sup>18</sup> In her *Survival* (1972), Margaret Atwood mentions various types of death by nature common in Canadian literature. Drowning and freezing are among the most popular ones.

differences which she also recognizes in her own life. In order to illustrate this point one has to juxtapose the following quotations: “School helped them forget the enormity of what they’d left behind, of what they’d come to; it also helped them to understand that their lives were full of entrancing possibilities, not just worries and dangers” (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 133) and:

The Toronto I grew up in was White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant. Whiteness, in those days, had to do with your skin colour, of course, but also with whether you came from the ‘right’ part of Europe – the western and northern rather than the eastern or southern parts (...) When my mother introduced herself, the neighbour said: ‘I thought people with names like yours cleaned the houses of people with names like ours.’ (...) Growing up Ukrainian in pre-multicultural Toronto meant being part of a community fissured by differences (...) united against *Angliky* trying to assimilate us. (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 192-193)

The quotations show Kulyk Keefer’s perception of her mother and her aunt’s school years with their positive influence. On the one hand, having to learn not only for knowledge but also for life made them function in Canada, find friends and partially assimilate in this pre-Trudeau Canada. On the other hand the differences they spotted or were just reminded of made them constantly realize this difference. At that time, before the feats of multiculturalism of Canada, the Solowskis were still the visible minority despite the color of their skin.

In *Honey and Ashes*, Kulyk Keefer also traces the family’s desire to remain within the circle of migrants and thus to sustain their Ukrainianness. When Janice marries her husband, Michael Keefer, and moves out, her mother keeps the news of her shabby apartment away from Olena. Moreover, the fact that she marries an “*Anglik*” (143) does not act to her advantage. The quandaries of marriages, dress codes, and lifestyles appear frequently in Kulyk Keefer’s texts and signify the center / margin discrepancies according to Colin Nicholson who claims that: “Cultural perceptions of peripheries, margins, and their complex relationships with centres which are anyway matters of relative definition, compose another continuing form of attention in Keefer’s writing, further complicating hierarchies of power” (1992: 403).

The complicated account, written “in order to rescue, from an ocean of silence and forgetting, the remarkable story of (...) [the author’s] grandparents and their children, a story of radical and often traumatic displacement” (Kulyk Keefer 1998b: 108), is recounted as a knot of facts

and memories, stories told and heard, but also stories echoed in the deepest layers of one's heart, snatches of languages and conversations, parts of stories told and silenced. The core of Kulyk Keefer's narration is finding space for one's identity between the two realms: the successful life in Canada and the well of the past. Irresistibly, throughout the whole book, Kulyk Keefer repeats the mantra of the uncertainty of truthfulness: "perhaps there's no such thing as a true story, just the echoes between different versions, and the desire to know, that keeps us speaking, and listening, at all" (*Honey*, 62). In this way, the impossibility of grasping the book as a true account ensures her safe position as the narrator of a story, whereas all the paratexts which can be found inside prove the opposite. This generic complexity, typical of many migrant texts, acknowledged by Ondaatje (1984) and Hutcheon (1985) in one way or another, offers wider space for Kulyk Keefer with her focal motif of uncertainty. Lisa Grekul, in her study on Ukrainian-Canadian writing, claims that:

*Honey and Ashes* seems to question the notion that Ukrainian Canadians can uncover the 'truth' about their pasts through oral stories, written histories, and/or first-hand observations of Ukraine – historical 'facts' are after all, always selectively recorded and subjectively remembered (...) Given that, (...) [Kulyk Keefer] draws upon the conventions of fiction and non-fiction, biography and autobiography, history and travelogue. (Grekul 2005: 142)

If migrant stories share common features the generic complexity is definitely one of them. Literature of any diaspora brings about the question of identity, which Kulyk Keefer also addresses. Her insight into the fates of the members of her family demonstrates such an inquiry as well. It is her grandparents who look for their selves in the new country, with the Old Place lingering in their minds. The same quest can be found in her mother's rhetorical questioning: "There are facts enough in the encyclopedia and history books to constitute a kingdom of knowledge: how will I ever find my way home here? How far back can I imagine the people I come from?" (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 169) until her own statement near the end of her narrative: "And I am left with two rivers: one blue and open to the sky, and one gone underground, its water dense as ashes" (*Honey* 303). In this way she acknowledges the inability to arrive at one, fully coherent history as well as sets the frame for the narrative. Lisa Grekul sees this impossibility as a central motif of Kulyk Keefer's text

and claims it should be interpreted predominantly through these lenses (2005: 142). Post/memory which she lives with, this inherited bunch of memories from the past, defines her family's *lieux de mémoire*.

### **Lisa Appignanesi's *Losing the Dead. A Family Memoir***

Born as Elżbieta Borensztein into a Jewish-Polish family in Łódź, Poland, in 1946, Lisa Appignanesi<sup>19</sup> is a Canadian and English writer and scholar. Her parents Hena and Aaron Borensztein moved to Paris first and, when Elżbieta was five years old, they went to live in Montreal, Canada. She spent her formative years in Canada and graduated from McGill University in Montreal to pursue her literary and scholarly career also outside Canada, mainly in England. Her literary output is extremely varied and she has received a number of prizes including 2009 British Medical Association Award for the Public Understanding of Science for her book *Mad, Bad, and Sad: A History of Women and the Mind Doctors* (2008), whereas her novel *The Memory Man* (2004) won the Canadian Holocaust Fiction Award and was nominated for Commonwealth Writers' Prize. Appignanesi's memoir *Losing the Dead. A Family Memoir* (1999) was short-listed for the Charles Taylor Prize and the Jewish Quarterly-Wingate Literary Prize.<sup>20</sup> Her activism is not limited to literature though. Lisa Appignanesi has been a film script writer and worked for the radio as well as has been involved in the executive of the English PEN Club. Apart from writing thrillers and books based on famous historical figures such as Proust and Freud, she has also worked as a translator (Lisa Appignanesi Profiles for *The Guardian, Crime Time*)<sup>21</sup>. The discussion of two of her texts, *Losing the Dead* and *The Memory Man* will appear in Chapter Two and Three of this study respectively. The interplay between the loss of memory and its regain will be the main aspect of the analysis that follows.

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<sup>19</sup> For the discussion on various variants (Borenstein, Borens etc.) of her maiden name, see Chapter Two. The name Appignanesi is the one she took after her marriage to Richard Appignanesi, a Canadian of Italian origins.

<sup>20</sup> This memoir was translated into Polish by Michał Ronikier as *Żegnając umarły ch. Pamiętnik rodzinny* in 2007.

<sup>21</sup> The number and type of sources concerning Appignanesi's, Karafilly's and Ravvin's lives and writing only support the necessity to include them and their writing into a more systematic and scholarly discussion.

Lisa Appignanesi's non-fiction memoir *Losing the Dead: A Family Memoir* (1999) concerns the process of identity formation of the Holocaust survivors and their descendants. Despite this fundamental difference in comparison to Kulyk Keefer's text, one can trace similar motifs in Appignanesi's approach to her attempt at narrating the family memoir, which have also constituted Kulyk Keefer's inquiry. Both texts discuss the linguistic legacy of Central and Eastern Europe as well as the tension between the places of origin and Canada. It is also significant that *Honey and Ashes* and *Losing the Dead* likewise try to reconsider the perspective that children of immigrants have on the Old Place using the motifs of travel and re-examination of these Central and Eastern European sites of memory. Also, in both texts, this revision is done through Hirsch's idea of post/memory, Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* and Škrabec's imagined geography, mainly due to the fact that the actual places no longer exist in the pre-World War II shape.

The motif of Jewish origins and the legacy of the Holocaust experience have been frequent elements of Appignanesi's literary output, though not the only one, as she has published on psychology, psychoanalysis, women, femininity and many others. By writing about her parents' lives in *Losing the Dead* she tries to draw attention to the value of each memory one can gather and reclaim and, thus, she highlights the reconstruction of the collective memory of the whole generation of Holocaust survivors, who fled from death and tried to live new lives, trapped between a burden of memory and a desire to forget. All the fears, wounds, terror of the past and the uncertain future serve as an illustration of an escape from the Nazi world of death to the Promised Land of Canada<sup>22</sup>.

The reasons for writing such a memoir, which Appignanesi wonders about herself, turn to be multilayered. One of them, also accounted for by Kröller (2004), is connected with the opportunity for the writer to travel to the country of origin, usually in order to make discoveries, to check herself against the memories of the parents. Such an aim also forms one aspect of the book in question as well as pertains to the discussion of *Honey and Ashes*. It is frequent that the authors of memoirs, whose origins can be traced back to the countries from behind the Iron Curtain, decide to visit these countries instead of their ageing or dead parents. As

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<sup>22</sup> Parts of this discussion were published in Drewniak (2009).

Kröller claims, such “long delayed [journeys] by restrictions imposed by Eastern European communist regimes” help “to be reunited with family the narrator barely knows, to visit a village or city conjured up in stories and photographs, and to deal with the traumas – often the Holocaust – that have forced their families to emigrate” (Kröller 2004: 90). In the case of *Losing the Dead*, it is mainly the second cause of visit to Poland, namely to see the places alluded to and depicted by the members of Appignanesi’s family, as well as to see the place of her early years as she left Poland at the age of three. However, the author also voices a strong need, forced by the death of her father and her mother’s loss of memory, to come to terms with the trauma of Nazism and the dystopian world of the War years, which haunted her father at his deathbed. While addressing the reasons for writing this book, truly unique in Appignanesi’s writing career, the author and narrator of the story refers to one more factor influencing her decision made almost twenty years after her father’s death:

I can still occasionally hear his hospital voice evoking a scene [of Nazi terror] I could neither see nor altogether share. Its aura haunts me more persistently than it ought (...) Yet as my son grows into adulthood and my daughter into adolescence, I find myself wanting to root those early shadows – many of which bear the shape of my parents’ experience. Partly because I want to be able to answer my children’s questions about their family. Partly because I am confronted by the sense that mine is the last generation for whom the war is still a living tissue of memory rather than a dusty and barbaric history of facts and statistics.  
(Appignanesi, *Losing* 5-6)

At the same time, Appignanesi insists on a clear perception of what memory is and what it means to base one’s memoir on memory, which “is an emotional climate, a thick set of sights and smells and sounds and imprinted attitude which can pollute as well as clarify” (Appignanesi, *Losing* 6). As a result, the stories she offers are the outcome of her pressing her mother for facts and dates but also a relation of what is remembered in the family.

The book not only presents Canada; rather the country that becomes the place of action and the main subject is Poland. According to Egan and Helms (2004), Canada serves as a huge audience for stories of the Holocaust, trauma, and immigration. This assignment of Canada is an important one as this country, being home to many immigrants, has to

continuously remind itself of its multiculturalism and mosaic of cultures it constitutes. Egan and Helms claim that the immigrant contribution to Canadian literature is “deliberate[ly] (...) exotic” (2004: 219) and “in some cases, immigrant stories would not be interesting in their country of origin; in others they would not even be possible” (219). The problem with White European immigrants today is that they are treated as English-Canadians, especially if they were born in Canada and speak Canadian English as the first language. A group of authors and critics (Hutcheon 2000; Kamboureli 2000; Kostash 2004; Buchholtz 2008) have claimed that not seeing these writers as ethnic silences the diasporic dimension of their writing.

Linda Hutcheon, being herself of mixed origins, notices the problem and sees the tendency to exclude writers who are born Canadians from the group of ‘ethnic’ writers. Comparing this situation to her Italian family’s status in Canada, Hutcheon claims that such groups do not constitute any “visible minorities” (2000: 290) and thus they are frequently excluded from anthologies of ethnic writers, which conflates ethnicity only with race and ethnic writers with writers of colour. The same feeling is shared by Myrna Kostash who claims that despite her Ukrainian origin the fact that she is white made her “a member of a privileged *majority*” (2004: 135, italics original, 1998: 92). In this light, it is important to cite Mirosława Buchholtz’s view on ethnicity, which she explains in her *Canadian Passwords. Diasporic Fictions into the Twenty-First Century*: “I include in my understanding of diasporic fictions not only ethnic minority but also ethnic majority authors...” (2008: 35). In this respect Appignanesi and many other writers, whose origins go back to Eastern Europe, represent definitely ethnic writers who create diasporic fictions. That is why W.H. New locates Polish, Russian, Hungarian and other Eastern European identities within “the range of ethnicities that contemporary Canadian writing represents” (2003: 323).

The issue of categorization, however major and consequential, should be closely associated with the motifs present in writing such an autobiographical text as Appignanesi’s. In the case of Eva Hoffman’s acclaimed *Lost in Translation* from 1989, the book was mainly the study of the new language as one of the most significant determinants of becoming a member of the new world. In each and every example the particular reasons might be a bit different, but a general summary of this type of writing, given by New, is as follows: “Some writers used the experience of a particular heritage to focus more generally on how

memory invokes history or how language constructs any quest for truth" (2003: 307). This combination of the insight into memories, history and the need to know one's legacy is fundamental for Appignanesi's book. Kamboureli in *Scandalous Bodies: Diasporic Literature in English Canada*, locates this literature between faction and fiction, claiming that diasporic writing "is a fictional rendering of the author's own immigrant experience" (2000: 135). Nicola King in her comparative study on Appignanesi's, Dan Jacobson's and W.G. Sebald's books uses another term in the context of generic determinism of texts similar to *Losing the Dead*, namely that of "autobiografictions" (2004: 265), which is a good illustration of the fusion of facts and fiction within the attempt to write one's autobiography and highlighting the inevitable blending.

That is why, any memoir or non-fiction novel, quasi-autobiography, or whatever the attributed label might be, is then suspended between the empirical truth of faction, and the process of fictionalizing which becomes a part of any narrative. Thus, in the context of the current discussion, Kulyk Keefer's *Honey and Ashes* and Appignanesi's *Losing the Dead*, despite the obvious differences resulting from the reasons for emigration from Eastern Europe and the times they focus on, exhibit interesting similarities. They comprise the importance of a silenced, though somehow remembered and stored, language, be it Ukrainian or Yiddish, the framework of memory which, again, though suppressed, reappears in the next generations<sup>23</sup> and the need of recounting and rewriting one's past. In both cases, Kulyk Keefer and Appignanesi, among various scholarly and artistic duties (not connected to brooding over their past), have both returned to the layers of post/memory hidden deep within their minds.

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<sup>23</sup> It is important to note, however, that Janice Kulyk Keefer, born in 1952 in Canada, had different experiences with language than Lisa Appignanesi, born in 1946 in Łódź, who heard only Yiddish and Polish during the first years of her life, contrary to Kulyk Keefer, who heard mostly English in childhood. This remark is partially invalidated, and proves the crucial role of post/memory, as Lisa Appignanesi's brother, born already in exile, had similar, even more poignant and clear memories of the silenced past. It is then definitely not only the place of birth which determines the 'workings' of post/memory.

### Voice/Silence

The beginning of *Losing the Dead* features a discussion on the issue of legacy. It is even the title of the first chapter. In this way, Appignanesi draws upon the heritage she received from her father who, on his deathbed, returned to the past. Unaware of the details of her parents' life during and after World War II, Lisa Appignanesi realizes she lacks certain information regarding her family and her own past. This recognition comes through language as her dying father, oblivious in a diabetes delirium, "with his eyes, two glistening points of feverish pleading in an ashen face" (Appignanesi, *Losing* 3), started to speak Yiddish "a language he hadn't used to address me in for over thirty years" (3). Not only was it a sign of his poor condition and a prediction of his imminent death but also a testimony to the fact that his past, hidden and silenced throughout the years, had not been erased from his memory.

In an explanatory tone, Appignanesi notes her lack of interest in the past, as because of her happy Canadian childhood, it never really drew her attention until her father's illness. Moreover, this coincided with the onset of her mother's Alzheimer's disease and, as a result, the loss of memory. Afraid of being left alone with no kin remembering the past, Appignanesi sets out to elicit information from her mother and to travel to Poland to confront her memories in the country of her origin. Appignanesi's family after a few years in Warsaw and Łódź, emigrated to France after World War II and stayed some years in Paris. Thus, French was another language which she, as a child, started to learn. Therefore, it seems obvious why the family chose francophone Canada as their settlement. Although Appignanesi admits the decisions as theoretically reasonable, she is surprised that her family opted for Canada at all, since her father had some relatives in the US at that time and one needed to wait longer for the documents allowing to enter Canada. Montreal in the 1950s offered however "that lingua franca of Yiddish; a truly democratic language which paid no attention to national borders" (Appignanesi, *Losing* 15) and as such gave them at least minimum chances of successful functioning. Nevertheless in her parents' view the linguistic sphere guaranteed security and the awaited safety which Canada offered turned out to be far from the atmosphere of home, as the young Lisa was sent to an English school, which posed another barrier. The linguistic and cultural conglomerate Appignanesi's family was living in could probably be enough for a few families. Brought up in France, the Borensztejs' children

had to adjust to Québécois French, different from their Parisian French, then to the English taught at the English school Lisa attended. Then, the young Lisa was transferred from the convent school in Ste-Thérèse to an English speaking part of the province in the village of Rosemère, whereas at the same time, her brother lodged in Montreal preparing for a Bar Mitzvah, a Jewish passage into adulthood, never realized owing to his lack of willingness to participate in religious rites that had been suppressed in the family for years. She summarizes these years, full of humiliations and lack of stability, though comparatively safe, as a passage of “the French-speaking six-year-old I was (...) [growing] into an English speaker” (Appignanesi, *Losing* 27).

While the Borens family, after they changed their surname from Borensztejn, settle comfortably into the suburbs of Montreal, Lisa all the time is reminded unintentionally of their difference in a range of ways. She realizes her parents do not speak the polished unaccented English, that they have no close relatives around, that they do not read the same newspapers as others (instead of the “Montreal papers and Time magazine (...) a whole slew of newspapers in strange Hebrew script” Appignanesi, *Losing* 61) and most of all, the topics of her parents’ discussions circle around camps, ghettos, deaths, and the “iconic Holocaust” (61). At the same time, Appignanesi recalls that these conversations were held only among adults and the children were not included into the discussions for obvious reasons, but she remembers the atmosphere at home when other immigrants visited them and her overhearing scraps of such talks. Officially, in front of his children, Aaron Borensztejn “remained silent. His gestures, his displaced outbursts of rage, spoke for him” (Appignanesi, *Losing* 129). It was a way of forgetting as, “if you speak, not only are you forced to remember, but you meet with the incredulity of listeners” (129). In *Losing the Dead*, such an escape into silence is the parents’ way of dealing with their trauma but alongside the cauldron of languages they children are offered: Polish and Yiddish of their childhood, French and English of their growing up, the language of silencing the unspeakable is being born. It is the “ghost language” as Appignanesi calls it (*Losing* 217-232), and the children, despite not having directly experienced Holocaust trauma, are burdened with it.

The predicament of silence, visible in Appignanesi’s text, is present in various narratives of the Holocaust as well as in many theoretical approaches. It is one of the points of departure for rabbi Sacha Pecaric

who in 1999 gave a keynote speech at The Centre for Dialogue and Prayer in Oświęcim and titled it “The Inability of Speaking.” In this lecture, he offers two different understandings of the word ‘silence’ in the context of the Holocaust: *sztika* – when a person cannot speak at all and *dumija* – when a person is silenced, muted as a result of trauma and suffering and when speech can no longer express the enormity of suffering.<sup>24</sup> Appignanesi presents such a perspective as her parents, especially her father, are no longer able to talk about the events from the times of the war due to the fact that the fear and suffering are traumatic beyond comprehension and discourse. Though Appignanesi’s parents “had no discourse of traumatic illness available to them” (*Losing* 219) and at that time nobody really paid attention to healing such traumas, Lisa and her brother inherited the trauma and its ghost language. This particular clash of two different stances: on the one hand, the stubborn silencing of the past, represented by Aaron Borenstein, and, on the other: the urge to narrate, shows the multiplicity of perspectives and proves the dialogic dimension of two approaches.

This imperative to tell the story of one’s life, or one’s parents’ lives in Appignanesi’s case, is a subject of Dori Laub’s inquiry in “Truth and Testimony: the Process and the Struggle” (1995). He claims that “[it] can become itself an all-consuming life task (...) There are never enough words or the right words, there is never enough time or the right time, and never enough listening or the right listening to articulate the story that cannot be fully captured in *thought, memory, and speech*” (1995: 63, italics original). Laub and partially also Cathy Caruth in the Introduction to *Trauma. Explorations in Memory* (1995) ponder over the problem of giving voice to the silenced trauma and discuss the nature of a narrative which emerges from the impossibility and inability of telling the story. Caruth notices that the recipients of traumatic stories have to bear in mind “the inaccessibility of trauma” (1995: 10) and thus have to realize the existence of gaps, lacks, and contradictions.

In *Losing the Dead*, Lisa Appignanesi’s mother lives on and theoretically could serve as the witness of the war years and as a narrator of the family’s past. Although, according to Caruth, witnessing is also

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<sup>24</sup> Sacha Pecaric’s essay is unfortunately only available in Polish: <http://www.cdim.pl/pl/edukacja/zasoby-edukacyjne/teksty/53-teologia-w-obliczu-auschwitz/145-sacha-pecaric-niezdolno-mowienia>, date of access: 12.02.2013.

burdened with a dose of inaccessibility, Appignanesi decides to try to collect the memories from her mother. In one attempt she undertakes, she asks her mother to write down her memories, which, given her mother's ageing and collapse into Alzheimer's disease, seems absolutely unrealistic. She then buys a video camera and records her mother's speech. This task also proves unattainable<sup>25</sup>: her mother falls into digressions, distorts proportions, reverses meanings, and twists the scale of events, as “[h]er memory has taken on the randomness of dream, unconstrained by any order or external prodding (...) Memory is also a form of negotiation” (7). The process of recollecting memories is actually a failure; nevertheless it proves important to the listener as well. Appignanesi, being a daughter, a recipient of the testimony, and a writer realizes that her task

is not just the call to understand the ways in which what has been lost to memory affects writing both of testimony and of the histories that make use of it as its raw material. It is also a call to understand the ways in which that effort at retrieval – sometimes exceedingly selective, sometimes careless or mightily subjective – creates something other than memory, something new, and something tenuously related to what took place. (Bernard-Donals 2009: 3)

Giving and receiving an account of one's life prove to be very difficult, if not impossible at all, both for the speaker and the listener. Dori Laub refers to it as the “collapse of witnessing” (1995: 65), which “is central to the Holocaust experience” (65). Silence is, thus, the symptom and proof of trauma. Laub also adds that “[t]he ‘not telling’ of the story serves as a perpetuation of its tyranny. The events become more and more distorted in their silent retention and pervasively invade and contaminate the survivor's daily life. The longer the story remains untold, the more distorted it becomes” (1995: 64). That is why, in the case of

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<sup>25</sup> Appignanesi is shocked at the scale of this constatation. The way she comments on her mother's inability to tell the story proves the overall inability to write a fully credible non-fictional memoir as well: “When I look at the transcript of the video, I am startled at how fragmentary her narrative is. Each fragment makes sense on its own, but nothing coheres – as if the only point of cohesion were her own speaking body. Without it, dislocation rules. There is an occasional winter or spring, but there are no dates. Everything floats in a limbo crowded with detail which evades sense” (Appignanesi, *Losing* 82).

Appignanesi's mother, the illness might be seen as an 'escape' for her traumatized and silenced self.

The recipient of traumatic stories has to assume a great responsibility for the process of excavating the silenced stories as well. Acknowledging Laub's idea of the "collapse of witnessing," Caruth states that the listener needs to be prepared to receive the incoherent, fragmented, chaotic stories which are distorted by the power of trauma. She claims that

by carrying that impossibility of knowing out of the empirical event itself, trauma opens up and challenges us to a new kind of listening, the witnessing, precisely, *of impossibility*. (...) To listen to the crisis of trauma, that is, is not only to listen for the event, but to hear in the testimony the survivor's departure from it; the challenge of the therapeutic listener, in other words, is how *to listen to departure*.  
(Caruth 1995: 10, italics original)

As a result, Appignanesi's post/memories and stories are expanded by her parents' memories, fragments, by the "impossibility" and her own gap-filling process of supplementing the knowledge and memory she inherited from them. She realizes both her task and the complexity of approaching it as she admits: "I am all too aware that my parents' past is a narrative in a foreign and forgotten language" (Appignanesi, *Losing* 81). The stories she has received from her parents have been enlarged by her own narrative of them, her own retelling of them with all the obvious omissions, interpretations, and judgmental statements added by the teller.

### **The Legacy of Poland/Israel/Canada – the Question of Post/memory**

In *Losing the Dead*, the choice of Canada is the first strange element in the story of the Borensztejns' exile. As noted above, Appignanesi learned that it had been easier to obtain documents to go to the USA, but they did not make use of this opportunity. It was her mother who decided to settle down in Canada "because it was *terra incognita*, a blank whiteness, unmapped by myths, unpeopled by named individuals – a country whose reputation in Poland was simply one of comfort and plenty" (*Losing* 13, italics original). She doubts whether her parents knew the concentration camps' connotation of Canada as a storage of goods, gold, and jewellery taken from the prisoners, as they would have then certainly rejected the place. She even mentions her father, who became very proud of being Canadian, joking

“that when Moses, that lifelong stammerer, had designated the promised land as ‘C...C...Canaan’, it was only because he couldn’t bring out all the syllables of ‘Canada’” (14). The allusions to the utopian picture of a promised land were clear; Canada initially was, in the eyes of the parents, a land devoid of any mythology, any hints of war, Jewishness, or the Holocaust, and it seemed to have been an advantage of this country, where one could be free.

However, it quickly turned out that Canada was not a flawless, ideal country to live in. The obvious element which destroyed this image was the climate: either the summer heat or the coldness of winter. Another such feature, one not necessarily connected to Canada, was Lisa’s having to attend an English-language school, a change that was difficult for such a small child. Although this could have happened anywhere in the world, the problems it created in terms of language and alienation coincided with the fact that her hard-working immigrant parents did not have time to spend with their children. Appignanesi remembers long hours of “waiting outside in the heat or the cold or by a window, scratching the frost away in order to spy the passing cars – forcing (...) [her] mind not to wait, distracting (...) [herself] to no purpose, waiting in agony of waiting for (...) [her] parents to return” (Appignanesi, *Losing* 16). It should be emphasized that this strange impossibility of waiting peacefully for her parents is not only connected with childlike fears of being alone. The fact that the small Lisa sweats, worries, and trembles while waiting has its roots in the trauma of her parents’ experiences during the war:

I suspect my parents infected me with their wartime anxieties of waiting, an active, fitful waiting which can spill over into panic: waiting for the knock of the Gestapo at the door; waiting for absent loved ones at a time when every foray into the streets was an invitation to the deportation; endlessly waiting for those who would never return. (Appignanesi, *Losing* 16)

In *Losing the Dead*, it appears that the ghost of the past haunts even the second generation born after the war. The image Appignanesi recreates here equates with what Eva Hoffman has claimed about the legacy of the Holocaust: “We grew up not with the Holocaust, but with its aftermath; or rather, with that aftermath as it was lived in our parents’ psyches. Our first consciousness of the Shoah was transmitted to us

through means that were bodily, palpable, densely affective" (2005: 33). This could probably happen anywhere, even in the highly mythologized USA, but these are the earliest memories of Appignanesi's childhood in Canada, intensified by the frequent visits of other immigrants and exiles from Poland. Such visits were accompanied by eating, and sometimes drinking vodka, but the most important element was storytelling. The Tower of Babel of Yiddish, Polish, French and English heard by Lisa and her brother through the wall or door created an aura of mystery and the unknown. In quiet whispers, the voices revealed whole lives, and in particular, stories of survival from Nazi terror in ghettos and camps:

There are guns and battles (...) There are stories of walking, forth and back (...) a mad, gruelling geography of pursuit and escape, (...) a search for safe harbours, of rivers crossed and bribed boatmen and cold, cold winters into which people vanish (...) stories of tiny, overcrowded rooms, barricaded behind wardrobes, of darkness and whispers and shared breadcrusts (...) trains (...) hideously crowded [where] children scream. (Appignanesi, *Losing* 20)

These were whispered stories of killings and experiments on people in death camps, of escaping death. As Lisa recalls them (21-22), they were told in a tone devoid of emotions, never mentioning the word "survivor," which would evoke the stigma of their victimization. Instead of Grimms' fairy tales, the children got war stories, which remained an indispensable part of their understanding of the world.

In *Losing the Dead*, yet another aspect of being a Canadian in this country appears. It corresponds to the identity dilemmas faced by immigrants. During the war, when Lisa's family had to live apart from one another, they often changed their identities. They had to appear as Aryans, and when there was a shred of doubt whether they were safe, they moved and changed their names. Not being recognized by any of the neighbours was a necessary element of survival. With its Nazi terror and persecution of Jews, the war required such a denial of one's identity: "they lived under a succession of 'Aryan' aliases, changing names and identities and addresses when discovery was imminent, precariously acquiring documents and baptismal certificates as need demanded. One or other of them [parents] was variously Sawitzka, Kowalski, Zablocki, with the necessary preceding saints' names to match" (Appignanesi, *Losing* 28-29).

This might seem reasonable during wartime in occupied Poland, but it appears absolutely unnecessary in the postwar Canada of the 1950s. At first, when they lived in the more open and cosmopolitan Montréal, which had a large Jewish population, it was not an obstacle to admit one's Jewishness. But after some time, when they moved to the small Québécois town of Ste-Thérèse, their Jewishness again was the reason for their ostracism. Officially, there were no other Jews in this town, which was a small, agrarian, Catholic settlement. In order to avoid being stigmatized as “others”, the parents decided to change their name once again to “Borens” “ostensibly for simplicity and business efficiency. In fact they dropped the tell-tale syllable for more complicated reasons” (Appignanesi, *Losing* 28). It turned out that even in this “Canaan”, they were subject to intolerance. Although antisemitism did not lead to mass killing, but the now demythologized country was not free of the influences of world politics, shaping the local policy of Quebec, which was afraid of being flooded with Jewish immigrants<sup>26</sup>.

Appignanesi bitterly notes that anti-Semitism was not only a problem in Ste-Thérèse, but that “under a veneer of gentility and Protestant tolerance, Montréal WASPS practised a similar bigotry. (...) scores of tennis and country clubs were closed to Jews, as was property in Westmount, that exclusive part of the city (...) [which] was also closed to French Canadians” (29-30). Overall for the children growing up, one message was clear: “(...) at home we were Jewish and in the town we weren't” (Appignanesi, *Losing* 30). The spectre of the war, the memory of being segregated and rejected, persevered, leading the family to continue living in a certain hiding, not so much under a physical threat, but under a mental, urgent and compulsory imperative that required assimilating, losing one's identity, and forgetting. The initially idyllic, free Canada now seemed to be populated by ghosts of the past, forcing the existence of the Jewish family, although over the years they became quite affluent and secure, to the condition in which, as Appignanesi states: “mother was the liar, (...) father the silent, (...) while I [Lisa Appignanesi] the truthknower” (Appignanesi, *Losing* 30).

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<sup>26</sup> In her book, Appignanesi writes broadly about political issues, recounting the history of Poland and Canada. Details of the Quebec campaign against Jews in the 1940s and 1950s, however, is too broad an issue to discuss here. For more information, see Desmond Morton's *A Short History of Canada* (1994: 212-244) and Jan Grabowski's *Historia Kanady* (2001: 233-264), where Canadian anti-Semitic policies are discussed.

The fear manifested by Appignanesi's father's silence about their past and his unusual behaviour in certain circumstances contrasts with the mother's demonstrative lack of panic or even risk taking. Appignanesi never learnt whether her mother did not feel any anxiety or just masked it well, but she mentions a whole series of examples when her mother risked her life with a daring bravado. During the war, she was the one who was able to find people who could help them forge documents, change names, and find a job for her, or even find new nannies for her son. She was able to maintain relations, full of mutual trust, with a *Volksdeutsche* landlord (157-163). The nature of the relationships she maintained with a few of the family "saviours" is uncertain. Appignanesi herself claims that her mother was careless as her mother's stories, which she had offered to various, very important and powerful people, were simply untrue. Appignanesi's older brother doubts whether the fact that they survived during the war and managed to obtain documents each time their mother went to some "honourable" (Appignanesi, *Losing* 162) men was purely due to their generosity. But no matter what the true nature of these contacts was, the mother was clearly fearless. She played the great game of disguise and did it perfectly, according to the cynical circumstances where truth and lies were interchangeable and the value of life was easily converted into nothing. Even in Canada, after many years, Appignanesi's mother at times turned to the seductive and flirtatious mode of chasing fear away.

Crossing borders, forbidden and seen as an escape during the war, then afterwards treated as a final treason to the Communist regime in Poland, was another problematic issue in Canada for Appignanesi's family. Although the U.S.-Canadian border is one of the longest undefended borders in the world, it was a nightmare for the father to cross this frontier, as if the idea of frontier had a thrilling fear inscribed in itself. The anxiety was connected with the guards' potential questioning about the amount of goods they wanted to bring to Canada from the U.S. If asked, the parents had difficulty stating how much they should declare, but the most terrifying moment for the father came with the necessity of displaying documents to the border officials as "any official demand for documents, any confrontation with a uniformed being, sent them tumbling back into the emotional storm the Nazi occupation of Poland had produced" (Appignanesi, *Losing* 51). Therefore, trauma can also be seen as a repetition of certain gestures. These similar moments evoke the

traumatic event that lasts forever and has no end. According to Cathy Caruth, “repetition [lies] at the heart of catastrophe – the experience that Freud will call ‘traumatic neurosis’ – emerges as the unwitting re-enactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind” (1996: iv). Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub in their *Testimony. Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992) frequently refer to such an inability to escape the traumatic entrapment and the re-enactment of the past. They also claim that

The trauma is thus an event that has no beginning, no ending, no before, no during and no after. This absence of categories that define it lends it a quality of ‘otherness,’ a salience, a timelessness and a ubiquity that puts it outside a range of associatively linked experiences, outside a range of comprehension, of recounting and of mastery. (1992: 69)

As a result of this never-ending nature of trauma, Appignanesi’s parents cannot escape the ubiquity of it. It becomes a continuously re-enacted event which is not to be eradicated from their lives, even despite the absolutely positive changes in their life conditions. Not only is, therefore, her father afraid of the guards at the border, but of any representatives of the state, be it tax officers or policemen, as if a deep fear of the repression is an inseparable element of his identity. Throughout the war years, he managed to avoid death, by wearing disguises (for example, a Hitler-style moustache), and role-playing that verged on blasphemy (in the case of taking up an identity of a Catholic). Yet one cause for profound fear remained rooted in his body: he could mask his name and his brown, almond-shaped eyes but he could not bring his missing foreskin back. The root of this fear was within him, and, even though he miraculously managed to avoid death while having his trousers pulled down when tortured at the Gestapo headquarters on Aleje Szucha and got out alive, he is broken forever. Anywhere he travels, no matter, how close to his utopian ideal the place is, he carries his dystopia within him, in his body and in his identity. If utopia for Appignanesi’s father is a place where Jewishness does not provoke any hostility and is fully accepted, it is only Israel where he feels comfortable and at home.

Appignanesi’s father does not feel fully secure in Canada, and although there are no exact proofs of a lack of safety, his fear is constantly present. Appignanesi mentions that he was generally a very brave man, who was not afraid of nature, jumping into a deep, ice-cold lake, in

Canada, and engaging in risky business back in Poland. Yet, the only place he felt happy and free in was Israel. Lisa's mother, however, did not much like the idea of living in Israel. Perhaps she did not accept her Jewishness or she just did not care about preserving Jewish heritage as her daughter observes: "She [mother] manifested neither sentiment nor sentimentality about its existence as a Jewish state. It was all a little too rough and tumble for her. (...) I suspect she had got so used to playing out her double act of being simultaneously Jewish and not Jewish that without its necessity, she felt lost" (65). Appignanesi reveals the bitter truth that her father would probably have moved to Israel if it had not been for his wife. In different circumstances, with a different wife, he would have become a true Israeli, "but with a different wife, he might not have been alive to do so" (*Losing* 65). He would definitely not go to visit Poland or Germany. He rarely went to England to visit his daughter, but he romanticized Israel, as if he belonged there physically and spiritually. It was the "imaginary homeland of his pre-war dreams" (Appignanesi, *Losing* 64).

As a child and adolescent, Appignanesi did not have many chances to find out much about her parents' past, as they only whispered about it secretly with friends. She also faced her parents' silence about their history and, simply lacked interest. Her yearning for knowledge came later, when she started to ask her mother about their past and met with the confusion of a person immersed in the oblivion of Alzheimer's disease. Her quest for self-discovery turns out to be another utopian search for a confirmation of her roots. While visiting Poland, she decides to look for the records of her birth and traces of her family. Appignanesi's search, at first idealistic, proves to be partially successful. She manages to visit the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, where she finds the names and addresses from the prewar period of her closest relatives (Appignanesi, *Losing* 96). She even discovers the smells of her childhood, which she has taken for the smells of rural Canada for years (108). However, the illusion of a recovery of the past is soon broken in her memoir. The houses she is looking for have been pulled down, and in their places new buildings have been erected. The final step she undertakes to fill in the gaps in her post/memory – her absent memory, as Hirsch calls it – with proof is a visit to a lawyer who is supposed to search the Łódź archives for a birth certificate for Elżbieta Borensztejn. The series of coincidences that follow this inquiry could have been taken from a dystopian scenario. The letter

from the attorney that Appignanesi receives is written in German, a language erased from her family's memory, and says that there was no birth certificate for such a person (Appignanesi, *Losing* 230-231). The possible reasons for this are varied: different dates of birth may have been claimed, or perhaps a different name. Further searching does not reveal any relatives registered in Łódź. It turns out that, as Appignanesi concludes, “[o]fficial history refuses to coincide with family memory. Everything is open to invention” (231), which corresponds to her initial statement that “memory, like history, is uncontrollable” (Appignanesi, *Losing* 8).

As has been indicated earlier in the course of this discussion, the urge to write a true story of one's parents coincides in this case with the silence about the past that Appignanesi inherits. Therefore, in order to fill in the gaps of the non-fiction memoir, the author mixes it with the fictional air of storytelling which permeates the text. Appignanesi claims that “memory is always a montage of disparate fragments” (*Losing* 81) and, as a result, the selection, accessibility, credibility, and finally the very idea of narration create a fluid illusion of truthfulness which is required or expected from a memoir. The perspective of years and the view from Canada are only theoretically far from “the reality” of the Holocaust. It is true that as a writer of family story Appignanesi is lost as:

she [her mother] denied what she didn't want to know or chose to forget. Only the grim set of my father's face, the occasional interjection of a shattering comment, punctured her gilded balloon and forced it to land amongst the shattered lives of the ghetto or the camps. But my father didn't particularly want to remember either. He kept his silence (Appignanesi, *Losing* 81).

On the other hand, however, coming to Poland, being *in situ*, does not solve the problem of knowing more. Poland offered neither records of her birth nor the inner voice (“In Polish I am as mute as an infant” 230). The Polish war history is full of gaps, unnamed graves and unconfirmed testimonies and being ‘on site’ for Appignanesi is yet another corroboration of the way “fantasy works when facts are scarce” (*Losing* 224) even if non-fiction literally requires truth in the world where there are no longer “monolithic truths” (*Losing* 141).

The memories Appignanesi gathered in *Losing the Dead* constitute the legacy survivors of the war and Holocaust survivors left for their children.

Even though they are not confined directly to the ears of the children, as a result of the parents' fear of coming back to the past, these memories, or to use Hirsch's term, the vast body of postmemory, are planted at the very heart of the second generation's lives. The constant, mental oscillation between the dystopian world of Nazism and the freedom of Canada seen as "peaceable kingdom," (Frye 1971) results in frequent contaminations of these terms. Trauma forever shadowed the chances of living a happy life in a utopian place where the past did not weigh them down. Appignanesi's acknowledgement – "I suspect my main legacy from my parents is that they gave me a kind of deep fatalism. The worst has already happened and is bound to happen again" (Appignanesi, *Losing* 68) – sums up the spiritual bequest that she received from her ancestors. Such a fatalistic outlook on life is an effect of the traumatic past. It is inescapable as "[p]roblems with chronic depression, masochistic life patterns, chronic anxiety, and psychosomatic disease continue" (Krystal 1995: 77) decades after the traumatic events. Appignanesi's non-fiction memoir shows the impossibility of creating a happy land of plenty for those who fled the Holocaust, as they cannot escape the shadow of the traumatic past, which lives on even in their children.

### **Self-creation in the void**

Both Kulyk Keefer's *Honey and Ashes* and Appignanesi's *Losing the Dead*, although representing two different familial connections, different roots and fates their families have gone through, are juxtaposed here to outline the creative elements in the otherwise non-fictional literary form of memoir. By showing their attempts at recollecting the family stories via memory and remnants of physical tokens and proofs from the past, they also discuss the contemporary attitude to what memory and life writing are. They illustrate and expand Hirsch's concept of post/memory in their texts by showing "that the process of self-understanding is itself fundamentally recollective, taken here in the sense of gathering together again those dimensions of selfhood that had heretofore gone unarticulated or had been scattered, dispersed, or lost" (Freeman 1993: 29). Obviously, this does not invalidate the truthfulness in their accounts but it is not only the basic facts and dates that the authors are interested in. Through the narration of the life hi/stories of the family members and their tangled fates of leaving one's home village and hometown behind to immigrate to

Canada, Janice Kulyk Keefer and Lisa Appignanesi create themselves and their own identities in their books, “texts for which the interpreter is at once reader and writer, subject and object, [and as such] it becomes even more clear that the meanings one arrives at are in some sense as much *made as found*” (Freeman 1993: 30, italics original).

The processes of gathering family stories and accounting for one’s life present in both memoirs discussed in this chapter are therefore not only located in the past. As such it would be a mere reflection of the previous generations, whereas both Kulyk Keefer and Appignanesi are equally preoccupied with the present. Through listening to the old stories and visiting the Ukraine and Poland they want to immerse themselves in the present atmosphere of the places as well as confront their stories from the past with these places. Voicing the muted memories of the previous generations transcends the trauma that has destroyed their lives and deeply affected those of their children. Even the lacks, gaps and voids they frequently encounter contribute to and co-create their rendition of post/memory of the Old Places.



## **Chapter Three**

### **Memory Lost/Memory Retrieved: Irena F. Karafilly's *The Stranger in the Plumed Hat* and Lisa Appignanesi's *The Memory Man***

Immigrant writing frequently deals with the concept of loss. In the previously discussed memoirs, the Polish-Ukrainian and Polish-Jewish families experienced a whole range of losses: from the loss of houses, through the loss of relatives to the loss of memory. Paul Auster in his *The Invention of Solitude*, a meditation on the loss of his father, offers a following definition of memory: "Memory: the space in which a thing happens for the second time" (1982: 83). In this light, the incredible complexity of memory can bring consolation but can also make the survivors relive traumatic experiences over and over again. According to Felman and Laub, "[t]rauma survivors live not with memories of the past, but with an event that could not and did not proceed through its completion, has no ending, attained no closure, and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned, continues into present and is current in every respect" (1992: 69). Paradoxically, it is Alzheimer's disease that for many traumatized immigrants, both in non-fictional and fictional texts, heralds oblivion as well as strange, sometimes painful endurance of the seemingly forgotten memories.

The texts discussed in this chapter both deal with the value of memory and they exhibit striking similarities in their treatment of memory. Irena F. Karafilly's *The Stranger in the Plumed Hat*, published in Canada in 2000, is a second book in which Karafilly tries to go back to her own roots after *Ashes and Miracles* (1998), a travel book conceived during her journey across Poland, and written after her return to Canada. In her memoir, Karafilly tries to recreate the lives of her parents in the past, from their meeting in Russia, through her own birth in the Urals, their stay in Israel, to their life in Canada which was also abundant in traumatic events as the parents did not get on well with each other and the mother started to suffer from Alzheimer's disease. Lisa Appignanesi's *The Memory Man* is a novel published in 2004 in Canada which deals with different shades of remembering and forgetting the trauma from the past. Its main character,

Bruno Lind, a professor of neuroscience involved in the study of the ways human brain memorizes events, is himself in the oblivion of the trauma of the Holocaust which he experienced as a boy. His coming to Vienna, his hometown, to take part in a congress of neurobiologists devoted to memory and a whole chain of events this stay triggers offer an outlet of his memories hitherto encapsulated in total oblivion. Despite the two texts' generic differences, memory plays a crucial role in both, and its treatment is the subject of this chapter.

Non-fictional writing or life-writing, to use another term, which takes a form of auto/biography, is theoretically supposed to give an account of one's life or the life of one's parents and grandparents. Such texts create an "air of authenticity" to use Ondaatje's formulation (1984: 206) and make the reader believe in the stories included in the book. It is generally taken for granted that memory is more 'trustworthy' in a family memoir than a novel as a memoir refers to people who actually exist or existed. However, this chapter compares a family memoir and a novel in order to demonstrate that both texts employ similar techniques in order to deal with the material of memory. I argue that, although Lisa Appignanesi's narrative is a novel, it offers an equally valuable consideration of the workings of memory as Karafilly's memoir does, and secondly that the 'facts' offered by a memoir do not always acquire the label of 'truth' just because of the 'factual' genre of the text. That is why both texts are read here as literary contributions to the controversies around the concept of "fiction as truth" also alluded to by Marianne Hirsch (2012: 10). It is definitely not the goal here to try to extract the so-called 'bare facts' from the memoir and to deal with what is fact or what is fiction. If life-writing can be located within the sphere of fiction (cf. Chapter Two) and the process of narrating a family story is intertwined with the process of re-inventing it anew, then a novel written by a child of immigrants, who otherwise claims to be burdened with the stigma of the silenced stories, denial and recreation of them, may be read as a (fictional, because involving fictional characters) discussion on a true nature of memory and its ways of influencing the people (both fictional characters and factual characters in a memoir). Both texts are, therefore, focused on the influence of post/memory and a creative reconsideration of one's roots.

### Irena F. Karafilly's *The Stranger in the Plumed Hat*

A journalist and writer, Irena F. Karafilly was born in Russia, in the Ural Mountains to a Russian mother and a Polish-Jewish father who escaped to Russia during the Second World War. She lived for a few years in Łódź after the end of World War II and then moved to Israel, to finally settle in Canada. She is the author of many short stories and three books *Night Cries* (1990), *Ashes and Miracles* (1998), and *The Stranger in the Plumed Hat* (2000). She has graduated from McGill University and she holds a degree in Creative Writing from the University of British Columbia. She has received National Magazine Award for Fiction and First Prize CBC Literary Awards and been nominated for many awards, among them the QSPELL Award (short-listed twice for *The Stranger in the Plumed Hat* and *Ashes and Miracles*) (Irena F. Karafilly's Official website).

While Karafilly's memoir is predominantly devoted to the study of the impact of Alzheimer's disease on her ageing mother and her memory, it also explores the ways in which the past, especially the suppressed remembrances from the distant past, surface and dominate her current perception of herself. *The Stranger in the Plumed Hat* addresses the problem of how losing memory evacuates the deepest layers of reminiscences. It is beyond the scope of the present analysis to deal with the medical aspects of her mother's state; nevertheless Karafilly tries to learn as much as possible about the disease and she quotes doctors and nurses widely. She also refers to other opinions of the disease and the havoc it wreaks, but what is of interest at this point is what kind of memories are restored in the process of the disease-related forgetting.

The form of the narrative is undoubtedly a memoir and the text is subtitled accordingly. There is, however, a small margin of uncertainty left as the author makes clear at the very beginning that "Though ... [she] had to change most of the names in this book, and once or twice, the chronology of minor events, this is a factual account of ...[her] mother's story – the story she kept trying to tell" (Karafilly, *Stranger* Author's Note). It can be understood that the names of nurses, orderlies, doctors and other actually existing people had to be changed, but such a note leaves the story open to freer interpretation as no one can ever guarantee her mother's story as fully credible and true. Yet, this particular note alongside two mottoes from Adrienne Rich and Luis Buñuel, furnish the book with a different perspective. The former says "I came to explore the wreck./The words are

purposes./The words are maps./ I came to see the damage that was done/ and the treasures that prevail" (Karafilly, *Stranger*, no page given), while the latter mentions memory explicitly: "You have to begin to lose your memory, if only in bits and pieces, to realize that memory is what makes our lives. Life without memory is no life at all. ... Our memory is our coherence, our reason, our feeling, even our action. Without it, we are nothing" (Karafilly, *Stranger* 1). Consequently, *The Stranger in the Plumed Hat* is not only a story of the descent into the Alzheimer's. Rather, the text becomes the story of regaining memory through its loss.

Born Claudia Constantinovna Pavlova in 1921 into a Russian Orthodox family living for decades in Orenburg in the Urals, Karafilly's mother was of mixed origins and had Tartar ancestry as well. As a young woman, she lived through a trauma of losing her Russian fiancé who had been killed in the siege of Leningrad. As a result, when in 1944 she met the Polish Jew who had fled east from the occupied Łódź, she fell in love and married him quickly. Irena F. Karafilly was born in the Urals but when the war finished the family went to Łódź to unite with the father's relatives. However, having found no living relatives, for they had perished during the war, most probably all killed either in the invasion or in concentration camps, they decided to leave Poland forever. They spent a few years in Łódź, had a son there, and then moved to Israel where Irena lived with her mother and brother for nine years, whereas their father had gone to Canada to prepare for their arrival. The long Israeli years of parting turned out to be the most pleasant ones, according to family stories; they were full of freedom, relatively prosperous, and after the experience of war-stricken Russia and post-war Poland, the family members were in a place where, despite not being Jewish herself, Karafilly's mother found peace, beauty, and joy.

Irena Karafilly's undertaking is similar to the well-established attempts to write down or record the stories of the witnesses of trauma, like the Vietnam war soldiers infected with post-traumatic syndrome or the Holocaust survivors. Karafilly, however, quickly realizes that her task is more multi-dimensional as she is personally involved in the life of her 'protagonist' and, as it is going to be shown, she is not only the one who records the story of her mother's trauma but she has been a semi-conscious witness of this trauma for years. Her role, therefore, is at least two-fold: "From now on, my journal will be with me at all times, the mirror in which my grief, guilt, and confusion are to be faithfully

registered. Of course, the journal only compounds the confusion, forcing me to be simultaneously, actor *and* observer in one of life's grimmest dramas" (Karafilly, *Stranger* 96).

### **Memory Loss/Memory Gain**

Claudia Pavlova Denberg was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease at the age of 76, although, as Karafilly admits, there had been certain symptoms of the illness much earlier (Karafilly, *Stranger* 236). The point of departure for Karafilly is a photo of her mother in the eponymous plumed hat taken back in Poland during their Łódź years, showing her mother as an elegant and beautiful woman, an image which haunts her while observing her demented mother compulsively bargaining at the Salvation Army. Due to her memory loss, her mother's whole posture becomes a caricature of her former one, which makes Karafilly ponder over the past that is not discussed at all, the memories that are not the ones her mother comes back to, and the photographs, the scarce witnesses of the past, that are not shown.

In her critical study on memory, Anne Whitehead considers the perception on the problem offered by Aristotle, Locke, and Hume, among others. Taking the Lockean standpoint as a point of departure, Whitehead postulates a corporeal attitude to memory and she claims that it is not only the brain which should be examined in the perspective of memory loss but also the rest of the body. It is the corporeal and even physiological aspect that should be taken into consideration while discussing one's reactions to losing memory. It is frequently the case that the brain does not offer any memories as the suppression takes it over but the body remembers. According to Whitehead, "this desire to broaden Locke's focus is consolidated by recent research into the behaviour of amnesiac patients, which has found that while these individuals may no longer be able to consciously recollect past events, they nevertheless retain an unconscious, 'bodily' memory based on habit" (2008: 58). Moreover, Whitehead also quotes Linda Grant's research into Alzheimer's patients and claims that there are examples of situations when a patient who cannot "remember where he parked his car, nor could he recall the telephone number of his wife to call her and ask her to pick him up, or even the address of his house so that he could catch a bus or a taxi home [was n]onetheless (...) able to find his way home by walking, for 'his topographical memory was unaffected', his body 'remembering' the route" (Grant 1998: 136 quoted in Whitehead 2008: 58).

These assertions are proven by Karafilly's account of the behavior of her mother, who as an Alzheimer's sufferer does not remember basic facts about her husband's and daughter's identities, and yet demands that conversations are held in Polish and Russian, languages never used in the family. While tracing the early symptoms of the disease, Karafilly recalls a whole range of moments when her mother for no particular reason switched languages, which serves as an illustration of how the memory loss affects the 'memory gain' and the language of her mother's childhood and youth starts taking over: "in the supermarket, she sometimes addressed the cashier in Russian" (Karafilly, *Stranger* 5). Previously it would have been impossible as her mother was relatively proud of her good health and well-being in Canada. On another occasion, her mother became a bit offensive addressing her daughter in Polish and asking her to translate her stance to a doctor "Tell him to pick it up himself" (14). Such moments lead to her mother's painful exclamation: "My *memory* makes me crazy!" (15, italics original). This statement refers predominantly to her memory loss, but also, as it turns out in the course of narrative, to the memories that do surface from her past; the tormenting remembrances of the long forgotten languages, songs, loves, hatreds, abortion, the whole of her lost self. This memory becomes an imperative to be addressed in Polish "Mamushu", "Mama", "Mishka" (33-35, 38), to be reminded of the past names they used, for example "Zajoczek" for her son (38), to sing songs "Dai dayenu" (110, 136) in Russian, and to address her granddaughter in Polish which she does not understand at all. Karafilly admits that her mother insisted on using her maiden surname – Pavlova – instead of Denberg when the illness struck, which made her probably recall her Russian times. This, together with her consistent singing of the *Dai dayenu* song which was "her signature song" (110), bring her back to the times when everything was still possible in her life and the future was only to come.

The Russian language laden with the nostalgia for youth is also an important language for Karafilly herself despite the fact that English seems to be the language she knows and feels to the fullest. But she ponders over it:

Since the collapse of Communism, there has been a steady influx of Russian immigrants to Montreal, but today they seem to be everywhere I go, chatting in their high, melodious voices, telling amusing anecdotes, sharing their travails. Russian is, in theory at least, my

mother tongue – the only language I knew for the first two years of my life. Though my understanding is now limited, the language never fails to move me in mysterious ways (Karafilly, *Stranger* 126-127).

The cauldron of languages is a reflection of Karafilly's mother's past and presence in the new country, in which she never really grasped the essence of language(s). Karafilly was always exposed to at least a few of them never feeling at home in any. The usual mixture of Hebrew and Polish alongside her Russian mother tongue was further juxtaposed with the Canadian bilingualism which the family experienced while inhabiting Montreal. Karafilly's career as a writer based in Montreal and writing in English is only another dimension of the linguistic predicament. The lack of linguistic stability is also a reflection of the other problems in her mother's life.<sup>1</sup>

Having been married to a Polish Jew after the loss of her fiancé, and changing countries and cultures many times, she probably never really found her place and love. Karafilly's mother had an inferiority complex and the idea that her husband "was ashamed of her, embarrassed to have married a shiksa [a non-Jew]" (69) was probably one of the reasons for their uneasy relationship. The family's problem was not only the lack of communication, but also the very tangible inability to communicate fully in any of the languages they spoke. Neither of these was understood fully as a mother tongue usually is; nor was a common one to all of them. Frequently, even simple conversations "taking place in the usual blend of broken Polish and Hebrew" (Karafilly, *Stranger* 106) ended up in a mess of argument as they could not find proper words. Karafilly remembers quarrels and strange tensions between her parents as well as comes to a conclusion that

there wasn't a single language adequate to communicate with my parents. We adopted a linguistic hodge-podge unintelligible to anyone who did not speak English, Hebrew, and Polish. We spoke all three languages at home, simultaneously, ploughing their respective vocabularies in the endless hope of finding the right word. Though we

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<sup>1</sup> An interesting discussion on the usage of different languages in ethnic writing can be found in Karpinski (1998). She analyzes the Canadian politics of representation of ethnicity, which demands "erasure of other languages performed by translation and editorial practices" (1988: 121). If applied to the texts discussed in this volume, this regime policy would have diminished their value for sure.

sometimes succeeded in finding a passable word, we usually failed to communicate precisely what was on our minds. We never fully understood each other... (Karafilly, *Stranger* 61).

This lack of communication illustrated above as a polyphony of languages was probably not at all due to the lack of knowledge of any of the languages in question. It must have been a deeper problem as Karafilly's mother gradually manages to admit to certain disloyalties towards her husband throughout her life. She was, however, no exception as her husband was also guilty of love affairs. Her mother's constant reconsideration of her own marriage has one chief aim: "what she [her mother] tried to figure out throughout her life was how, despite all her devotion and hard work, her husband apparently failed to love her" (Karafilly, *Stranger* 51). While there is no one unanimous answer to this question in the book, and there must have been a combination of reasons for this situation, it has to be mentioned that Karafilly's father was the one who visited his wife in the geriatric ward every day till the end.

The aforementioned love affairs on both sides had a linguistic angle as well. Claudia Pavlova, being a strong and self-confident woman, experienced some inferiority complex that her husband, a Polish Jew, married a Russian Christian of Tartar origins and lost all his Jewish relatives at the same time. She tried to make up for this lack that her husband must have felt, and though he never complained openly about this, the reader also learns about the quarrels and discussions they constantly had. That is why she resolved to go to Israel. Incredible as it may sound, she also decided in advance to be happy there. And she was, although her husband wanted to go to Canada in order to suppress the memories of the Jewish culture. Canada also appeared an ideally untainted country not burdened with any connotations, and , as such, appealed to him more than Israel. He, however, had an affair with a Jewish woman, as Canada, especially the vicinity of Montreal proved to have been densely populated by Jews from various corners of the world. Karafilly does not reveal everything about the affairs. She was not offered the whole story by her mother in the past and, when her mother loses memory, she does not want to press her with negative reminiscences from her past.

The inferiority complex is deeply rooted in the 'Jewish problem' as at some point her mother abandoned her husband and moved out. It did not last long but Karafilly notes that it originated from the very complex as

She had been pregnant when he married her and felt he would never have chosen her otherwise. She also felt that he resented her for it, being sure he would have preferred to marry a Jew. She had known several Russian women who had had children with Polish Jews, only to be abandoned when the war was over. She never quite got over her gratitude that *he* had stayed, and spent her life trying to ensure he did not regret it. She thought he did anyway; that he could not forgive her. Her doomed in-laws, she suspected, would have quite likely chosen the grave over a shiksa daughter-in-law. My mother had that idea that somehow, irrational though it might be, my father had come to blame *her* for his parents' deaths. (Karafilly, *Stranger* 50, italics original)

This dramatic confession situates Karafilly's mother at the center of her husband's trauma. He is not the one to speak of it in the book. It is also due to the fact that he is not discussed much in the memoir. But it might be argued here that Karafilly's mother had taken part of the burden and was reliving the guilt over and over again. She tried hard to pretend to be Jewish or to become Jewish and she cooked Jewish food, like "matzoh balls and chopper liver and gefilte fish" (Karafilly, *Stranger* 50). She also did everything at home by herself, wanting to prove her strength and resourcefulness and desperately trying to attract her husband's attention. She was never satisfied with it as he never really offered any gratitude to her. At times, she was even close to killing him. Karafilly herself gives an account of how she, the adolescent daughter, came home earlier and caught her father with a woman with whom he spoke Yiddish and laughed a lot while her mother was at her factory job. It coincides with the memory her mother confided in her of her father being caught with another Polish woman at the back of his store (Karafilly, *Stranger* 68-69).

Such infidelities are probably the proof of their mutual misunderstanding and mismatching, but the very guilt that Claudia felt throughout her life places her in the very center of trauma as if she identified almost with perpetrators rather than victims and thus she could not establish a satisfactory relationship with a victim. Though not straightforwardly included in the group of Holocaust survivors, she becomes a part of it not only through her relationship to a person whose family died in the Holocaust and who escaped the fate, but through her identification with both: a Jew (by marrying a Jew, by cooking Jewish meals, by living in Israel, by having a son with a Jew) and the killer whom she also at times wanted to be (begging for a knife to kill her husband). Karafilly asks a rhetorical question that can serve as a

paradoxical answer to the identity problems her mother faced: “Could Alzheimer’s be a willful escape from intolerable truths; the only option left once hope is gone and all that remains is the knowledge of a life it is now too late to change? After all, even Freud believed that not only is there such a thing as susceptibility to illness, there is also the *need* for illness” (Karafilly, *Stranger* 47-48, italics original). The escape, if the illness can be viewed in this way, is of course an attempt to forget about the various losses (from the long-lost fiancé in the Urals to the lack of mutual love in her marriage), but it must also be seen in the context of the split of Claudia Pavlova’s identity – the unbearable burden of assimilation with the Jews and even the mimicry she tried to adapt and the guilt for killing them, intensified by her hatred towards her husband.

These problematic issues are further developed by Karafilly who is intent upon discovering the secrets of her family, even though it equals divulging the most intimate details. She feels inclined to get to the ‘truths’ about her parents, although what she has are some scattered memories, a few photos and a demented mother. Justifying herself with Philip Roth’s claim that “When a writer is born into a family, the family is finished,” (149) Karafilly describes her adolescent memory of Ari, her mother’s lover back in Israel – the memory of whom suddenly comes back to her when she is seventy. The mother recounts this affair as her desperate need to prove she was attractive to another man since she confessed she had not been attractive to her own husband at all. Notwithstanding her unfaithfulness, there appears another bunch of secrets hidden behind the veil of the disease.

From time to time, Karafilly’s mother comes back to the memory of having two daughters. Confused by the malady, she can easily be supposed to have mixed up her son, whom she sees occasionally, with a daughter. But there is a constant accusation that her daughter does not love her enough and that she has actually two daughters: one good, loving and caring and the other one bad. This is especially painful for Karafilly, as she is the only person in the family to take care of her mother on a regular, daily basis in the first phase of the hospitalization, her brother being unavailable and away. Still, her mother was “telling me [Karafilly] how glad she was to have me visit; how lucky she was to have raised such a good daughter” (Karafilly, *Stranger* 83). The statement then is continued in a conversation they have:

- And what about the one who gave you so much trouble? I found myself asking in spite of myself.
- That was Irka, she said, offering the nickname she had used all through my childhood.
- And who am I? I asked, smiling inwardly now.
- Irinka, she said. This was a Russian diminutive for my name; one never used in my family.
- So you have two daughters? I said, truly intrigued now.
- One good, one bad?
- Yes, she said. — Two. She sounded only a little doubtful. (Karafilly, *Stranger* 83)

This is yet another element of her mother's dementia through which the shadows of the past are revealed. She claims occasionally that her husband was beating her despite her desire to serve him well and although the father never really admitted it and kept denying using any violence, he mentioned that he had to hold or slap her in the first attacks of her memory loss. Karafilly never learns the truth.

Through her mother's constant consideration of the number of children she had, the next shard of the deeply hidden memories returns. Claudia Pavlova admits her husband never wanted more children and she had to undergo many abortions<sup>2</sup>. Although not explicitly discussed, this fact is another factor making Karafilly's mother feel trapped in the life-death, survivor-victim, love-hatred snare. The surfacing of these memories is always accompanied by statements like: "How many children did I have?" (44), "'Unbelievable, what's happening to me.' She switched into Polish. 'I'm not the person I used to be'" (44) and "Only my husband never loved me" (45). The personal traumas she went through, together with the experience of Alzheimer's, which is both

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<sup>2</sup> This is only mentioned in passing as at one moment Karafilly's mother started to sing a song in Russian "about a girl seeking an abortionist. She has, over the years [comments Karafilly referring to her mother], told me many times of her deep resentment at having been forced to have several abortions back in Poland, one of them without anesthetic. — Your father never wanted to have children — she has told me on countless occasions — I would have had half a dozen if I could" (Karafilly, *Stranger* 126). This fact, although never else openly admitted and discussed in the book, can shed some light upon her psychological state. If one can trust this revelation of a mentally demented person, then the multiplied abortions may have left a mark of trauma on Karafilly's mother's mind.

traumatic for the family and the illness's *victim* mirror the Holocaust trauma Pavlova's husband went through (even if he did not witness the death of his parents owing to his escape to the East). The roles they both assume are interchangeably the roles of victims and perpetrators, even if the stories of her husband's using domestic violence cannot be fully given credit to. Claudia Pavlova Denberg and her husband, Mr. Denberg, perform both roles. They deny and accept at the same time the fact that they are the victims of the wife's Alzheimer's disease, of an unsuccessful relationship, of the suspected domestic violence, of failure in the assimilation into the Jewish culture despite the strange desire to do so, and of the Nazi terror. They oscillate between accepting the guilt for and denying being the victims of the past traumas.

### Framing the Mysterious Past

Marianne Hirsch in *Family Frames* devotes a part of her book to photographs taken by mothers and the relationship which is created between a mother-photographer and a child-being photographed. In the case of *The Stranger in the Plumed Hat*, the photographs also play important roles and create an atmosphere of secrecy. Moreover, they also form a strong bond between a mother and a daughter although the mother is the central figure in the pictures and the daughter only watches the photos occasionally. Through the loss of memory as well as the loss of their Canadian possessions due to the fire Karafilly's mother unintentionally started in their house in April 1998, Karafilly tries to stick to the little details that are left physically after the burning and in her memory. Among these there is a memory of the only photo of her mother's childhood:

it was a snapshot showing my mother at the age of five, seated against a stark background of snow, surrounded by a group of bundled, picnicking relatives. She could never explain this odd winter scene, but the relatives were quite likely inebriated, all brandishing vodka glasses, while my mother, the lone child, sat in the midst, looking oddly lost, clutching her scarf in one hand and a doll in the other. The photograph had been taken in the Russian Urals. I still remember my grandmother's entry on the back, written in purple ink: *Orenburg, 1926*. I remember my grandmother's dreamy gaze in the photograph, and the birches in the background, and the possessive, vaguely anxious way that my mother sat clutching the doll. (Karafilly, *Stranger* 19, italics original)

This detailed description in the form of ekphrasis illustrates some premonition as to the losses that would await them in the future during and after the Second World War. The world from the 1920s is irretrievably lost and the dreamy gazes in the picture can now only symbolize the strange foreboding. It also, however, refers to the loss of her mother's self as everything she had possessed (both physically i.e. her possessions as well as her memory of the past) is lost in the disastrous fire – “a mental catastrophe subsuming her former self as relentlessly as the flames had the home she cherished” (Karafilly, *Stranger* 18). The loss of photographs therefore frames her loss of memory.

There are other photographs alluded to in the memoir as well. Karafilly received some photos from her mother which then disappeared from her own house. She never really learned who had taken them but suspected her mother of retrieving the pictures. The reasons for it remain unsettled and unclear. These were the “nine faded sepia photographs going back to Russia” (Karafilly, *Stranger* 111) which were the only remaining link to their past in the Urals. Alongside, there were other “snapshots in fragrant Polish forests and on white sands of Israeli beaches; the ones of my brother and me in Purim costumes, and of my mother in matching dresses” (111). There is no evidence of the moments of happiness with the destruction of the photos. Some of them (they also include the newer pictures taken already in Canada) are, however, duplicated and left at the hospital for Karafilly’s mother to cherish them, but they also disappear mysteriously. First, the father is accused of taking them; two of the pictures turn up in the laundry room, and the father admits to taking one. The rest vanish.

Incredible as it may sound, although being reasonably wealthy, as Karafilly’s father had a prosperous jewelry store, the family does not have any visible remnants from the past. This symbolic lack of photos illustrates the lack of memories, thus the lack of the past, lost in the shadow of the dark fire smoke and the dark corners of her mother’s brain inhabited by Alzheimer’s disease. The “unsolved family puzzle,” which Karafilly recounts (*Stranger* 236), is, therefore, also hidden in the pictures. Central among these was the eponymous “old Polish portrait of my mother in her plumed hat” (236). The ekphrastic description of this picture opens the memoir and alongside the depiction of “a black-and-white femme fatale wearing a diamond brooch and a felt hat with a white, audacious feather” (3) Karafilly recreates the feeling of estrangement that the photo always

evoked in her as the picture showed her mother but “a mother I [Karafilly] was barely acquainted with: a glamorous stranger who held me in her complex spell (...) this photo – it had been taken in Lodz, around 1950 – [and] suggested infinite mystery and hauteur” (Karafilly, *Stranger* 3). The mystery of this photo is never solved as the picture itself vanished from the mother’s album about twenty five years before the illness struck. Karafilly ponders the fact that it could have been an early symptom of what is to come.<sup>3</sup> The picture is both a testimony to the other mother Karafilly had, an elegant, distant, eponymous ‘stranger,’ but also to the fact that through the inability to catch a glimpse of her former mother, she can never fully reach her past. Or, on the contrary, the mother is now a stranger, a demented, different version of her other self. Though this particular picture was duplicated by Karafilly’s aunt from Russia, the original is mysteriously lost and the copy is burned in the flames.

The only photo that has remained is the one that the father had with him all the time: “a small, creased, black-and-white photo of my youthful mother and father sitting at a wedding reception. They are both dressed up and smiling (...) My mother looks glamorous as she did in her plumed hat, without any haughtiness I remember” (Karafilly, *Stranger* 238). What remains, then, is a picture giving testimony to neither the distant past nor the mother Karafilly remembers. In Hirsch’s meditation on Eva Hoffman’s use of photos in *Lost in Translation*, she writes that “The photograph does not enable them [the two women depicted in the picture] to find their past connection: it measures the depth of their disconnection. It evokes the world and a friendship they lost and cannot recapture” (Hirsch 2002: 223). A similar approach can be used to analyze the photos in Karafilly’s memoir. The photo which survives is accidental and plain and does not offer the desired insight into its subject’s life. The pictures which vanish and remain memorized show the disconnection, the vast gap, between the old world and the new life, the ungraspable rift in Karafilly’s memories.

Claudia Constantinova Pavlova Denberg cannot be viewed as a typical Holocaust survivor and therefore she is not discussed here as such. She might be analyzed by doctors and psychiatrists on the basis of the symptoms depicted by Karafilly. My modest attempt is not to usurp any

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<sup>3</sup> One of the common early symptoms of Alzheimer’s disease is losing things, scattering possessions, which Karafilly also observed in her mother’s behavior.

of the aforementioned positions. I try to apply the literary angle to the memoir, showing that *The Stranger in the Plumed Hat* is a memoir, but due to the illness of the author's mother, which influences the memory of particular events, it can never be fully trusted.

Moreover, through the bond to the Polish Jew who fled from the Holocaust shattered Łódź, Karafilly's book inevitably becomes a commentary on the annihilation of Jews. Paradoxically, Karafilly's mother was the only member of the family who tried to retain the Jewish traditions and wanted their life in Canada to be as similar to the lives of other Canadians as possible. According to Karafilly, it was the father who did not pay attention to Jewish celebrations and "thought nothing of eating ham and playing cards on Yom Kippur" (Karafilly, *Stranger* 173), but it was also he who was to "fly into rage on coming home and finding a Christmas tree – 'and a monkey yet' – standing in a flat furnished by a Jewish family who had perished at Treblinka" (173).

Claudia Pavlova's mind thus experienced from the early years of their relationship a mixture of guilt and passion to make up for the Jewish tragedy. Therefore, considering Karafilly's premonition that the illness is the escape from the unbearable, a significant parallel can be observed here. Karafilly's mother is a witness to her husband's untold trauma. He never expressed his feelings and what is left about him are merely a few facts: arguing with his wife, having love affairs with the Jewish women, being unable to declare his feeling towards his life companion. The tyranny of trauma thus 'contaminates' Karafilly's family. Dori Laub also notices a certain transfer of guilt from being a victim to being the perpetrator. On the basis of some interviews with the Holocaust victims, he claims that the "untold events had become so distorted in her unconscious memory as to make her believe that she herself, and not the perpetrator, was responsible for the atrocities (...) If she could not stop them, rescue or comfort the victims, *she bore the pain*" (Laub 1995: 65, italics original). Paradoxically, in *The Stranger in the Plumed Hat*, such a transfer does not dominate Karafilly's father, but her mother who was neither the victim of the Holocaust nor its witness, but she witnessed her husband's non-witnessing. Due to his escape from the war-stricken Poland, he was the one who did not see the establishment and liquidation of the Łódź ghetto and, as a result of that, he was the one who must have felt the guilt of non-witnessing. Throughout his life with Claudia, it was she therefore who adopted his guilt and became his victim at the same time.

### **Lisa Appignanesi's *The Memory Man*<sup>4</sup>**

Like Karafilly's work, Lisa Appignanesi's texts frequently refer to the way memory functions, and offer a discussion of memory and its connections with Jewishness and the Holocaust, which Appignanesi focuses on accommodating her personal experience. In the novel *The Memory Man* (2004),<sup>5</sup> which won the 2005 Holocaust Literature Award, she analyses the ways in which memory plays a crucial role in finding one's past, roots and identity. She examines the patterns of remembering and forgetting as indispensable aspects conducive to the formation of Jewish identity and the identity of a Holocaust survivor.

#### **Memory/Forgetting**

In *The Memory Man*,<sup>6</sup> the intersection between memory and forgetting mainly concerns a Holocaust survivor, whose repression of memories is a metaphor for his escape from reliving what he experienced during the war. However, Anne Whitehead, in her book titled *Memory* (2008), concludes her discussion with a proposal of the “art of forgetting”, which may serve as an indication of the future direction of memory studies. She writes: “It seems to me that forgetting, *considered in all of its complexity*, deserves to be taken seriously, both because it is an inseparable and not always sufficiently recognized aspect of memory itself, and because some measure of forgetting is a necessary requirement for personal and civic health” (Whitehead 2008: 156-157, italics original). This particular mode of escaping from the torment of memory cannot be fully accepted from an ethical point of view by scholars such as Paul Ricoeur (2004), whose study on the subject of memory proves that forgetting leads to amnesia,

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<sup>4</sup> This is a revised version of a discussion originally published in Drewniak (2012a).

<sup>5</sup> I use a reprinted version of the first edition of the novel. For details, see Bibliography at the end of the book.

<sup>6</sup> Lisa Appignanesi's novel could be viewed in a wider context of the Holocaust writing which ranges from the already canonical texts by Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi through Adele Wiseman, Clara Kramer, and Janina Bauman, to name just a few, representing exemplary Canadian, US and English Holocaust voices respectively. Here, Appignanesi's novel is only a case study of rendering the story of a Holocaust survivor in the form of fictional narrative. Her text is also interpreted here as a voice from the writer belonging to the second generation of survivors, whose experience of the Holocaust is not restricted by the experience of Auschwitz.

and thus amnesty. Ricoeur's views, though expressed mainly through philosophy and history, can be applied to narrative as well. His doubts about "*ars oblivionis*" (Ricoeur 2004: 505) echo the quandaries which both fiction and non-fiction pose. He writes that "the ruses of forgetting are still easy to unmask on the plane where the institutions of forgetting, the paradigm of which is amnesty, provide grist to the abuses of forgetting, counterparts to the abuses of memory" (Ricoeur 2004: 500). Therefore despite a whole range of arguments for a "happy memory," to use Ricoeur's term, it is still essential not to cross the boundaries of abuse of memory, which may stem from forgetting, especially in the context of Holocaust studies.

Karl Simms (2003: 121) emphasizes Ricoeur's belief "in the duty to remember. Collective remembrance constitutes history. If pardon is a gift, then it is tied to memory in that when something is given, there is a debt on the part of the recipient." Moreover, neither remembering nor forgetting belong to the sphere of conscious decisions, and thus are passed down to subsequent generations. Ellen S. Fine notes that the existence of the post-Holocaust generation makes the question of memory constantly vital. She expands the term "second generation" in a similar way to Eaglestone (2004) by saying that it "is used to characterize the generation born after the war, generally referring to children of survivors. However, [Fine's] use of the expression is more comprehensive, encompassing those born during and after the war, including those who did not directly participate in the Holocaust but who have come to endure the psychic imprint of the trauma" (Fine 1998: 186).

Marianne Hirsch defines the notion of diasporic experience of the generation in question and calls for an idea of 'absent memory,' which is typical of those "whose parents never spoke of their abandoned world or of their wartime experiences and who thus had almost no access to the repressed stories that shaped them" (2002: 243).<sup>7</sup> This element is situated

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<sup>7</sup> Michael F. Bernard-Donals in his *Forgetful Memory: Representation and Remembrance in the Wake of the Holocaust* contrasts the term "absent memory" with his idea of "forgetful memory" which is seen by him as "the interruption of the fabric of memory by the trace or effect of the event that it can't contain" (2009: 59). His study is mainly concentrated around studying visual representations of trauma. Yet, his views on the oppositions between these two modes of memory are vital in the understanding of Amelia's behavior in *The Memory Man*. What Bernard-Donals also adds to his definition of "forgetful memory" is that if "the second generation witness experiences regret at this

at the very center of post/memory, thus corroborating the inability to forget, even if the survivors undertake the effort of erasing the past and do not deliberately inform their children about it. Nonetheless, Hirsch claims that “None of us ever knows the world of our parents. We can say that the motor of the fictional imagination is fuelled … [by] a need … to remember, to re-build, to re-incarnate, to replace, and to repair” (Hirsch 2002: 242-243). This fusion of collective and absent memories is, according to Fine (1998: 187), the main domain of the post-Holocaust narration. The painful passage from forgetting to remembering becomes the main motif of *The Memory Man*.

### **Suppression of memories/memories excavated**

From the very first pages of her novel, Appignanesi makes memory the focus of the book. Not only the novel’s title but also the mottos she borrows from W.G. Sebald’s *Austerlitz*<sup>8</sup> and Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*<sup>9</sup> make these considerations on lost memories and re-claiming the past the leading motifs in her own story. Moreover, her chapter titles “Present Tense,” “Past Present,” “Past Historic,” and “Return” exhibit significant allusions to the main concern of the novel, and suggest intricate connections between the past and the present and the impossibility of dissolving these categories in one’s life.

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inaccessibility in absent memory, there’s no such regret in forgetful memory” (2009: 59). Such an approach situates Amelia in the very center of “absent memory,” though the concept of Bernard-Donals is also an interesting viewpoint to consider.

<sup>8</sup> The passage from Sebald’s book which functions as a motto in Appignanesi’s text is as follows: “I realized then, he said how little practice I had in using my memory, and conversely how hard I must always have tried to recollect as little as possible, avoiding everything which related in any way to my unknown past … I had constantly been preoccupied by that accumulation of knowledge which I had pursued for decades, and which served as a substitute or compensatory memory.” (Appignanesi, *Memory* no page given) Both the *Memory Man* and *Austerlitz* exhibit certain parallels concerning the process of recollecting memories about the traumatic past.

<sup>9</sup> The motto from Proust’s novel is the following: “Days in the past cover up little by little those that preceded them and are themselves buried beneath those that follow them … Our self is composed of the superimposition of our successive states. But this superimposition is not unalterable like the stratification of a mountain. Incessant upheavals raise to the surface ancient deposits.” (Appignanesi, *Memory* no page given)

The main character of the book, Bruno Lind, a scientist dealing professionally with complicated neurological issues of remembering and memory loss, tries to recollect his war memories during a journey to the places of his youth, which are at the same time the sites of his and his family's trauma. The Holocaust, change of identities, war experiences and, finally, living in DP camps and escaping to Canada, return to Bruno Lind's mind in order to be passed on to the next generation and then preserved. Attending a conference of neuroscientists in Vienna, where Bruno was born, brings him closer to his childhood memories, and his decision to further explore the past and to travel to Poland is the result of the suppressed memories he reluctantly begins to recall.

Denial of trauma is a well-known experience. For Bruno, in his early youth, it becomes a daily practice aided by the new life he is offered by a doctor from a DP camp, whom Bruno helps as an apprentice for two years. In 1948, Bruno receives all of the necessary papers allowing him to enter Canada, which "felt innocent" (Appignanesi, *Memory* 65), and begin his education in medical sciences. This total change of place and work allows him to forget and distance himself from his war memories. Arriving in Canada at the climax of autumn, he marvels at the landscape, "ablaze with red and russet leaves [which] ... gave way to gusting winds. Snows followed in their wake, and the city took on a coat of white. He loved the white and the stillness that came with it. ... [It] filled him with a delight he couldn't name. It was a little like the snow. It swallowed everything outside and made it invisible" (Appignanesi, *Memory* 65-66). This whiteness and innocence of his first Canadian experiences creates a chance to begin a new life and erase his trauma with the blankness of novelty. Finding refuge in the landscape is also connected with the nature of the personal contacts Bruno is able to establish at the beginning. Although polite, they are superficial and cold, and do not encourage any deeper connection. Bruno thus never has an opportunity to confide in someone about his past.

This is why it shocks Bruno to discover in Vienna that after so many years his memories, though denied, are stored in the deepest corners of his mind. His stay in Austria begins with a symbolic welcome at the airport when a person waiting for Bruno holds a cardboard sign that says 'Memory' in order to greet scientists attending the symposium. Then, during his conference speech, he switches into German and "fe[els] the familiarity of the speech on his tongue, despite the sudden strain on his

lips and cheek as long dormant muscles were prodded into action" (Appignanesi, *Memory* 17). Led by some unexplainable instinct, Bruno goes to see his childhood house and accidentally crashes into a young boy skateboarding in the street.<sup>10</sup> Bruno is knocked down and loses consciousness for a while. This triggers a memory of a similar event in the remote past:

Funny how he had altogether forgotten that attack in front of the childhood apartment until this afternoon with its painful near repetition. Forgotten because so many worse events had come in its wake, displacing it in a sequence of horrors. It must have been the physical act of falling which had awoken the young Nazi thugs who leaped at him in 1938. No, no... that wasn't quite right. It was the whole associative sequence, this city, the street, the woman bending towards the window, one thing after another, a whole series of cues activating the neural networks to give him the memory again. (Appignanesi, *Memory* 13)

The memory of the long-ago attack in the street evokes memories of his father, who frequently suffered from similar attacks. The anti-Semitic atmosphere of Vienna in the 1930s led to his father's disappearance and probable death. Yet, there is another, strange coincidence of facts when Bruno overhears the name of a scientist from Poland registering for the conference, Aleksander Tarski. Hearing this name provokes intense feelings in Bruno, since it is the name he once stole from a heavily wounded Partisan who had recognized him as a Jew, and which he used as an alias in order to hide his Jewishness and become an active member of the Polish underground resistance during the war. This man seems to be too young to be Bruno's contemporary. Nevertheless, the hero begins to fathom his past even more, and realizes that "by some perverse instinct, he had followed a name he didn't want to think about, and it had led him to a seam of his past he had lost, but not, it now seemed, forever. It had been kept passionately alive for him by an old woman who contained a young one, almost intact" (Appignanesi, *Memory* 251). Due to his connection with Tarski and

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<sup>10</sup> The importance of this accident in Appignanesi's text is also parallel to Sebald's *Austerlitz*, in which such coincidences also play a role in triggering the memories and provide an insight into the world from the past. Similarly to Bruno from *The Memory Man*, Sebald's Austerlitz travels to the city of his childhood (Prague) to excavate the suppressed memories while catching the after/images of his hometown blurred by time and rift of the Holocaust.

meeting a journalist from Poland who attends the conference, as well as his daughter Amelia's interest, Bruno agrees to take part in a journey of self-discovery to Cracow and its surrounding areas. The old woman mentioned in the above quotation, the journalist's mother who is suffering from Alzheimer's, turns out to be the woman Bruno fell in love with in his youth when he spent some time hiding in a farmhouse in the countryside.

The familiarity of Vienna on the one hand, and Bruno's alienation in the city, on the other, can be understood in light of his experience of exile. He finds himself on the crossroads, torn among his various concepts of home, none of which he can call a real home. In Canada, Bruno finds forgetting and oblivion, but is painfully aware that Canada is not the country of his origins, of his grandparents and of his childhood. Vienna at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is no longer his remembered childhood home, but merely the site of the painful memory of his father's disappearance. And Poland, to which Bruno travels after the conference, turns out to stir the worst memories of his mother's and sister's murders, the deaths of his grandparents, and his own brush with death. Canada's sterility, and Austria and Poland being virtually graveyards for Bruno, create an intense feeling of unbelonging, typical of people living in exile who have survived the Holocaust. Hirsch claims that such emotions are characteristic not only of those who have suffered war trauma, but even of their children: "'Home' is always elsewhere, even for those who return to the Vienna, the Berlin, the Paris, or the Cracow their families had to leave, because the cities to which they can return are no longer the cities in which their parents lived as Jews before the genocide, but the cities where the genocide happened and from which they and their memory have been expelled" (Hirsch 1997: 243). This exiled condition, together with his career as a skilled neuroscientist, who studies human brain, forms Bruno's identity.

Bruno professionally explores the ways in which memory functions, and this leads him to various thoughts concerning his own fate. Being an expert, Bruno comes to the conclusion that "our understanding of memory, which must be the foundation of mind, is still in its infancy" (Appignanesi, *Memory* 18), despite the development of neuroscience. Paradoxically, as a scientist he strives to discover a cure for memory loss, while, in his private life, he wishes to forget the past. Aware of the numerous ways of finding oblivion, Bruno is confronted with doubts: "Why was it that, although our brain cells are always changing, we remember even when we want to

forget? But the world had been transformed since then. Wanting to forget had been replaced by wanting to remember" (Appignanesi, *Memory* 7). Central to the whole story, this thought is a recurrent motif in the next generations' quest for identity as well as the more general concept of collective memory. His denial of remembering and a bold certainty that it is possible to suppress memories are juxtaposed with his visit to the places which were once familiar. Bruno realizes very quickly that "the fear was still alive, despite the passage of years" (Appignanesi, *Memory* 4). Shocked as Bruno is, he discovers:

a memory solidified by repetition, so that it became a part of him, was felt – a collective memory which was also individual, his own. Here. Recorded in these walls. Flashbulb memories. That's what they called them in the profession. Shocking, traumatic experiences or images, reproduced by the media time and again, and bringing with them great floods of adrenalin and steroids, picked up by amygdala and the hippocampus, imprinted. Here, inside. In his brain. (Appignanesi, *Memory* 39)

The protagonist is able to explain the processes governing such memories in the brain, but is reluctant to acknowledge that it is happening to him, that these are his own suppressed memories of the war trauma that are ready to surface in his own brain. Bruno goes even further in his negation, as if he cannot believe the recollection might happen to himself. When he is immersed in a professional discussion with a few fellow scientists, he convinces them that "If the memory's become long-term, it'll come back with the appropriate triggers" (Appignanesi, *Memory* 51). He is still unaware, however, that such triggers have already appeared around him: the language and the landscapes of his childhood. As a result of these factors, his memories are going to be gradually excavated and the languages he hears in Austria and Poland also contribute to the release of "the overpowering force of heteroglossia, and thus dialogism" (Bakhtin 1981: 426). At the beginning, he tries to look at himself with the distance of a professional scientist who constantly speculates on the way memory functions. As a specialist, he cannot accept the fact that he does not remember things he wants to remember, and vice versa. Although Bruno remembers the moment his father drew a nerve cell for him, he does not remember whether he missed him after his father's disappearance. Bruno even asks an expert question:

Did the brain distinguish between registering real death from real-time death, as death on television was oddly called? The answer probably lay in the level of fear – recurring fear [as] he may not have witnessed Hitler's rallying cry to the Austrians then, but somehow it had etched itself with pictorial realism on his mind, so that he could see huge massed crowds ... Like New Yorkers, who vividly remembered the destruction of the Twin Towers as a real event, whereas in fact they had only witnessed it virtually. (Appignanesi, *Memory* 10)

As a result, Bruno cannot be certain what he 'really' remembers and what he projects onto his memory. As a scientist, competent with the workings of memory, he should be able to distinguish among these tangled visions, but he fails. However, this failure does not put Bruno in the position of being defeated by oblivion; on the contrary, it serves as a springboard to excavate the 'ancient deposits' which Appignanesi alludes to at the beginning of *The Memory Man* in the quotation from Proust.

### **Post/memory**

Bruno's decision to forget is not understood by his adopted daughter, Amelia, who is another triggering force in the novel. For many years, she accepted her father's silence about his past but, despite her Black-Canadian origins, she is compelled towards the Jewish faith and becomes an active member of a synagogue. During their journey to Poland, when Bruno refuses to take Amelia to Auschwitz, she exclaims:

What else fathers are for ... is introducing their children to the history that made them ... because the history that made them gets passed down, willy-nilly ... Even if you don't talk about it, it's there. It's there in your silences, in your gestures, in the odd things that make you angry, like filling in forms. In your sudden starts. In the way that you used to hug me as if I might disappear down an Alice hole at any minute. (Appignanesi, *Memory* 124)

Amelia's appeal to Bruno to retell his stories, may also be seen in the context of Paul Ricoeur's "narrative remembrance," a notion which is supposed to denote the way memories are stored. Through a reconsideration of such memories in the narrative, a tribute is paid to the victims of the Holocaust and such a writing comprises a warning to the generations to come. According to Kearney: "Narrative remembrance, as

analysed by Ricouer, can serve two functions: it can help us to represent the past as it really was, or to reinvent it as it might have been" (2004: 108, italics original). In life-writing and historical writing, the primacy would be granted to the former mode, whereas in fiction it would be granted to the latter, as Kearney claims, but, in both cases, the importance to remember the Holocaust and to retell, or "reinvent" it, is an important duty of the survivors and their children.

The concept of "narrative remembrance" with its reference to the past touches upon the problem of forgetting and recollection of the events from the past. The idea of recollection seems to be closely related to the process of narration: "It was Aristotle who most plainly made the distinction between *mneme* and *anamnesis*, memory and recollection, where memory is the making present of something absent, while recollection is a type of kinesis or movement, a motion or animation in which what is absent becomes suddenly present but as *process*" (Bernard-Donals 2009: 9, the former italics original, the latter mine). Following Rocoeur's and Bernard-Donals's views, it has to be highlighted that memories have the structure of a narrative. Therefore, memories which are excavated also gain a similar form. As Bernard-Donals stresses, "the point of origin – the lost memory – is the origin of writing" (2009: 10).

Amelia's feelings as well as her religious conversion follow the paths of postmemory outlined by Hirsch, who claims that "the children of exiled survivors, although they have not themselves lived through the trauma of banishment and forcible separation from home and the destruction of that home, remain marked by their parents' experiences" (2002: 243) as well as Ricouer's "narrative remembrance." The motif of knowledge and feeling shared by the second generation is known to Appignanesi herself, who expresses similar views in her memoir *Losing the Dead*. Eaglestone, in his *The Holocaust and the Postmodern* (2004), extends the concept of postmemory to "all of us who come after the Holocaust, and who reflect on it" (2008: 73). He ponders such questions as "how does the 'post-Holocaust memory' of those who did not live through the events relate to that which it cannot take on board fully?" (Eaglestone 2008: 73) and discusses the degree to which postmemory affects people through storytelling, as "these narratives [post-Holocaust memory narratives], told to us as well as told by us, acted out by us and acted out in relation to us, are still interwoven and equiprimordial. We are interpellated, identified by and in a range of different memory narratives"

(Eaglestone 2008: 76). This idea of narrating memory, as expressed by Eaglestone and Appignanesi as well, coincides with Ricouer's conviction that remembering in the context of the Holocaust is, first of all, a moral duty of the human race inasmuch as retelling true stories of death and survival saves them from banality (Kearney 2004: 107).

This moral dictate together with the concept of postmemory in *The Memory Man* refer to Amelia, irrespective of her cultural origin, as she is "interpellated" and defined through her father's experiences and his silence. Irena, the Polish journalist, also shares such a view and observes that "the survivors are growing so old, they'll be gone soon, so we want to know before it's too late" (Appignanesi, *Memory* 87). Amelia is infected to a certain extent by her father's trauma, but she is also an extremely vital person, and attempts to cure her father of his fears and misery and thus legitimize her Jewishness and her need to remember. Amelia may seem to be in a 'more comfortable' position, able to be indifferent towards her father's past, since she is adopted by Bruno and his wife, not related by blood. It turns out, then, that postmemory is neither transmitted genetically nor through stories as Amelia's father has silenced his past for a very long time. In Amelia's case, her father's legacy becomes hers as a result of the whole emotional baggage, including the unvoiced one, her father bestows on her. Nonetheless, she desires to know about Bruno's difficult past and proves herself to be strong enough to face it, since her strength and vigor give her the ability to witness trauma. Moreover, her childhood, as she claims, was tinged with her experiences of prejudice as a Black-Canadian.

The journey that Amelia encourages her father to undertake is a quest for memory through the places Bruno lived in during the war, places where he hid with his mother and sister and where they were killed. Amelia would like to push her father to the extreme and accuses him of not wanting to visit Auschwitz. This is too much for Bruno. In an outburst of agitation, he yells at her that he is afraid of not having proper feelings there, or perhaps not even feeling anything. Instead, he offers to go to the New Jewish Cemetery where members of his family are buried, and this particular moment triggers another feeling of readiness to see the countryside where his mother and sister were killed. He experiences this disposition in a very specific way, as if "the dead were murmuring to him, talking" (Appignanesi, *Memory* 130). Reliving the trauma is a difficult experience for Bruno, but Amelia finds a way to acknowledge these deaths and

negotiates with a local woman the possibility of placing a modest stone with an inscription commemorating Bruno's family, those who are "remembered by Bruno Lind and his daughter, Amelia" (Appignanesi, *Memory* 189). This moment of emotional terror is like a rite of passage for Bruno, similar to a permit to live and die in peace. But it is also what he was most afraid of: re-collection of the terrifying memories. His account underscores the tragedy as well as his regained, acute memory: "My mother and sister were shot here. In front of my eyes. They're buried near that tree where the little girl is swinging. My sister played there too. She was barely six-years-old. I promised I'd come back" (Appignanesi, *Memory* 188). Such closure and mourning seem to be important elements of one's identity (Eaglestone 2008: 96). The processes of denial and surfacing through blurred memory are widely discussed in Appignanesi's novel. In the denouement of *The Memory Man*, the importance of memory in the formation of a child's identity is presented: "It was all so strange. The way memory was so crucial to who one was, the very foundation on which identity was built" (Appignanesi, *Memory* 231). Although Bruno's final recollection triumphs over the recurrent fears, it is Amelia who has to face this past now.

Driven by her desire to confront her father's past, Amelia might be charged with the willingness "to equate [the children's own] suffering with that of their parents, appropriating it for their own identity purposes" (Hirsch 2012: 20). This assumption is shared by a number of writers such as Gary Weissman, Ruth Franklin and Marianne Hirsch herself.<sup>11</sup> However, in *The Memory Man* Appignanesi tries to avoid falling in the trap of "ambition or envy or narcissism" (Hirsch 2012: 20) that awaits the second generation, represented by Amelia, trying to claim her father's past. The fact that Amelia is of Black-Canadian origin and has experienced identity crisis herself defend her against such accusations. Having experienced prejudice and rejection, she is the only fair recipient of Bruno's painful legacy.

Bruno's desire to forget seems to constitute a natural part of a Holocaust survivor's identity. His repression of war memories is also shaped by his experiences at the DP camp he lived in. There was painful irony in this

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<sup>11</sup> Hirsch lists all these names in her Introduction to *The Generation of Postmemory. Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (2012), where she mentions the concepts of "fantasies of witnessing" and "appropriation of witnessing" (2012: 20).

situation, firstly because the location of the camp in Germany meant he had to willingly apply to get there: "The camp itself was in Germany. Where else could these endless ironies of the supposed post-war take him but through Austria into Germany? The enemy – hated, feared, plotted against, fought, outsmarted too late. He had a feeling that German soil would belatedly swallow him up never to regurgitate him" (Appignanesi, *Memory* 60). And, secondly, since he only possessed his Polish documents he had to convince camp officials of his Jewishness. This was an extremely difficult situation for Bruno, as it would be for any Jew, since "he had hidden who he was for so long, had masqueraded as an Aryan for so many years, there seemed to be no going back. Lies grown into truths. The Nazi logic of race had taken them all" (Appignanesi, *Memory* 59). Having received a pass to enter Germany and become a displaced person, Bruno met other people similar to him in the DP camp. Never having spoken Yiddish, only German, he had to learn another language in order to fit in with the group. This sequence of events from Bruno's life shows how much he has to forget in pristine Canada in order to lead a comfortable life, devoid of any emotional turbulence.

Through meeting Irena's mother, Bruno's lover and savior, his journey in time uncovers a totally forgotten past. Bruno, a memory specialist, is astonished by what he is able to recall: "No. Science wouldn't, couldn't give him explanations that dealt adequately with the complexity of the experience of these past weeks. He felt at ease with that knowledge now. Felt strangely light too, in the midst of sadness, as if he would have liked to immerse himself even more deeply in that recollected world, rather than bear its burdens by avoiding it" (Appignanesi, *Memory* 247). Irena's mother's flashbacks of memory, which are a frequent occurrence in patients with Alzheimer's, "triggered a supposed recognition and launched a waterfall of speaking memory" (249). This feat of memory coincides with a probable lack of recognition, since she is now an old, ill woman and Bruno himself an elderly man. The greatest paradox is that Bruno, a healthy person, managed to forget, whereas Irena's mother still remembers, despite the fact that she was said to have lost a great part of her memory:

he had forgotten and she had remembered. Had even remembered the name he had worn and which had belonged to a man he thought dead, a man he had felt had tried to kill him ... Aleksander Tarski. His personal memory had functioned in the spirit of what collective memory had made of the time – Poles and Jews mired in hatreds, when the killing machine which made murderers and victims of them all had in the first instance

been put in place by a Nazi regime that despised them both. That was history ... and [she], whom the neurologists would have supposed to have lost her name memory almost first of all, had remembered through the tangles of her own forgetting. (Appignanesi, *Memory* 248).

As painful as they are, Bruno's recollections liberate him from his fear of returning to the past. Overcoming this fear allows him a more peaceful return to Canada. When Bruno faces his loss, it coincides with the discovery of his daughter's identity. Amelia, whose desire to discover the past results in finding a half-sister, much older than her, gains satisfaction in pushing her father to be able to commemorate the dead and in reclaiming memories from her father's past.

Lisa Appignanesi's novel, as well as her non-fictional *Losing the Dead: A Family Memoir* (1999) discussed in the previous chapter, apart from presenting narratives concerning a particular character (Bruno in *The Memory Man* and Appignanesi's parents in *Losing the Dead*), also offer philosophical disputes on Jewishness and the place of memory, alluding to Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire* (1989). Her considerations refer to the role of Jewishness in contemporary Europe when her characters visit the old Jewish district of Kazimierz in Cracow, where there are almost no Jews but Jewishness flourishes in an acutely performative way. She calls it "the heritage industry" and describes it as "tableaux, living snapshots of the supposed past culled from an intricate continuum and re-presented as attractions. An unruly sea trimmed into a garden pond with a couple of goldfish for effect. This was the memory of business at work ... And since there were no Jews here, memory with all its distortions was all you got. It was easier, after all, to love the extinct" (Appignanesi, *Memory* 122). Such a spectacle always brings pain and guilt of being the survivor. Another set of feelings which arises is the embarrassment of witnessing the frequently kitsch presentation of Jewishness to fit into the atmosphere in order to satisfy a whole range of tourists. In such situations, according to Appignanesi, the

hoary wartime truism leaped into ... [one's] mind. Poles and Jews recognized each other. Germans were less dangerous. They couldn't detect the subtle differences. ... This Pole was masquerading as a Jew out of folklore, a *stetl* Jew wearing fancy dress. It was like watching a minstrel show where the whites blackened their faces to perform a pastiche of black life. Watching it in a slave graveyard. (Appignanesi, *Memory* 121, italics and spelling original)

Bruno's experience during the trip to Central and Eastern Europe, through the mixture of emotions and revelations it offers, provokes a reconsideration of his identity through a recollection of his memories and facilitating his daughter's postmemory. His "condition of exile from the space of identity, this diasporic experience" (Hirsch 2002: 243) undergoes some changes, and he emerges a different person. Yet, Bruno acknowledges that it is impossible to fully erase memories from one's life. Although memories of the war may be suppressed for a time, Appignanesi's novel seems to prove Ricoeur's statement referring to the unattainability of "*ars oblivionis*" (2004: 505) and thus postponing Whitehead's proposal of "the art of forgetting" (2008: 156-157) at least for the generation of Holocaust survivors and their children. Bruno concludes his quest with the feeling that his scientific approach to memory and forgetting has been unable to fully protect him from grief and a series of coincidences which have led him to deeper recognition. Not only does the recollection of memories paradoxically bring him closer to these memories through the conference he attends, but also equips his adopted daughter with the right to know. To a large extent, it is Amelia's 'absent memory' that leads Bruno to follow the path of his forgetting towards remembering.

### **From Loss to Recollection**

The very idea of interpreting the memoir *The Stranger in the Plumed Hat* by Irena F. Karafilly alongside the novel *The Memory Man* by Lisa Appignanesi seems to be risky at first glance because of the obvious trap that generic boundaries impose on such a close reading especially if this analysis is a systematic one. A follow up conclusion may arise: is it really so important that one analyzes Karafilly's text *as a memoir* only and Appignanesi's *as a novel*? This is undoubtedly a valid quandary but at the same time it might be put aside if one concentrates on the workings of memory only. What is crucial for the present discussion is the way both writers, or, to emphasize the creative aspect of the process, both artists and creators, record feats and defeats of memory<sup>12</sup>, the way it functions and the price a human being pays if Alzheimer's attacks one's brain. The

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<sup>12</sup> I refer here to the title of Agnieszka Rzepa's book (2009). The intention here is not to appropriate the authorship of this formulation but, since it is extremely adequate in this context, to use it to show the ways memory functions.

intention of this study is not really to discuss in minute details the facts that Karafilly is ‘really’ the daughter of the main character struggling with Alzheimer’s and Amelia is not ‘really’ Appignanesi herself, but the fact that notions such as post/memory, sites of memory, or the interrelations and tensions between history and memory are represented in the strikingly similar way in different texts in spite of their generic origins. As this chapter has shown, both texts underline the value of personal memory and the necessity of reclaiming or excavating personal memory against the communal one or history for the main protagonists (be it really existing or imagined constructs) and their children. Moreover, both texts highlight that fact that “we should see memory as an intersection of remembrance and oblivion” (Bernard-Donals 2009: 15) through their analysis of Alzheimer’s disease and its effects on memory and forgetting. This is especially vital in the Canadian context where immigrants or children of immigrants already born in Canada seek their roots in order to fulfill the process of identity formation.

## **Chapter Four**

# **Novelistic After/Images: Rediscovery of Home through the Canadian Experience: Norman Ravvin's *Café des Westens*, Eva Stachniak's *Necessary Lies*, and Anne Michaels's *The Winter Vault*<sup>1</sup>**

In *A House of Words. Jewish Writing. Identity and Memory* (1997), Norman Ravvin addresses the notion of recreating one's past in fiction. His principal focus is Canadian Jewish writing but what is valuable in his approach is the fact that he accommodates both novels and non-fictional texts as well as referring to the importance of having been a witness through the process of fiction writing. He explains the need to narrate as stemming from a generation gap:

I recognize this bizarre gap between generations and the compelling urge to make the past part of a fictional present (...) there is the ever-present need for a backward glance, a tendency to take this world's measure by referring to an older one and to the stories that describe that world. Such stories present us with a portal out of our secure and often unsurprising life. (Ravvin 1997: 4)

This justification is highly autobiographical, as Ravvin's Jewish grandparents left the Polish town of Radzanow near Mlava before the Second World War and thus avoided the tragic fate of their neighbors. However, the urge he identifies is found in many immigrant and diasporic writers who try to pit themselves against their past, their site of memory, and their memories. Not only does Canadian literature offer examples of this in autobiographical and memoir type of writing but quite a few of the recently published novels redefine the perception of Poland as well. In the

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<sup>1</sup> Parts of the discussion that follows is published in Polish in Drewniak (2014). The publication in Polish has a more limited scope, however, as its aim is to offer an insight into the portrayals of Polish towns in Canadian literature to the Polish readers.

three texts chosen for discussion here, the authors, who come from Poland either directly (as Stachniak does) or indirectly (as Ravvin and Michaels do), approach the Polish past from a Canadian perspective. Therefore the images of Poland are reconsidered in their writings from a Canadian perspective of multiculturalism and transculturalism. The images or after/images are created from the vantage point of Canada and it seems that they could not have been elicited in any other way.

I use the term multiculturalism as a former step in the evolution of the phenomenon of transculturalism as a concept suggesting multiplicity of cultures and ethnicities inhabiting a certain area as opposed to a nationally homogenous region or country, rather than the political and social Project of Canada as a multicultural state. As such, Canadian multiculturalism has been the object of severe critique, for example by Himani Bannerji. Her understanding of the policy is, however, restricted to its influence on the so-called ‘visible minorities’ (2007), which are in her view excluded from sharing the multi- and especially transcultural experience. Moreover, Smaro Kamboureli in *Scandalous Bodies* also subjects multiculturalism to critique (2000). As Barbara Godard claims, Kamboureli criticizes “the process of normalizing ethnicity” (Godard 2007: 357) which “keeps cultural diversity manageable by the state in a centre/margin dialectic” (Godard 2007: 357). Godard quotes Kamboureli’s statement that multiculturalism is a “mandated discrimination” (Kamboureli 92, also cited in Godard 357). Will Kymlicka in his “Multiculturalism and Minority Rights: West and East” identifies some drawbacks in the multicultural policies in Canada, Belgium, and Switzerland. He mentions the appearance of “parallel societies” (Kymlicka 2002: 12-13), called also “two solitudes” (2002: 13), in the case of Canada as well as the high level of indifference among various ethnic groups.

Much of the study of Canadian transculturalism is done by Marie Vautier. She coins a more French-sounding term – transculturation – and refers to Jean Lamore’s definition, according to which it “is a process where one gives something in exchange for getting something, the two parts of the equation are thereby modified. A new reality is produced. Transculturation is in a state of constant transmutation; it is creative and never finished; it is irreversible” (Lamore quoted in and translated by Vautier 2003: 269).

Another important reflection on various meanings of the concept of transnationalism and transculturalism can be found in Winfried Siemerling’s

“Trans-Scan. Globalization, Literary Hemispheric Studies, Citizenship as Project” (2007). Here Siemerling, through an analysis of the prefix trans-, proposes a multifaceted look at Canadian literature and its research as scholarly activities going, among others, beyond, outside, through Canada (Siemerling 2007: 131-135).<sup>2</sup> He goes even further and proposes to abandon the term “CanLit” as the one that can no longer embrace the whole body of diasporic texts written and published in Canada. Instead, he wants us to “consider TransCanada” (130) because such a perspective “combine[s] well with the idea that local positionality by definition is relational, and thus requires mediation, difference, and multi-perspectival recognitions (...) to go ‘through’ Canada in the double sense of both across and beyond” (130). Siemerling also highlights the importance of “shared cultural contexts” (2007: 131) in the study of literature nowadays.

Transculturalism is, in the case of immigrant writing, inextricably connected to another dimension of “sharing cultural contexts” which is post/memory. Hirsch’s vision of the concept, appearing to a different extent in each of the diasporic writings where the second or third generation tries to accommodate the burden of the past, proves to be extremely important in the first text, analyzed in this chapter, Ravvin’s *Café des Westens*, where the child and grandson are haunted by the memory of the place from the past. In the case of Eva Stachniak’s *Necessary Lies*, the transcultural experience of immigration to Canada opens the main character to a new dimension of seeing the past of Breslau, which is not the vision she inherits from her ancestors. Rather, she ‘inherits’ a memory of loss because of her second, Canadian husband, a pre-1945 Breslauer. Furthermore, Anne Michaels’s protagonist from *The Winter Vault*, Lucjan, a war survivor himself, exhibits the inability to forget and illustrates the way in which memory becomes post/memory and therefore lives on. He together with his group of friends make it impossible to quench the still open wound of the war, full of memories, poisoning the present. The idea of shared contexts and experiences and the role of post/memory in the production of after/images of Poland as well as a transcultural dialogue that follows are the bases for the discussion of the fictional texts in this chapter.

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<sup>2</sup> In the context of this discussion, it is important to note that Anna Branach-Kallas explores the controversies of multi- and transculturalism in her *Corporeal Itineraries: Body, Nation, Diaspora in Selected Canadian Fiction* (2010). Her reading of a selection of diasporic texts is preceded with a study of multiculturalism as seen from a postcolonial, feminist and phenomenological perspectives.

### **Norman Ravvin's *Café des Westens***

Norman Ravvin, a scholar, literary critic and writer, was born in Calgary in 1963, and is the author of essays, scholarly criticism and books (both novels, short story collections and a travelogue). His Jewish grandparents emigrated to Canada at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century from Mława and Radzanów in central Poland. He has received degrees from University of British Columbia and University of Toronto and is currently employed at Concordia University, Montreal, where he pursues his academic career in the fields of Jewish and Holocaust studies and contemporary Canadian and American Jewish literature. He is also the editor of *Not Quite Mainstream: Canadian Jewish Short Stories* (2001) and an author of *A House of Words. Jewish Writing, Identity and Memory* (1997). His creative writing output includes a short story collection *Sex, Skyscrapers and Standard Yiddish* for which he gained the Emerging Artists Award, *Lola by Night* (2003), *Café des Westens* (1991), and recently published *The Joyful Child* (2011) (Norman Ravvin's Profile, McArthur 2011).

Ravvin's output can be divided into two groups: scholarly and creative writing. As a Professor of Concordia University, he is interested in Jewish fiction especially by such authors as Leonard Cohen, Irving Layton and Mordecai Richler. In his fiction, he has used such settings as Calgary, Toronto, Vancouver, and the USA often alluding to Canada's Jewish Polish heritage. His travel book, *Hidden Canada* (2001), seeks out lesser known places and stories across the country, including the southern Ontario towns of the Underground Railroad and the Jewish prairie colonies of Saskatchewan. His most recent novel, *The Joyful Child* (2011), explores the father-son bond against a legacy of the Holocaust mentioned in passing and the great North American tradition of crossing frontiers and journeying across the continent.

Ravvin's debut novel, *Café des Westens* (1991), called "a disturbingly autumnal book" (Kelman 1992: C7), is an example of how after/images surface in the present lives of elderly émigrés in Canada and how they overshadow the younger generations. It tells the story of the Binder family, Rivka Binder, the nestor of the family, and her son Martin, a funeral undertaker, whose wife died many years ago leaving him with his child, Max. The book also comprises another storyline featuring Hiram Ostrovsky, the owner of the eponymous *Café des Westens*, which resists the modernity overtaking Calgary and surprisingly becomes a successful business. Apart

from them, there is the vivid memory of Issac Rosen, who persuaded Polish and Jewish families to emigrate to Canada, a piece of advice Rivka Binder followed. All of these characters meet in Calgary either in person or in memory as it is the idea of living in two worlds – the pre-World War II Mlava and Calgary – that dominates the story. Rivka, who is unable to forget about her youth and who resists being swallowed by Calgary's modernisation, lives in the past and cherishes her site of memory. Moreover, she hands down this legacy of *lieux de mémoire* onto the next generations: both her son, Martin and her grandson, Max. As a result, the images of Mlava surface and dominate the story, though not so much in terms of the pages taken up by them as by the atmosphere they introduce; they become the focal point, the reason, for the Binders' sadness and melancholy. As Coral Ann Howells (1992: 158) points out, *Café des Westens* seems to be a tribute and elegy to two cities, both of which have become irretrievably lost in the course of history – the pre-World War II Polish city of Mlava, north of Warsaw, and Calgary before the boom of modernisation.

After leaving Mlava in 1935 for Calgary, the Binder family have to deal with various dimensions of loss, both together and separately. Rivka, the grandmother, immerses herself in the past, living on recollections of Mlava, its "sepia-toned" (van Luven 1991: E6) images, smells and atmosphere. Both her son, Martin, who refuses to accept a stable lifestyle due to his wife's death and his mother's sad legacy, who sleeps in his car and occasionally visits the eponymous Café, and his son, Max, who was born in Calgary but never really acknowledges the town as his home, form a suggestive picture of people who are haunted by spectral cities both from their past and present. In her comparative analysis of *Café des Westens* and Adele Wiseman's *The Sacrifice*, Janice Kulyk Keefer stresses that "in both texts, the 'here' that is Canada is haunted by the 'there' of Eastern Europe" (1996b: 82) a remark that, as will be shown, can also be applied to Michaels's *The Winter Vault*. In *Café des Westens*, Rivka Binder lives day by day, trying to talk her son into another marriage, but what really counts are her memories, this internal world of hers that can be seen by an intent observer:

Her eyes though (...) are as they always were. Moist. Expressive. Beautiful things caught and wasting in a desolate place. Upon them formed a cusp, a border between one world – an inner one, beautiful and old under mist and yellow groundsel – and another outer world, made up of nothing but the rush of moments, the birds outside the grass,

the house with its broken tree and fallen fence (...) All these latter things had to be accepted as the tedious outcome of a long life, the everyday business that was a continuous reminder of what had been. (Ravvin, *Café* 31).

Rivka is then haunted by the ‘there;’ she looks at her present life in Calgary through the perspective of her Mlava past and constantly imagines the life she might have led there if it had not been for the War and for the immigration as well as for the changes which enter Calgary. She does not even complain openly about the fact that such things as immigration and wars happen but she demurs the very idea of looking into the future with some hope and optimism and concentrates on what it used to be like in the past. These are not necessarily pessimistic visions as the Binders left Poland before the Second World War so they never witnessed the destruction of their *shtetl* and did not go through the trauma of camps. Paradoxically, the Polish-Jewish past becomes the source of consoling memories of the beauty they left behind but at the same time the shadow of what was to happen covers the memories.

### **Sites of memory**

Pierre Nora’s idea of sites of memory, *lieux de mémoire*, becomes an interesting explanation for Rivka Binder’s reconsideration of her past. Since the actual environments of memory do not exist any longer, what is left, are Nora’s sites of memory (1989: 7). Nora claims that “we have seen the end of societies that had long assured the transmission and conservation of collectively remembered values” (1989: 7). In this light, *Café des Westens* can be interpreted as an attempt at grasping the image of a Jewish community, which can be only traced back in *lieux de mémoire*. Rivka’s memories of a life in Mlava are real, although the real Mlava *shtetl* no longer exists and she is frequently unable to look from a different perspective. Therefore she rejects the developers’ offer to sell her little house for the lot which would be converted into a modern steel and glass building as this wooden Calgary is so reminiscent of the wooden Mlava. The consolation also comes from her memory of the family silver stored in the attic and cellars full of food and cold beer. Even if the Mlava of her youth was a town of small houses, clay streets and “a thin gutter running down” she was still inclined to “look at (...) [Martin] from under the shadows that fell from the peaks of buildings lining Plock Street, the

*Mlawer Gasse*, the Old Market. She called him by another name in her heart, imagined him wearing different clothes" (Ravvin, *Café* 31-32).

Images of Mlava, recalled by Rivka, constitute the frame of the whole story. Her memories of "a vanished Polish city. A pale of nurturing and calm (...) [where] one need not be concerned with what lay outside a certain circle of safety" (Ravvin, *Café* 31) organize her existence and are passed on to the next generations, who are scarred by them. Nora claims that "Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name (...) History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually active phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past" (1989: 8). This idea defines Rivka and her family who are marked with her memory forever and live in the eternal presence of the past. Both her son, Martin, and her grandson, Max, are burdened with this uprootedness, and *lieux de mémoire* become their post/memory as well. The destruction and rebuilding (without creating a replica) of Calgary make Martin reconsider his life and his familial relationships with his son and mother. His thoughts on the creation of the new-style Calgary, the death of one town and the birth of another, though not the same, push him to "another buried city, the mate, the sister, the opposite of Martin's hometown – his mother's. Buried like a corpse, a corpse beneath a pile of corpses. The forever full moon comes up over it and sits in the branches of an elm tree. The streets are silent, silver-pale and still" (Ravvin, *Café* 61-62). Though Rivka emigrated from Poland a few years before the war, leaving Mlava while its vivid Jewish community was still in full bloom, it is clearly the Holocaust that darkens the images of Mlava and which, although it did not influence the family directly, has left its mark on their perception of the place.

The site of memory she evokes comprises everyday routines of Mlava's market days with plenty of food on offer, the regularity of the arrival of an express train to Warsaw leading to the obvious, yet not available to everyone, exchange of those who go to the capital city of Warsaw to see 'the world' and those who come back to the town. Rivka's visions bring back the lost chances as well. These are not necessarily hers but belong to others who could not decide whether to leave this circle of safety and seek out happiness in the world outside:

periodically one Jew sits at the depot throughout a long afternoon, wondering why he has not yet reached Warsaw. Travelers pass him, patient in the sun, and greet him. Martin's mother does this repeatedly in her buried city. She greets the seated wayfarer as she walks with her sister to the station where the rails leap south toward Warsaw. On either side of the railway tracks are rolling fields dotted with yellow groundsels, camomile, blue cornflowers. (Ravvin, *Café* 62-63)

This nostalgic view is passed on to the next generations and again evokes Hirsch's concept of postmemory (1997). Though the concept is supposed to be the factor determining the identity of children of Holocaust survivors, it is also applicable here. If understood plainly as the "condition of exile from the space of identity" (Hirsch 2002: 243), causing home to be "always elsewhere" (Hirsch 2002: 243), the concept of post/memory is what Rivka's son and grandson inherit.

Moreover, this family feels the burden of a double loss of a hometown: one is Rivka's Mlava together with her family house, and the other is Calgary, to which they immigrated. The boom of modernisation that struck Calgary was supposed to turn the center into a metropolis and the arrivals of various developers caused a serious threat to the calm and sleepy community. Through Rivka's perspective the text posits a parallel between the change of Mlava and Calgary. Mlava endured the Bolsheviks' invasion but fell prey to the Nazi destruction. In Calgary, the female protagonist rejects an opportunity to earn some money by selling the lots to the developers. The danger comes with the visit of "Sven-Bjorn Investments, a holding company run by two reclusive brothers who didn't realize real estate prices were faltering in the downtown and had offered an outrageous sum for (...) [Rivka's] little house" (Ravvin, *Café* 35). She acts as if her stubborn resistance to selling her house to developers, the "modern day Bolsheviks," (*Café*, 35) as she calls them, was supposed to rescue not only her house from destruction, but her past as well. The female protagonist is also afraid of starting her life anew in a new house and thus ruining her ordinary life. When Martin inquires about the visits of the agents and the gradual sales of Rivka's neighbors' houses she "threw a collection of business cards the agents left her into a drawer beside the fridge where they became tangled with loose bit of twine, rusty scissors and the fabulous sheets of cake recipes – a scramble of measurements and Yiddish script" (Ravvin, *Café* 36). This symbolic mixture of the fragments of her previous life still present in her current

life does not only refer to the danger of another potential loss and the destruction of her Calgary house but clearly connects with her memories of the destruction of Mlava. Rivka mentions the fact that the neighbors who decided to sell their houses auctioned their possessions as well: cutlery, furniture, books, even clothes, and that they moved to “new apartments, where they died” (Ravvin, *Café* 36). Rivka, on the contrary, wants to preserve her Calgary house as this is the site of her memory, this is the storage place for her memories. As Nora claims:

*Lieux de mémoire* originate with the sense that there is no spontaneous memory, that we must deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries, organize celebrations, pronounce eulogies, and notarize the bills because such activities no longer occur naturally (...) We buttress our identities upon such bastions, but if what they defended were not threatened, there would be no need to build them. Conversely, if the memories that they enclosed were to be set free they would be useless (...) [They are] no longer quite life, not yet death, like shells on the shore when the sea of living memory has receded (Nora 1989: 12).

Rivka is not by any means militant in her behavior and resistance, although marches against developers are organized in Calgary and Ravvin mentions them in the novel. As a simple person, she unintentionally creates and sustains her private world of memory to demonstrate the necessity of the preservation of the old world in accord with what Nora says about “buttress[ing] our identities” (1989: 12). That is why, she subconsciously feels that without her opposition everything she associates with stability and peaceful life in Canada would be lost again and there would not be anything to collect. Ravvin summarizes one of the numerous talks Martin has with his mother about the potential sale which does not prove any solution: “And so their two worlds flickered, imposed themselves upon each other like competing film reels cast on the same screen, never complementing each other, always at odd angles. The ephemera of one vision shifting to the ephemera of another” (Ravvin, *Café* 40). This shows how Rivka’s and Martin’s views are incompatible not only in relation to the potential sale of the house but also to the fears it arouses.

## The unwitnessed Holocaust

During private conversations and a few ‘meet the author’ sessions at various conferences,<sup>3</sup> Norman Ravvin has mentioned the fact that his artistic undertaking has been aimed, among others, at grasping and depicting the identity of Jews who did not experience the Holocaust directly i.e. who emigrated from Eastern Europe before the Second World War for various reasons. In spite of the fact that the word ‘Holocaust’ does not appear in Ravvin’s book, *Café des Westens* becomes a commentary on how it is to be a Jew in Canada, who, though being spared the trauma of the Holocaust, is not devoid of the awareness of it.<sup>4</sup> The Binder family feels somehow determined by the memory of the Holocaust. Martin does not accept the changes in Calgary and neither does Max, his son. The father’s perception of the city is similar to a loss of a person and is deepened by his loneliness (his wife died and he does not have a good relationship with his son) and his job (as a manager of a funeral company). He has visions of Calgary from before the boom of modernization as well as half magic visions of a flâneur wandering around the town at night. However, he sees a “darker vision of the same place” (Ravvin, *Café* 59) where the city is transformed into a strangely twisted, half-carnivalesque place with half-horror stricken characters screaming, wandering, dancing, dreaming (*Café*, 59-61). On the one hand, it is Martin’s – the stroller’s way of commemorating the old Calgary and

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<sup>3</sup> Apart from such declarations in my private conversations with the author in 2007, 2011, and 2013, Norman Ravvin spoke about this in public during the conference on “Jewishness in Contemporary Culture: American and European Perspectives,” held in Warsaw and organized by Szkola Wyższa Psychologii Społecznej, on May 17 and 18, 2011, and during 6<sup>th</sup> Congress of Polish Canadianists held in Poznań at Adam Mickiewicz University, from 5 to 7 April, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Such an approach to the Holocaust is not a solitary endeavor of Ravvin’s in Canadian literature. Among many different texts, Mordechai Richler’s works have to be mentioned in this context. Norman Ravvin discussed this phenomenon of Richler’s writing as well in *A House of Words. Jewish Writing Identity and Memory* (1997: 33-47). Elaine Kalman Naves in her *The Writers of Montreal* (1998) summarizes Richler’s consideration of the Holocaust in the following words: “The fate of the Jews, in particular during the Holocaust, is an abiding leitmotif in Richler’s work: his heroes are frequently successful men haunted by their relatively easy ride through life, too young to fight in the War, and sheltered from the horrors that afflicted fellow Jews in Europe.” (<http://www.vehiculepress.com/montreal/writers/richler.html>)

subconsciously resisting the changes. On the other hand, though not explicitly stated, the Holocaust keeps haunting him as well. The aforementioned vision brings about a vision of the destroyed Mlava, which he never saw as well as the vision of another buried city discussed earlier in this chapter:

Their birthplace slept in their children's imagination. Less often, in their children's children's. Buried beneath other dream cities were squares. Spires. Commerce. Hope gone rotten. The proposition of memory was an evil bargain: everything could be kept forever, but it all became corrupt (...) Martin's mother never really left her Polish town. Walk as she might up and down Calgary streets, their character always described in the negative – they are not as the streets were, the Sabbaths are not so fine... the children, the marriages, the taste of ice cream, salami... Her dreams were more real than her daily business. In them her father stood up from the table, his belly full of dinner. Her sister baked bread. Her children went off to school. Nothing was ever distorted in her dreams (...). (Ravvin, *Café* 135-136)

On the one hand, Martin feels the stories are dead and do not influence his life, although his tramp-like lifestyle proves the opposite. But on the other hand, there is one story, the story of the day of their emigration, which, although he does not remember it, lives on in him as “an extra piece of baggage to carry. Baggage full of clouds. He had no memories of his boyhood in Poland to bring to the aid of the tale. It was as if the boy at the center of it was someone else, not himself. This facsimile of himself even had a different name – Nachman – the name he was first given” (Ravvin, *Café* 136). As such, this story always remains at the very center of his identity. Rivka and Martin left Poland to join their husband and father in Canada in the summer of 1935 in order to start better and more affluent lives, free of anti-Semitism, in Calgary. They were puzzled by Isaac Rosen, who helped them fix documents. He believed strongly that the value behind New York skyscrapers is also transcendental and not only material as “In such a place all culture was disclosed to the Jew. Every work imaginable was translated into Yiddish: Wilde, Jules Verne, Heine, Longfellow. Every discipline was available (...) A reinvigoration of the diaspora fire that had been smothered” (Ravvin, *Café* 144). Despite these optimistic visions, the future events to come also haunt their dreams of the promised land and make it even more difficult to forget what once was: “Barbarism was unthinkable, pogroms were unplannable, the hard

time-worn life of the ghetto impossible” (144). Interestingly, these hints to the future resemble the story of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Jewish *shtetl* near Plock depicted by Lilian Nattel in *The River Midnight* (1999), where some sections of the novel are summarized through the narrator’s insight into what is to come.<sup>5</sup>

The Holocaust, never alluded to in the story openly, though it is the real reason for seeking out a safer place to live, is for Rivka and Martin an obvious context, an intertext to their considerations of loss. Although the majority of Polish Jews from Mlava and Radzanow who are mentioned in the novel did not blindly believe Rosen’s utopian views of North American promised land and they did not imagine what was to happen in Europe, the Binders live with the shadow of what befell their people in the following decade after their departure. This is what makes this story complete, the perspective which they have. Even though they left Poland before the Second World War, it is utterly impossible to look back into their past not considering the trauma of the Holocaust which reshaped the landscape of their hometown.

Central in Ravvin’s novel is the idea of the loss of home based on the loss of one’s homeland and hometown, and it is additionally emphasized in his portrayal of another character of the book, Hiram Ostrovsky, the owner of the Café des Westens, a Jewish immigrant in Canada whose coffeehouse is “a borderless meeting place for (...) welfare recipients, trendies, artists, students, and oldtimers, whether immigrants or native-born, [and who] does for the living (...) what Martin’s non-denominational funeral home does for the dead” (Kulyk Keefer 1996b: 85). The Café, whose name refers to a famous Berlin establishment, also symbolizes the world gone by, where one can meet people of various origins joined by their devotion to the past. Max’s friend, Sara, who is startled by the message behind naming the café in this particular way asks a question whether Ostrovsky has done it on purpose. The query remains unanswered by Max at first, but through Sara’s learning about the Berlin Café and the atmosphere of this German pre-War metropolis, the stories of the Binders and of Ostrovsky intertwine. He is called by one word in Max’s description: “A survivor” (Ravvin, *Café* 174). After a reconsideration, Max offers another response: “It isn’t easy, Max says, to understand Ostrovsky’s relationship with the past. He is not nostalgic.

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Dagmara Drewniak (2012b).

He is not burdened with regret. But then again, the past contains him. It talks him and walks him around. Possibly he knows why he gave this restaurant its name. Possibly it named itself" (Ravvin, *Café* 178). Ostrovsky completes the Binders' story of immigration offering a coda and a symbolic perspective. By evoking Berlin with its rich pre-War cultural life, partly preserved in the café's name, Ravvin encapsulates the fate of Central European Jews in a nutshell.

Thus, *Café des Westens* becomes a postmodern discussion on the value of history and storytelling, an interplay between hi/story and its influence on further generations, hybrid characters, an 'inheritance of loss,' to refer to the title of Kiran Desai's novel: a phrase which aptly describes the conditions in which Martin lives in Canada. The text becomes a palimpsest which is also a term used by Kulyk Keefer to describe Ravvin's Calgary: "(...) if buildings can be pulled down as if they never existed, stories are a different matter. In this context Ravvin's novel invites us to make a crucial distinction between memory and story. The former, mortal and private, is locked within the mind of the possessor; the latter, if told or transcribed, achieves a kind of permanence and a public quality" (1996b: 93). Therefore, Kulyk Keefer also insists on calling the book transcultural, as Martin, who himself feels amnesiac about his childhood in Poland, offers his mother's received stories in Ostrovsky's café and thus "reaches beyond the community it creates and is created from" (Kulyk Keefer 1996b: 93).

Norman Ravvin's attempt to fuse a Canadian story with a Polish one in *Café des Westens*, basing the storylines on both a handful of autobiographical facts and fiction, becomes a comment on the hybrid state of contemporary Canadians who live in the new environments with the sites of memory pulsating like open scars in them, creating pain at times and keeping a grid over them.

### **Eva Stachniak's *Necessary Lies*<sup>6</sup>**

Born in Wrocław, Eva Stachniak is a full-time writer who has recently decided to leave her university career and devote herself to writing exclusively. After her 1981 visit to Montreal, which resulted in her decision to stay in Canada, she was a journalist at Radio Canada

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<sup>6</sup> Parts of this discussion were published in Drewniak (2005).

International, the Polish Section, and a university lecturer at Sheridan College, Oakville, Ontario. Her writing includes short stories and novels. Her debut novel, *Necessary Lies*, won the Amazon.com/Books in Canada First Novel Award in 2000, then the next novels followed: *Garden of Venus* (2005) (published also as *Dancing with Kings*), *The Winter Palace* (2011) and *Empress of the Night* (2014). Her novels have been translated into many languages, including Polish. Apart from the above-mentioned titles, she also published another historical novel only in Polish entitled *Dysonans* (2009) (Ewa Stachniak's Official website). Since Stachniak's writing has moved in the direction of historical literature recently, I examine only her debut novel, *Necessary Lies*, here. The book discusses the ways the Canadian experience of an immigrant opens the main protagonist's and the readers' eyes to the multilayered history of a Central European city such as Wrocław/Breslau.

As a variation of multiculturalism, a more creative and open process of shaping new identity in which there is a constant transmutation, new realities are created and new vistas gained (Lamore quoted in and translated by Vautier 2003: 269), transculturalism contributes to a reading of *Necessary Lies*, which at the same time can be inscribed into the plethora of images of Poland seen from a Canadian perspective the present study undertakes. Belonging to the first generation of immigrants who left Poland in 1981, Eva Stachniak is not a writer who only relies on her memory in presenting Poland. She knows the country very well, speaks Polish and visits it frequently. In Canada she has been a lecturer, a journalist and a writer, which also gives her a specific and insightful outlook onto how Poland is perceived abroad. Her own experience as an immigrant who has become a part of the famous Canadian mosaic offers an interesting insight into her understanding of transculturalism.

In reconstructing the past of Poland, Stachniak relies to some extent on the memories of her parents and grandparents. *Necessary Lies* shows how the Canadian perspective, acquired through immigration, helps the main character to rediscover her hometown – Wrocław/Breslau. The book tells the story of Anna, a Polish scholar who comes to Montreal on a scholarship. After she falls in love with William Herzman and Martial Law is proclaimed in Poland in 1981, she decides to stay in North America. The novel discusses the way Anna discovers Canada as a country full of immigrants. She observes the multicultural mixture of Montreal which turns out to be an extremely inspiring place, and, thanks to this experience,

Anna is capable of noticing the transculturalism of Canada, but also of grasping the vision of the lost multiculturalism of pre-World War II Poland. The change of attitude to her home country is especially visible and can be referred to as a transition from a perception of Poland as a monolithic being to a heterogeneous and multilayered one.<sup>7</sup> Anna's peregrinations through Poland and Germany show how she defines the place of her birth as well as the lost homeland of her family. Therefore *Necessary Lies* shows that the creative reconsideration of the Canadian heritage and the direct experience of transculturalism enables people to find out about their origins; it also points to the importance of memory in such journeys and an evolution of the concept of homeland.

### **Transcultural Poland**

When cut off from Poland and her relatives, Anna starts to reconsider her past, both in a historical and personal sense. Soon she notices a disturbing, yet stimulating, parallel: she is asked the same questions in Montreal as her grandparents answered in Wrocław many years before. Her forefathers belonged to "these people whose towns and villages were cut off by the borders of barbed wire and ploughed fields (...) 'Where are you really from?' they began all conversations, 'How did you get here?'" (Stachniak, *Necessary* 43). This starting point for further considerations reveals a truth which was silenced in Poland at that time: that Wrocław and the whole Regained Territories are inhabited by immigrants from various parts of the former Poland.

*Necessary Lies* offers a rich vision of Poland's multicultural past and the fact that this area had been previously populated by other nationalities. Looking back into the most distant past, Anna sees her grandparents in Warsaw, where her grandmother was sent from Tarnopol, near Lvov, now the Ukraine, to get education and find a husband. Her grandfather owned a 'colonial store' i.e. selling all kinds of goods and prospering in a quiet and modest way. After the 1939 Nazi invasion, the subsequent bombing of the store and the difficult months of the Warsaw Uprising spent in a basement, Anna's grandparents leave for Wrocław in

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<sup>7</sup> A similar thesis is formulated by Elwira Grossman who even calls Stachniak's book "an attempt to replace a national monolith with transcultural hybridity" (2012: 365, translation DD).

the Regained Territories to seek a safe place to live. Although the lands are granted to Poland by Stalin as a kind of reward for the lost borderlands in the east, communism does not spare this region. Having lost the store, the grandfather is imprisoned and, after a period of “socialist reeducation” (Stachniak, *Necessary* 142) he is released to work in the store as an assistant. The fresh war memories of her grandmother influence Anna’s perception of Warsaw and Wrocław. The “granny,” or “*Babcia*,” as she is consistently called, refuses to accept Wrocław as her hometown. She equates it with the German bombings, round-ups and raids that she lived through in Warsaw. She rejects the idea of burying her husband and herself being buried in Wrocław. Yet, Granny also refuses to talk about her feelings in relation to this:

when Anna asked her why she had to bring *Dziadek*’s body [to Warsaw], why she did not bury him in Wrocław, *Babcia* would only scowl at her. *Babcia* did not trust Wrocław. It was enough to have her parents lie in a village cemetery near Tarnopol, now in Ukraine, where she could never go. Why tempt fate? No, he was her husband after all, and he would rest in Polish soil. (Stachniak, *Necessary* 137)

Owing to the summary of the grandparents’ history, which Stachniak includes as Anna’s reminiscences, we see the impossibility of a distanced look at the problems of borderlands for the people who experienced the war suffering. Stachniak includes the personal memories of her characters alongside the greater panoramic view of Polish history, mentioning the Soviet Gulags, Katyń massacre and populating the Regained Territories after the Second World War, to name only a few examples. Her narration ranges from Anna’s grandmother’s intimate despair that “on All Souls Day there was no one to light candles on (...) [her parents] graves” (Stachniak, *Necessary* 43) to an almost historical narrative<sup>8</sup> of Anna’s husband – Piotr who is a Solidarity activist. Thanks to the stories offered by Anna’s grandparents, the second generation of people, already born in Wrocław, discovers the two-fold truth of places such as Wrocław/Breslau. However, it is important to emphasize that in Anna’s case, memory is

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<sup>8</sup> This is definitely a sign of Stachniak’s interest in writing historical novels which erupted after *Necessary Lies* with the subsequent books she published and has culminated recently with the publication of *The Winter Palace* in 2011 and *Empress of the Night* in 2014.

triggered as a result of the experience of immigration. Only by being abroad, and especially in Canada, is one able to see the multilayered reality. It may even be the case that such a distance cannot be acquired without the experience of leaving one's homeland.

In Canada, Anna discovers how ethnicity can flourish, how lively it can be, contrary to Poland, where it was annihilated and the remains are frequently silenced, eradicated or closed in Scansen museums:

*You would not believe it, darling, she wrote [home]. It's a world straight from pre-war Poland I thought I would never see. I heard haggling prices, in Yiddish, and Polish. They still sell pickled herring, here, from barrels, wrapped in old newspapers! Measure out fabric with wooden rulers! Yesterday I saw Hassids in black coats and hats, their beards untouched by scissors and it was as if I were transported right into my grandmother's Warsaw. They walked with their eyes cast down, to avoid temptations* (Stachniak, *Necessary* 27, italics original).

Such an experience in Montreal first gives her some premonition and later on more and more certainty that the stories *Babcia* told her, the history she learned from Piotr and she did not learn at school may all lead her towards a rediscovery of a different Poland. She realizes that her hometown, Wrocław/Breslau, has actually been a transcultural city, a metropolis once inhabited by Germans, then by Poles from various eastern districts of pre-war Poland, frequently from different ethnic groups who often spoke different languages and dialects. Thanks to her Canadian insight, Wrocław/Breslau becomes for her a city on the move, which is especially visible in the 1980s-1990s – the period of transformation. Not only was it a political but also a mental move from silencing and denial of the past to knowledge and acceptance.

Anna is especially suffused with her grandmother's stories of Warsaw, a symbolic heart of Poland. For her grandmother, it is the epitome of both happiness of the family's prosperity, the place of birth of a daughter after many years of miscarriages. She was also a witness of the tragic fate of Warsaw, occupied by the Germans and irreversibly transformed:

The colonial store was hit by a German bomb in August 1944, in the first days of the Warsaw Uprising. 'What's gone is gone,' *Dziadek* said and refused to see it, but *Babcia* went to take one last look (...) 'I shouldn't have,' she said. Broken glass and shards of wood cracked under her feet. She thought she would take something with her, something to remember,

but there was nothing to take. During the Uprising her grandparents hid in the cellar, the city above them burning to cinders (...) She had heard the cries of people burnt alive in the church of the Sisters of Visitation. People crowded in these cellars, listening to the sounds of planes, the howl of falling bombs, the explosions. A few blocks away. Next door. The end was easy to imagine. The cellar doors could open at any time. The last thing you would hear in this life was the blast of grenades. When children wailed, mothers said, ‘Don’t worry, you will die soon.’ (Stachniak, *Necessary* 140).

Anna reconsiders these issues in Montreal when she meets William Herzmann, a German-Canadian from Breslau, who becomes her husband and also paradoxically a guide in her journey of self-discovery in Poland. It is because of him, the Canadian distance and the post/memory of the past that she undergoes a transformation as well. That is why when she comes to Poland in the 1990s and visits for example the cemetery of *Powązki* (the place of her grandparents’ burial), she realizes that “the new apartment houses, [are] built on the ruins of pre-war Warsaw. Somewhere, in one of these non-existent streets, her grandparents had their grocery store” (Stachniak, *Necessary* 136). She also notices the ugliness of the Warsaw under the free market transformation where grey, Communist blocks of flats become background for the spectacle of a great sale of every kind of goods on various kinds of benches and cots.<sup>9</sup>

With the realization that Poland is no longer multicultural but has once been a transcultural country with ethnic minorities within its borders, having various rights, and enjoying freedom, Anna, despite her “Eastern-European fatalism, perennial pessimism, this Slavic melancholy of the soul that has touched her forever, made her fearful of the future, doubtful, suspicious of good fortune” (Stachniak, *Necessary* 181), learns a transcultural lesson. Even if the vista of a multicultural Poland has changed irrevocably, this new discovery is a valuable one. It coincides with the fatal illness of her father, who wants to be buried in Wrocław because as he said “he knew this land inside out” (Stachniak, *Necessary* 202), which is a symbolic frame added to the story and appears as a coda to Anna’s reviewing of her identity.

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<sup>9</sup> In the first years after the fall of Communism, many sellers traded all kinds of goods directly from the drop-leaf tables and unfolded camp beds in the streets. This was a sign of the burgeoning free market.

### **Wrocław/Breslau – site of forgetting/site of memory**

In an interview, Stachniak confirms that the story of Anna is partially autobiographical.<sup>10</sup> However, the importance of this personal experience pertains less to certain facts than to the whole idea of seeking one's roots and defining the notion of origins. Stachniak refers to the question which every immigrant has to answer at some point of their stay in Canada, or anywhere else abroad: "Where are you from?" This particular inquiry appears in most of the emigrant writing in English. In many forms it can be found in the memoirs and novels by Eva Hoffman, Michael Ondaatje, and Salman Rushdie, to name just a few immigrants who have been recognized as most significant literary voices and for whom the idea of place/site/setting has become a focal point of their writing. The need to describe one's origins, especially in the light of the Canadian multicultural approach, does not mean to erase the roots. On the contrary, it fosters the search for one's identity. As, according to Brian S. Osborne:

Self-knowledge and personal identity cannot be reconstructed without place-worlds. Not merely neutral containers, geography, locale, setting, place – whatever you wish to call them – are complicit in strategies of cultural survival. Places are defined by tangible material realities that can be seen, touched, mapped, and located. (Osborne 2001: 42)

For emigrants, trying to render a place of their origins accessible, it is necessary to take into consideration the vital aspect of memory and its creative character. As has been proved, the fragments of knowledge, memories or information people preserve are not stored passively. They are subjected to constant reorganization, which can have a form of selection, adjustment, or reconstruction. According to Ian Chambers (1998: 81), "memory (...) knows the impossibility of ever fully knowing either itself or the past. What are transcribed and translated are traces, residues, shadows and echoes." Such workings of memory are also true for Anna who, meeting a Filipino woman in Montreal, objects to the statement that this stranger remembers everything from the past "exactly the way it happened" (Stachniak, *Necessary* 83). The female protagonist "remembers feeling incredulous at first, then irritated with the certainty in

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<sup>10</sup> This interview with Eva Stachniak by Agata Tuszyńska was published in *Odra* 2003, v. 6, available also under: <http://odra.art.pl/article.php/122>.

the woman's voice and then, guilty that her own memories came maimed, malleable, prone to manipulation" (Stachniak, *Necessary* 83). The feeling of uncertainty is one of the reasons for which emigrants respond to the need of narrating their homeland – or in more general terms, place – in a fictional way: that is by writing fictional autobiographies and novels that freely play with the genre of autobiography, and, thus, freely rewrite their feelings and their personal historical palimpsests.

In this light, *Necessary Lies* becomes Stachniak's answer to the quandary of where she comes from and what it means to come from Wrocław/Breslau – a city of many faces and versions of history:

‘A girl from Breslau! That was William’s voice, raised in amazement. ‘Where are you from in Poland?’ he had asked, and she said, ‘Wrocław,’ prepared for the need to explain once again the shifting borders of post-war Europe, the story of territories gained and lost in which a German city became a part of Poland. But he did not ask for explanations. (Stachniak, *Necessary* 31-32)

During a long conversation with William Herzmann, they both realize that having been born in Wrocław/Breslau, “they were not from the same place. His Breslau was no longer there and in her Wrocław he could only be a visitor from the West on an exotic trip to a deprived land, marveling at how the locals could live among such squalor” (Stachniak, *Necessary*, 35). With these dilemmas and coincidences Anna realizes that for the first time in her life “The city she had left with so little regret, where she never felt at home – Wrocław – had now begun to intrigue her” (Stachniak, *Necessary* 40). This difficult discussion that Stachniak characters have throughout the novel encompasses a whole plethora of problems, for instance the painful relation between the contemporary Germans, the *Heimatvertriebene*<sup>11</sup> (i.e. expellees) towards Nazi Germany, the question of memory which stands in a certain opposition to history and the relationship to one's land, homeland, *Heimat*.

Due to the reference to the category of transition, transformation, transfer of cultures, lands, languages and other cultural designates,

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<sup>11</sup> *Heimatvertriebene* is a term used by Lutz (2007: 13) to describe people who were banished from their lands in the western parts of Poland and had to move to Germany as well as the Polish, Russian, Belarusian, Lemko and Bojko people who were removed from their formerly eastern parts of Poland to the Regained Territories.

Stachniak's novel clearly resonates with the positions of critics such as Vautier, Lamore, Godard and Kamboureli, concentrating on the idea of transculturalism and rejecting the center/margin dialectic. Anna, a Pole from German/Polish Breslau/Wrocław, an English-speaking visiting scholar, rediscovers a convoluted history of Poland from Montreal, the heart of the francophone Canada. The Canadian atmosphere of celebrating a complexity of experiences and origins, and especially the spirit of Montreal, as not only a francophone capital of Canada but also a place where many immigrant minorities settled down, triggers the fascination with "... émigré writers, stories scattered in émigré papers, thin volumes of poems printed by the small presses of London, Chicago, Montreal. As if the mere act of leaving anointed people with some mystical, unexplainable superiority" (Stachniak, *Necessary* 42).

In *Necessary Lies*, a reconsideration of a distant Polish/German city could be voiced by Anna as a result of her immersion in the multiculturalism widely present in contemporary Canadian culture. Although before the 1960s, Canadian multiculturalism was not officially supported and proclaimed, according to Kuester, it started to be acknowledged as a multicultural country in practice (though not officially) with the completion of the transcontinental railway back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (1995: 14). Throughout the novel the readers feel the importance of the main character's emigration to Canada, which enables her to analyze the history of Wrocław/Breslau without hatred or prejudices, but with the fascination with its multilayered history. Anna, despite her discoveries about Wrocław/Breslau is far from reaching ready made statements about how to respond to her hometown's past. It is rather a questioning of one's identity in progress than a final conclusion.

The reasons for the female protagonist's inability to arrive at a totalizing conclusion are multifaceted. Anna's experience is also in transition. She does not learn the whole perspective at once. Her reinvention of her identity is first shaped by her grandparents' stories, then her emigration and clash with Canada, her marriage to a Breslauer, but also by the lies she discovers after his death and finally by the experience of traveling to post-Communist Poland and Germany. In one of the letters which Anna receives after her husband William dies, Father Albrecht writes: "[William] was of the generation touched by the war. Too young to have taken a stand, too old to say it happened before his time. This is a European disease, this mixing together of blood and soil. Pick a handful

of it, they say, and you will squeeze blood" (Stachniak, *Necessary* 82). This symbolic blood is a proof of the painful inability to reach easy and quick conclusions. At the beginning, Anna's relationship with William made her vigilant as "the thought he was German, even if his German childhood might be nothing more than a few memories of the war, cautioned her to be careful of the things she said" (Stachniak, *Necessary* 34). In the course of their love affair, when she gets to know his personal hi/story, she frequently juxtaposes it with her own past. Anna's thoughts about Wrocław/Breslau are always, therefore, shaped in the form of a mirror image, a double, which is signaled here by the usage of both names for the city: "The Polish city and its German double. Filled with shadows. Hers and William's: 'What's your name, lad?' 'Willi.' 'Come here, Willi. Take a look. Take a good look. This is the end of your *Heimat*'" (Stachniak, *Necessary* 156).

In the area where both German and Polish influences compete, on the borderlands, where the Germans miss the lost *Heimat* which the Poles call *Ziemie Odzyskane* – the Regained Territories – it can be difficult, if not impossible, to cherish the multicultural perspective. To find Wrocław/Breslau an intriguing city which has an undoubtedly interesting past and to see this past without the burden of claims from the two nations becomes possible for Anna only in Canada. However, the troubled history of this place that has been a hometown for many from at least two nations becomes an exemplary notion of a transcultural home as defined by Vijay Mishra: "the idea of 'home' has indeed become a 'damaged' concept. The word 'damaged' forces us to face up to the scars and fractures, to the blisters and sores, to psychic traumas of bodies on the move" (Mishra 1995: 7). *Necessary Lies* therefore displays intriguing similarities to the paradoxically different and remote situation of the postcolonial narratives devoted to the study of the lost homelands. After a close consideration of Mishra's view, it is clear how true his observations are in relation to any loss of a homeland in any circumstances. Stachniak notices that Wrocław/Breslau is such a 'damaged' place and she does not avoid the wounds and scars of her town. On the contrary, her novel makes an attempt at cicatrizing them, bearing in mind the difficulty of the undertaking.

*Necessary Lies* reflects the formation of the female protagonist's understanding of her place of origin through the analysis of her grandparents' exile to Wrocław confronted with William's legacy of German Breslau. Her hometown – Wrocław – is seen by the generation of

her parents and grandparents as a city whose history is never discussed and a place whose status as Polish is never fully trusted. This negative, one-sided picture of Wrocław/Breslau and its history starts to be reshaped in the novel through Anna's love affair and then marriage to William Herzman. The Wrocław of her youth, "this city without a past, where history ended with the desperate Nazi defense of *Festung Breslau*" (Stachniak, *Necessary* 22), clashes with his memories. William prefers not to evoke his memories, yet some of them recurrently come back and he cannot free himself from them. Breslau was for him a symbol of the lost homeland, a city in which there was the house he was born, but on the other hand a city from which he, among other Germans, had to escape, calming "himself by staring at the spirals and mazes of cracks on the ivory tiles lining the tunnel of Breslau *Hauptbahnhof*" (Stachniak, *Necessary* 34). Anna confirms overtly that before meeting William she never thought about the second facet of Wrocław. In her youth, in the Poland of the 1960s and 1970s, "just pronouncing the word Breslau made the children uneasy, as if recalling a secret, silenced but still dangerous. A Polish city without the past. A Polish city filled with German ruins" (Stachniak, *Necessary* 154). The perception of this place is created and inextricably connected to Anna's memories of her childhood escapades to old German bunkers, cellars, and ruins which are scattered everywhere. But this memory does not go beyond the Second World War. The memories of the Poles clash with the war destruction visible in Wrocław many years after the war ended. The history from before 1939 was amputated and those who came to Wrocław after 1945 as well as their children felt like patients with amnesia who were suddenly woken up and realized they were in a foreign place. According to Stachniak, this is how the collective memory of whole generations of Poles was formed: on the basis of amputation, a certain lack of true history and memories as well as on the silenced and faked histories combined.

The images of Wrocław/Breslau in Stachniak's novel and Anna's reception of them testify to the possibility of transformation of sites of forgetting into sites of memory. Anna's father, who, after the Second World War, consciously chose Wrocław as a place of settlement, was repeating to himself that soon they would go back to Poland (Stachniak, *Necessary* 159). Wrocław was not seen as Polish by one of the first newcomers "for in his mind then Lower Silesia was no man's land, a magical robbers' den for the dispossessed, a haven for marauders, a chance for the politically suspect. One could disappear here, *Tata* said, but one could also die from a

stray bullet or a knife in the back" (Stachniak, *Necessary* 159). This feeling of alienation connected with Wrocław is familiar to many people living in Lower Silesia. Despite the constant acknowledgement by the authorities of the Polish character of Wrocław, Polish settlers in the city subconsciously felt different. The gap in memories was widened even further due to the propaganda of the Communist regime:

*Returned to the motherland*, the slogans of her childhood said in big red letters. Slogans spread on thick, concrete pillars, on white billboards. Slogans perched on the roofs of houses, on the bays of bridges, their red and white background flashing in store windows. *We haven't come here, we have returned.* Returned to the ancient Piast capital of Lower Silesia which, too, was a Polish province. To think otherwise would have been a betrayal (Stachniak, *Necessary* 155, italics original).

*Necessary Lies* shows that the Poles who came to Wrocław after the war were aware of the history of the place but were probably afraid to think of their new hometown as German, although the haunting remnants of Breslau were being constantly found in the form of "flattened toys, bent silver spoons, broken knives, forks with missing tines, pieces of green and blue grass, shards of white and blue porcelain, black gothic German lettering still intact" (Stachniak, *Necessary* 155). Nevertheless, the generation of after-the-war newcomers, represented by Anna's father, treated Wrocław as the Wild West and the land of unrestrained opportunity, still perilous and risky, but undeniably abundant in possibility. Strange as it may sound, it is Anna's father, who despite having experienced prison and degradation, declares his willingness to be buried in Wrocław. He comes to realize that it is the first place to which he really belongs. Unlike the previous generation of grandparents, he is able to acknowledge Wrocław as his hometown and his place on earth. For Anna this decision is a confirmation of the positive choices of her parents from the past. It also creates an explicit image of a place from her childhood which, when contrasted with William's heritage, becomes the site of at least double legacy.

Upon returning to Wrocław in 1991, after the fall of Communism, having been enriched by the Canadian experience and William's love and hi/stories, Anna sees her hometown in a different light. She is now fully aware of its double facet. All the memories of her childhood in German-marked Wrocław come back to her. She remembers: "warm and *kalt* (...)

on round, white bathroom taps in the house she lived in (...) Underneath the thick, yellow wallpaper she helped her father strip, the walls were pasted with German newspapers, their black, incomprehensible squiggles forming yet another layer that had to be removed and washed away" (Stachniak, *Necessary* 157). This, together with the echoes of children playing on the ruins and screaming "*Hitler kaput!*" (158), creates the thin layer of deeper knowledge that an average inhabitant of this city must have had. It is as if Anna has been granted a third eye, and is able to see more of this place, being able to visualize the site of William's memory:

As the train rolls through the outskirts of Wrocław, Anna watches the city with suspicion. Old pre-war German houses are easy to spot, bit, grey, solid, in spite of the forty-five years that have passed from the day the war ended. Old German working class districts with their red brick, soot-covered façades and tile roofs. She can tell where the ruins have been for that's where the post-war slab houses stand now, the ugly concrete constructions of Communist Poland, like scars. Whole blocks of them, sinister, beginning to crumble the day they were built. (Stachniak, *Necessary* 157)

Anna's initiation into the scarred history of Wrocław/Breslau lets her see the double image. Thanks to this personal experience and memories of herself and her relatives as well as Canadian transcultural experience, she comes to a greater understanding. Paradoxically, the recuperation for the previous amnesia she inherited from the former generations comes from Canada, and the images of Wrocław thanks to Anna's marriage to William are enriched by the afterimages of Breslau.

Anna's Canadian experience and her redefinition of her Polish identity after the fall of Communism in 1989 are enriched by a Berlin episode. Just after William's death after ten years of a happy marriage, Anna finds a bundle of letters from his lover from Germany – Ursula. It emerges that he had had a lover throughout the whole marriage to Anna. Although this is shocking news for Anna, she discovers that his daughter as well as his former wife knew about it. She realizes that she was not the only woman who was loved by William at the same time and becomes terrified. The female protagonist, who feels betrayed and whose identity is formed in relation to her postwar experiences as well as the parents' war experience suddenly sees this event in terms of a German offensive and invasion:

From the darkest corners of her memory come the thoughts she has never allowed herself to think. What was it that Hitler thought of the Slavs? An inferior race of slaves? The dirt of history, a mere notch above the Jews. Slated for death to make living space in the East for the master race. *Drang nach Osten. Lebensraum.* Hasn't she been warned so many times? Hasn't she seen evidence, the ruins, the graves? But she wouldn't listen, would she?

*Lebenslüge*, she says remembering the German word William once used (...) The lie that transforms your life. (Stachniak, *Necessary* 106, italics original)

This outburst of emotion makes her question her acquired Canadian heritage and come back to the dark Polish legacy, full of scars and wounds. Yet, at the same time she already knows she has to see Ursula. At this particular moment we start to realize the meaning attached to the title of the novel. The lies are sometimes 'necessary' in order to be able to transcend the hidden emotions and begin to cope with them. Anna has to transform her life literally – she has to learn a new life without William and with the memory of him as a liar, but also figuratively – by attaining a new perspective and an identity freed from prejudices.

When the female protagonist visits William's lover in Germany, Ursula shows Anna her heritage of the divided Berlin and her perception of Communism. They also try to come to terms with Anna's newly-gained knowledge of William's past. What serves as a turning point is a visit to the archives of the *Stasi* documents. Together they discover a silenced distant past of William's grandparents. It emerges that his grandfather, Professor Claus Herzmann, did not support the Fuhrer and together with his wife, was against the marriage of their daughter, Käthe, to a *SS-Strurmbannführer*. Käthe left Helmut Rust, but, already pregnant, gave birth to William and partially lied about his father, saying he was an officer. This is another lie in the story, and Ursula comments on their discovery as follows: "Lebenslüge, she says. This is what you get here, in this country. A lie you live with for so long that it transforms your life. But also, she adds after a moment, a lie that enables you to live" (Stachniak, *Necessary* 257-258, italics original). This breakthrough and final revelation of the whole truth liberates Anna who is more willing to accept the lie. She once again, realizes that a cohesive picture of Wrocław/Breslau can, paradoxically, only be found in the lack of homogeneity and one-sided unity.

During her stay in Berlin, Anna also visits an old friend of William's mother, and she hears the following words, which once again undeniably support the Canadian experience as a crucial one: "It's good Käthe [William's mother] is in Canada, ...This is the cursed land. People are afraid of the past here, afraid to love their country, afraid to be proud of it. No matter what the young ones do, the world will never forgive the German people. Käthe was right to go away with Willi" (Stachniak, *Necessary* 238). The memories of people who suffered during the war cannot fade, and that is why they create their perception of the world, full of fear, intolerance and only some of them are able to come to terms with the burden of remembering and necessity to forgive.

Anna has even greater luck: through the painful experience of emigration, divorce, and the death as well as betrayal of her lover, she receives an insight into Polish transculturalism which disappeared after the war. Stachniak's novel does not discuss these matters openly, but throughout the novel the atmosphere of Canadian influence prevails. Anna declares near the end that people from Eastern and Central Europe "have all been marked for life" (Stachniak, *Necessary* 245), which proves Kulyk Keefer's point of view that all immigrants from this part of the world come to Canada with their "traumas, hatred, prejudices and fear" (1990: 44)<sup>12</sup>. Even if, as in Anna's case, those prejudices are not so visible, she is scared of examining the truth concerning the past of her hometown. Her lack of knowledge and unwillingness to know, so widespread in Poland, is converted in *Necessary Lies* into deeper understanding. Graham Huggan, while discussing Michael Ondaatje's return to his roots in *Running in the Family*, claimed that such an "in-betweenness can be liberating, allowing the freedom to experiment with alternative identities or to oppose and outmanoeuvre monolithic cultural codes" (Huggan 1995: 119). The necessity of such a 'Canadian treatment' is not to be underestimated as from the very beginning of the novel Anna feels her world is transformed by the influence of the English and French, as well as the multiethnic and transnational, Canada.

Therefore, like Anna, in *Necessary Lies* Stachniak is able to take an advantage of her Canadian experience and approach the city of her youth

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<sup>12</sup> Kulyk Keefer in her article "In Violent Voice: the Trauma of Ethnicity in Recent Canadian Fiction" (1990: 44) refers to Ukrainian immigration in Canada but this example serves in the case of Polish immigration as well.

and its complicated past in a new way. What she does to Polish and German history and Wrocław/Breslau heritage would be best commented on by paraphrasing Ajay Heble's words: she offers a new direction for our reflection on the meaning of postwar belonging.<sup>13</sup> Parallel to this conclusion there is another reflection that comes after discussing Stachniak's novel. Despite the physical distance separating Canada and Poland or Germany and the seeming impossibility of sharing the experiences, *Necessary Lies* paradoxically offers a new rendition of truth about Wrocław/Breslau. It is far from categorizing the place in terms of possession but rather in accordance with the Canadian treatment of places as declared by George Woodcock: "In Canada we are all immigrants. Whenever Man first appeared (...) it was certainly nowhere in the Americas. There are no autochthonous Canadians, even among the Indians and the Inuit" (Woodcock 1993: 98). The past of Wrocław/Breslau in question participates in a similar phenomenon as a place with no autochthonous inhabitants, as all of the city's past or current residents are either emigrants from it or immigrants to it. For many, it has become their home, their place on earth, while for others it is a distant and lost homeland.

### **Anne Michaels's *The Winter Vault***

A poet, a scholar, and prose writer, Anne Michaels is a Toronto born (1958) and based author. She has published poetry, *The Weight of Oranges* (1986), which won the Commonwealth Prize for the Americas, and *Miner's Pond* (1991), which won the Canadian Authors' Association Award and was shortlisted for the Governor General's Award and the Trillium Award. She has received numerous prizes for her debut novel *Fugitive Pieces* (1996), translated into Polish as *Płomyki pamięci* (2000a), among them: nomination for the Giller Prize and the Canadian Booksellers' Association Author of the Year Award, and she has won the Trillium Prize, the Chapters/Books in Canada First Novel Award, The

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<sup>13</sup> Heble in "Rumours of Topography": The Cultural Politics in Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*, "Essays on Canadian Writing", used these words to discuss Michael Ondaatje's return to his homeland and origins but it may be claimed that the way in which postcolonialism reshaped the Western world is similar to how fiction and non-fiction concerning the perception of Central and Eastern Europe and emigration from it change the perception of this part of Europe. The same refers for instance to Eva Hoffman and her *Lost in Translation*.

Beatrice and Martin Fischer Award, and Orange Prize (Canadian Poetry Online) and Guardian Fiction Award. Her second novel *The Winter Vault* was published in 2009. Since very little is known about Michaels's roots as she "is so determined to strike herself from the record" (Crown 2009), it is enough to say that she is a child of a Polish-Jewish father, Isaiah, and Canadian mother, Rosalind. Her latest publication is a collective work created with the cooperation of Bernice Eisenstein, in which Michaels published poetry and Eisenstein illustrations, entitled *Correspondences: A Poem and Portraits* (2013) devoted to and inspired by Anne Michaels's father (Hannon 2009, Anne Michaels's Profile, Crown 2009).

Michaels's *The Winter Vault* (2009), as well as her first, bestselling and award-winning novel, *Fugitive Pieces* (1996), in addition to providing important commentary on the transfer and reconstruction of Abu Simbel and Holocaust trauma respectively, are significant fictional testimonies to the appearance of people of various nationalities in Canada and the ways in which their different ethnic backgrounds and haunting memories influence their present lives there. Michaels's protagonists, as immigrants from Europe, and especially those whose roots can be traced to Poland, frequently experienced a traumatic past, and their memories to a certain extent hinder their successful functioning in their new homeland. *The Winter Vault* is a truly multilayered novel tackling a wide range of topics: a fictional rendition of the real-life shift of the Abu Simbel temple and its environs and the creation of the Aswan Dam, a description of the construction of the St. Lawrence Seaway, and an exploration on love and marriage through a story of loss – a lost child, a lost love, and a lost city. In the second part of the novel, one of the protagonists, Jean, after numerous losses, meets Lucjan, a Polish immigrant, who tells her his own story of loss, turning the book into an elegy for the Polish capital city of Warsaw, which was totally devastated during the Second World War.

### **Trapped between History and Memory/From Forgetting to Remembering**

Michaels's second novel, probably to a larger extent than her debut one, is a meditation on the mutual interdependencies between history and memory. On all the levels of the plot, these two concepts play important roles and clash with one another, steering the readers into ideas about memory originating from Pierre Nora's understanding of the two concepts.

The first plot of the novel concerns Jean and Avery, a married couple from Canada, a botanist and an engineer respectively, who work hand in hand on the excavation site in Egypt, Avery is involved in the relocation of the Abu Simbel temple to a new place because of the erection of the Aswan dam on the Nile River, while Jean collects and depicts the plants growing in the fertile neighbourhood of the Nile. The story explores notions of gain and loss as Avery witnesses many losses: villages are flooded, graves and temples relocated for the sake of a power plant built together with the dam. Michaels makes the questions which appear alongside very disturbing: why is it that so that still the majority of the Nubians lack electricity (Michaels, *Winter* 114)? what happens to decomposed bodies when whole cemeteries are relocated (Michaels, *Winter* 22)? And, last but not least, can one desecrate the land if a temple is moved (Michaels, *Winter* 69)?

The second layer of the book concerns the building of the St. Laurence Seaway in Canada alluding to the first explorers of the continent who penetrated the land along St Laurence river. In this part, Michaels alludes to Jacques Cartier, the famous French traveller from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but she refers predominantly to another story of loss, the 1954 project of building the hydro power plant and a great dam on the Long Sault, which lost its prior wilderness and involved flooding of many villages in the region, then called the Lost Villages.

The third strand – and the most significant for this analysis – is the story of a Polish émigré, Lucjan, who survived the Warsaw ghetto, the Warsaw Uprising in 1944 and then the subsequent bombing of Warsaw and emigrated to Toronto to lead a life on the edge of society. He tells his story to Jean, who, once separated from Avery, becomes Lucjan's lover and most importantly the confidant of his stories. Jean's and Avery's marriage undergoes a deep crisis after they lose a child and they decide to cope with the experience of stillbirth by living apart. Paradoxically, despite her own trauma, Jean is able to immerse herself in Lucjan's traumatic memories and participate in them; through this close relationship, she is transformed into a stronger human being, perhaps even able to reconsider her relationship with Avery. Lucjan, as an artist, is able to create picturesque, though depressing, visions of destroyed Warsaw which can be called afterimages and are displayed constantly in his head.

It is beyond the scope of this study to provide an in-depth analysis of Jean and Avery's marriage, the loss of their child, their return to Canada and their separation. It is enough to state that the losses they endure destroy their initially strong relationship, and that they begin to live separately once back in Canada. Despite Avery's success as an engineer and Jean's satisfaction with her botany job, their lives are marked by tremendous solitude. The focus of my analysis is the group of Poles whom Jean meets after leaving Avery, Lucjan in particular, because it is at this point that the power of memory in determining one's life becomes visible in the novel.

The group consists of Lucjan, Jean's lover, Ewa and Paweł, a married couple, and Jan, a Lithuanian from Saskatchewan. They form a close-knit circle of friends separated from their Canadian surroundings. Their frequent mention of Poland, and especially Lucjan's constant storytelling, becomes a threnody for the lost homeland. It is again, as in Michaels's *Fugitive Pieces*, the trauma of war which is the main reason for the protagonists' inability to immerse themselves in their Canadian existence. Lucjan feels both a personal and communal loss. The image he carries in his heart and to which he constantly returns is connected to the image of the destroyed city of Warsaw:

It was as if the sky had been made of stone and had crashed to earth: an endless horizon of rubble (...) In the midst of this devastation was the crumpled city square, Plac Teatralny, once the point of intersection for every major trade route across Europe – from Baltic to the Black Sea, from Paris to Moscow. In the centre of that city square, a slender stone column still stood, untouched, its tip barely visible, an engraved compass needle upright among the incomprehensible debris, marking the place. (Michaels, *Winter* 213)

This after/image of destroyed Warsaw determines Lucjan for life. Not only is he unable to shed off the memory but also he lets this image rule his life.

As a result of his storytelling, Jean becomes marked with Lucjan's loss as well. As a perfect listener, she is ready to share the trauma with Lucjan when he says: "I need you to hear everything I say, and everything I can't say must be heard too" (Michaels, *Winter* 211); "I can only speak if you are lying next to me, he said, as close to my voice, my words throughout the length of your body, because what I am going to say is my entire life. And I have nothing really but these memories I need you to listen as if these

memories are your own" (Michaels, *Winter* 211). This proximity needed to tell one's hi/story is synonymous with safety, as Lucjan was told stories in the ghetto, when he hugged his mother hiding under a blanket for the evening portion of storytelling in the darkness of the night. His philosophy of life is commemorating the loss which can and cannot be explained in words at the same time.

The main thesis that Michaels tries to convey in her novel is the fact that places are sacred, no matter what the 'local' religion of the place is – they are living organisms and they possess souls. Therefore, the great parallel among the three points of the triangular story – Abu Simbel – Lost Villages of Ontario – Warsaw concerns the question of what happens if the sites lose their original image, site, place or metaphysical soul. The quandaries as to how to approach rebuilding, relocation, replicating, trouble Michaels in her novel from the very beginning. In the discussion on the relocation of Abu Simbel they concern the very basic idea of what a temple is:

and although the angle of sunrise into the Great Temple would be the same and the sun would enter sanctuary at dawn, Avery knew that once the last temple stone had been cut and hoisted sixty metres higher, each block replaced, each seam filled with sand so there was not a grain of space between the blocks to reveal where they'd been sliced, each kingly visage slotted into place, that the perfection of the illusion – the perfection itself – would be the betrayal. If one could be fooled into believing he stood in the original site, by then subsumed by the waters of the dam, then everything about the temple would have become a deceit. (Michaels, *Winter* 4)

The idea of falsity is present in all the plots and layers of the novel. Michaels ponders over the nature of how replicas deceive us; at the same time, although she is able to offer concrete data such as numbers of cubic feet of rubble and GPS positions (Michaels, *Winter* 213), she is more interested in catching the soul of the place, for example at the moment when Avery and Jean realize that "(...) somehow holiness was escaping under their drills, was being pumped away in the continuous draining of groundwater, would soon be crushed under the huge cement domes; that by the time Abu Simbel was finally re-erected, it would no longer be a temple" (Michaels, *Winter* 5).

In *The Winter Vault*, Michaels also addresses the problem of commemoration of loss. When she talks to Lucjan about Avery, their relationship, the breakdown of it, their love and their work at Abu Simbel, Jean comes to a conclusion: “it repels him [Avery], the idea of false consolation. In the end, he believed that’s what the moving of the temple was” (Michaels, *Winter* 234). However, Lucjan wonders if there is any hierarchy of loss and suddenly is filled with doubts: “Everything we do is false consolation (...) Or to put it another way, any consolation is true” (Michaels, *Winter* 235). In an interview with Sarah Crown for *The Guardian*, Michaels summarises these ideas in the following way: “The question of how we commemorate that sort of loss runs through the book, alongside the notion of false consolation, which we see in the relocation of Abu Simbel and the rebuilding of Warsaw. Even if you replace something with the same thing – which is such an understandable impulse – it’s still just that: a replication. Something essential has been lost” (Crown 2009). In Michaels’s metaphysical perspective, what is irrevocably lost is the soul of such replicated places. The urge is obvious, as Michaels states, to protect the temple, to rebuild the monuments but the quintessence of the site, this fleeting and intangible spirit of the place is lost. That is why Nora claims that “Memory attaches itself to sites whereas history attaches itself to events” (1989: 22) and talks of “memory places, *loci memoriae*” (1989: 25, italics original). What Avery and Lucjan are obsessed with in *The Winter Vault* is something that is no longer existing in the original site and form. In Lucjan’s meditation on the ruins of Warsaw there is a fragment exhibiting his philosophy: “Cities, like people, are born with a soul, a spirit of place that continues to make itself known, emerging even after devastation, an old word looking for meaning in the new mouth that speaks it” (Michaels, *Winter* 214). It coincides with the idea of *genius loci*, a spiritual dimension of the places in question that has been lost together with the rebuilding and replicating.

This tension in the protagonists stems from a deep relationship to the mentioned places (Abu Simbel, St. Lawrence Seaway, Warsaw) and can be characterized as nostalgia for the lost homeland, but Michaels goes further and deeper in her analysis of these emotions. It is a challenge to the truthfulness of replicas. There is, for Michaels, some innate falsity in the very idea. Given the fact that the bricks to rebuild Warsaw were transported from the whole of Poland, especially from the older, ruined

and deliberately dismantled buildings in the Regained Territories,<sup>14</sup> then it is relatively easy to see the difference; although bricks seem to be equally old and worn away by time, they are not the same bricks that had been in Warsaw for ages and created the soul of the place, its *genius loci*. Even if one tries to reduce such an attitude to nostalgia only, Edward S. Casey explains that nostalgia is also important in the discussion on the intricacies between place and memory: “One of the most eloquent testimonies to place’s extraordinary memorability is found in nostalgia. We are nostalgic primarily about particular places that have been emotionally significant to us and which we now miss: we are in pain (*algos*) about a return home (*nostos*) that is not presently possible” (Casey 2000: 201, italics original).

Lucjan, undisputedly the central character of the second part of *The Winter Vault*, feels alienated in Canada in spite of a few friendships he has made. A survivor of the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, the protagonist gives testimony to Warsaw’s destruction. His feelings towards the annihilation of Warsaw are accompanied by his stories of the decline of his Polish marriage. Moreover, as a representative of an ethnic group in Toronto, he can be seen as an example of the famous ‘salad bowl,’ failing to integrate with others. He lives in “a building that had been marooned. Over time, the tumbledown coach house had been cut off from the rest of the property and stood stranded” (Michaels, *Winter* 203). He visits an empty café run by another Pole named Paweł and happens to befriend Jean, carrying her own losses within her heart. For Ravvin, the novel provides “an opportunity to investigate a corner of contemporary Toronto” (Ravvin 2009: 19) which is somewhat artistic – Ewa and Paweł are involved in theatrical performances, the band The Stray Dogs plays occasionally, and Lucjan is involved in mural-painting. But despite this artistic stimulation, Toronto’s crowded downtown is tainted with stagnation for Lucjan, and haunted by memories of the past. What multiplies the image of loss is the fact that his band often performs to an empty room (258-259). Toronto, according to *The Winter Vault*, is not a tumultuous metropolis, but a place hiding “émigrés (...) [with] their narratives of catastrophe, loss and exile. (...) [It] is figured like the slim waist of an hourglass, with the wounds of the past and the possibilities of the future flaring away from it in opposite directions” (Ravvin 2009: 19).

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<sup>14</sup> Ravvin also mentions this procedure, calling it “a dark narrative” (2009: 19).

This inability to shed the skin of trauma is constantly reconsidered by Lucjan, whose philosophy of life is a fusion of the *flâneur* and a martyr suffering for a cause as “To mourn is to honour. Not to surrender to this keening, to this absence – a dishonouring” (Michaels, *Winter* 248). He wanders around the well-known corners of Toronto, visits his immigrant friends, and talks about his experiences. This Baudelairian strolling to immerse oneself in the city space is realized by Lucjan in his numerous walks with Jean to the forgotten corners of Toronto, the “other sites of lost hopes, sites of amputations and scars; vacant lots strewn with the debris” (Michaels, *Winter* 240). They visit empty, uninhabited areas around the Rosehill reservoir and Kendal Avenue to examine the remnants of unfinished churches, redirected rivers, sheds, cemeteries, and rusty garages, “an alternate city” (24), the one not explored by tourists, far away from the beaten track of central Toronto. For Lucjan, these desolate spaces are reminiscent of Warsaw: “We are born with places suffering in us, history is the proof of them...” (Michaels, *Winter* 211). These suffering places, these “cities (...) born with a soul” (Michaels, *Winter* 214), are reflected in the images of Warsaw that Lucjan obsessively returns to:

Sunlight passed through walls of dust where real walls had stood only a few hours before; the city, an afterimage. When the dust settled, this glowing flesh dissolved, leaving only the skeletons of buildings, sharp piles of stone, ventilator shafts, mangled iron beams, shredded wooden beams, cobblestones, chimney pots, eaves, shingles, pantry cupboards, (...) scraps of wool dresses, melted buttons, and the greasy smoke of still-burning, avalanched bodies (...) The dead were invisible and pervasive (Michaels, *Winter* 213-214).

These images constitute an immense part of Lucjan’s memory, and although he does not possess any photos of the rubble of Warsaw, his memories take the form of photography and project images endlessly within his mind and heart. Being haunted by these visions becomes for Lucjan a way of life as he searches for similar representations of destruction and replication in Toronto.

Lucjan questions the possibility of creating a replica of a place – whether it remains the same or its spirit becomes irretrievably lost. He asks rhetorically, “Who is to say that the rebuilt city was worth less or more than the original? Is desire the only determination of value?” (Michaels, *Winter*

231). He also refers to cities which acquired different names in the course of history, such as Breslau, Danzig, Koningsberg and Marienburg, questioning their double identity and stating that the cities' second existence is not certain, since they live new, different lives, and as such, have become different places. Even with Warsaw, Dresden or Berlin, though their names have not changed, the pre-World War II cities ceased to exist, and in their places new cities have been built, while the spirits of the former inhabitants live on in the people who remember them. Especially in the case of Breslau/Wrocław the idea in Michaels's novel evokes Stachniak's *Necessary Lies*. Michaels refers to this idea of 'spectre cities' and their spirits in a two-fold way, failing to find a resolute solution:

Names were stolen while we slept. We fell asleep in Breslau and woke in Wrocław. We slept in Danzig and yes, admittedly, we tossed and turned somewhat, yet not so much as to explain waking in Gdańsk. When we slipped in between the cold sheets our bed was undeniably in the town of Koningsberg, Falkenberg, Bunzlau, or Marienburg, and when we woke and swung our feet over the edge of that same bed, our feet landed still undeniably on a bedside rug in Chojna, Niemodlin, Bolesławiec, or Malbork. We walked the same street we had always walked (...) although where we'd once ordered *ciasta*, now we ordered *pirozhnoe* (...). Then there were the places that had changed everything but their names. After their obliteration, when the cities were rebuilt, Warsaw became Warsaw, Dresden became Dresden, Berlin, Berlin (...) Those cities had not completely died but grew again from their dregs, from what remained. But a city need not burn or drown; *it can die right before one's eyes, invisibly* (Michaels, *Winter* 278-279, italics in foreign words original, italics for emphasis mine).

These are Lucjan's ideas on rebuilding and replicating. There is no saying what is right and what is wrong. He just states the fact of being torn apart by the war and such big projects as power plants in Egypt and Canada. It would be a truism to say that every war is bad, Lucjan is rather concerned with the question of how to live after the war and how to deal with one's displacement, if the memory of the place lives on. He openly asks: "I do not know (...) if we belong to the place where we are born, or to the place where we are buried" (Michaels, *Winter* 233), which echoes Avery's quandaries about the relocation of cemeteries on the terrains to be flooded by the Aswan dam and St. Lawrence Seaway. Certainly what Michaels concurs with, through Lucjan, is Casey's statement that "Places posses us

– in perception, as in memory – by their radiant visibility, insinuating themselves into our lives, *seizing and surrounding us, even taking us over* as we sink into their presence” (Casey 2000: 200, emphasis mine).

In this way, the novel becomes a discussion of the problem of un/belonging and identity, questions viewed as typically Canadian. Lucjan, as well as Avery and Jean to a lesser extent, looks for a stable sense of identity and simultaneously is aware of the impossibility of a success in this respect. He is the embodiment of Canadian transculturalism understood as continuous movement and creative transfer of ideas and multiple identities (Cf. Lamore quoted in and translated by Vautier 2003: 269). There is no chance of going back for him as there is no Warsaw from before the war, yet he is possessed by the afterimage of the city and its soul which prevents him from identifying with the productive and positive image of Toronto. Avery who, through his involvement in the relocation of Abu Simbel, spent a lot of time in the desert,<sup>15</sup> also realizes this indeterminacy of home and one’s identity:

I do not believe home is where we’re born, or the place we grew up, not a birthright or an inheritance, not a name, or blood, or country. It is not even the soft part that hurts when touched, that defines our loneliness the way a bowl defines water. It will not be located in a smell or a taste or a talisman or a word...

Home is our first real mistake. It is the one error that changes everything, the one lesson you could let destroy you. It is from this moment that we begin to build our home in the world. It is this place that we furnish with smell, taste, a talisman, a name. (Michaels, *Winter* 183)

Michaels, through her characters, does not offer easy answers to the dilemmas concerning the notion of remembering and forgetting. Rather, she leaves open the question of the relationship of memory to identity. She mentions these disturbing ideas in an interview: “There were certain philosophic questions that haunted me – questions about the way we commemorate and the way we forget historic events, about dispossession. This whole complicated idea of rebuilding after devastation – what does it mean to create an exact replica? is it a kind of remembering or a kind of forgetting?” (Tlhanyl 2009). Remembering and forgetting are complicated issues. Michaels seems to be firm as far as her

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<sup>15</sup> In this respect, he resembles Almasy from Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*.

views on replicating are concerned, but she acknowledges the fact that the relocation of Abu Simbel, the villages in Ontario before flooding or the rebuilding of Warsaw are done in order to preserve. The motives are somehow justified and the need is obvious, but at the same time it is futile as it leads to this tremendous loss. In the parts devoted to the Lost Villages in the area of St. Lawrence River in Ontario, she clearly states that the transfer of the villages “was like the difference between a man and his corpse, for what is a corpse if not an almost perfect replica” (Michaels, *Winter*, 181-182). Such an outlook on memories and subjection of one’s life to them again mirror Nora’s concept of *lieux de mémoire* which “block the work of forgetting (...) and materialize the immaterial” (1989: 19) and thus make Lucjan’s process of healing through the Canadian experience highly unsuccessful. For Nora, a site of memory is an interplay of history and memory in its hybrid forms (1989: 19). As such, this corresponds to Michaels’s protagonist’s cultivation of his own personal site of memory. Nora’s ideas have been mainly adopted within the context of the memories of Holocaust survivors, and Lucjan in *The Winter Vault* also refers to the Warsaw ghetto and its image living in him. It is a sacred place for him in Warsaw, probably the most sacred of all, its status obtained at the high price of thousands of deaths: “Death makes a place sacred. You can never remove that sacredness” (Michaels, *Winter* 315).

### **After/images Made Textual**

The group of immigrants in Michaels’s *The Winter Vault*, Lucjan in particular, as well as the Binder family and Hiram Ostrovsky in Ravvin’s *Café des Westens* testify to the powerful existence of the memories of lost towns – vanquished cities with invincible souls. The memories which live on, sometimes cherished, sometimes renounced, cause them to live on the fringes of Toronto and an imagined Calgary, while images of pre-war Warsaw and Mlava still linger in their minds. Also, in this respect Stachniak’s *Necessary Lies* excavates the images of the post-war Wrocław which, in turn, brings about the memories of Breslau. All these cities have undergone specific changes, all of them are no longer the same and all of them have lost a substantial portion of their identities. As a result, they have influenced the people inhabiting them: Anna, Lucjan and Rivka as well as the subsequent generations like Rivka’s son, who live on with

their inherited post/memory of places that no longer exist in reality in the shape and with the soul remembered by their forefathers.

Memory is in all these cases an important stimulus in the characters' formation of their identity. After/images are the determinants of their remembering. In order to create after/images of the lost places, one has to respond to memories. Despite the obvious differences of personal fates, the characters of Ravvin's, Stachniak's and Michaels's novels either remember or inherit the images of the pre-war cities located in Central and Eastern Europe and, through the excavation of their hi/stories, rescue the cities' souls and re-create *les lieux de mémoire*.



## Conclusion

It is in part for my own sanity, that I decide to explore [my mother's] past. (...) So I set out to elicit the stories from her in a systematic way, pen at the ready. Her memories, of course, elude system. The familiar biological irony of all this doesn't escape me. This is the ultimate generation game. All my friends are playing it. We are suddenly interested in our parents' pasts which we feel are linked with our own buried ones. Children of Freud and his mismatchriage to the rebellious Sixties which put youth, only youth, on a pedestal, we root around, often too late, in the family romance and sometimes excavate dark secrets. We are hungry for knowledge. If it doesn't at its best bring mutual understanding, or forgiveness, or, at its worst, an excuse for personal failure, at least it may bring a kind of peace. Perhaps even a childhood talisman to inure us against old age.

In my case, I am all too aware that my parents' past is a narrative in a foreign and forgotten language.  
(Appignanesi, *Losing* 81)

This quotation from Lisa Appignanesi's *Losing the Dead. A Family Memoir* summarizes succinctly the project undertaken in *Forgetful Recollections: Images of Central and Eastern Europe in Canadian Literature*. It embraces the manifold aspects of narrating memory, an attempt taken up by all the authors of the books discussed here. Appignanesi mentions the generational urge to grasp the memories of one's forebears and to learn something about the bygone times of the

ancestors. This looking back into history is supposed to enlighten the younger generation, now mature, usually having their own children who begin asking the same questions, about where they come from and who they are: the perennial identity questions. Furthermore, this search for one roots, frequently embedded in Central and Eastern Europe and connected to an “excavation,” digging up the figurative “graves,” is a painful process which does not offer easy solutions, consolations and “truths.” This process of discovery often involves a realization that, without visiting “the sites of memory” (Appignanesi, *Losing* 83; Nora 1989: 7), the task could not be accomplished, though the conclusion of a narrative does not equal success in putting the fragmented memories together and reaching an unambiguous “truth” about oneself and one’s family.

This urge is expressed by all the authors whose work is explored in this book, as they all come from approximately the same post-World War II generation (Kulyk Keefer b. 1952, Appignanesi b. 1946, Karafilly b. 1940s<sup>1</sup>, Michaels b. 1958, Ravvin b. 1963, Stachniak b. 1952) and they all have their roots in Central and Eastern Europe. Despite the fact that some of the fictional characters in their texts belong to the older generations, like Rivka in Ravvin’s *Café des Westens*, Lucjan in Michaels’s *The Winter Vault* or Bruno in Appignanesi’s *The Memory Man*, it is always the younger postwar generation who pushes the older to reminisce about the past (Martin, Jean, and Amelia respectively). The visit to the sites of memory sometimes does not turn out to be revealing, as Appignanesi in *Losing the Dead* does not find the family documents certifying her birth in Łódź in 1946; Kulyk Keefer in *Honey and Ashes* does not locate the people who would remember her grandparents in Staromischyna; Irena F. Karafilly receives contradictory and convoluted messages from her confused mother. From time to time, the visit illuminates the past, as in the case of Eva Stachniak’s *Necessary Lies*, where a multilayered history of Wrocław/Breslau and Anna’s family story are revealed. It should not be forgotten that these inquiries are frequently influenced by the experience of transcultural Canada, as I have tried to show in this book. In other cases, the visit is no longer possible; Rivka and Lucjan are too old and aware of too many changes and losses. Moreover, the replicas that have

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<sup>1</sup> No exact date of Irena F. Karafilly’s birth is to be found; one may, however, infer that she was born in the 1940s during World War II, when her Jewish-Polish father escaped from the Nazi occupation of Poland into Russia, as she was born in the Russian Urals.

been built on these sites of memory as a consequence of World War II destruction are too disturbing to be borne for some of them.

Accessing the past through memory cannot be done alone and, if repressed, memories often disappear and fade away. That is why the texts taken into consideration in this book all explore the problem of forgetting, both unwelcomed and desired. In spite of the generic discrepancies, all the characters, both fictional and family members depicted by the memoirists, go through certain stages of oblivion and forgetting. Some have even transformed this forgetfulness into *ars oblivionis* (Ricoeur 2004: 505). The extreme example is Bruno Lind in Appignanesi's *The Memory Man* whose traumatic memories of the Holocaust seem to have been eradicated, or Karafilly's mother and Appignanesi's father who enter oblivion through Alzheimer's disease and diabetes respectively. Notwithstanding, there is always a recipient of memories, stories, after/images in these texts. The children, grandchildren, lovers and friends trigger the need to excavate the past. Although, as Bal claims "traumatic reenactment is tragically solitary" (1999: x), "it is the narrative memory (...) [which] comes about in a cultural context whose frame evokes and enables the memory. It is a context in which, precisely, the past makes sense in the present, to others who can understand it, sympathize with it, or respond with astonishment, surprise, even horror; narrative memory offers some form of feedback that ratifies the memory" (Bal 1999: x). Regardless of the form of repression and forgetting, what is strongly argued here is the fact that memories are living entities and construct narratives; hence they influence who we become. Therefore, both silencing of memories and their rendition are essential in identity formation. It is also valid to be aware of the fact that we do not know everything about our ancestors as, through this gap, we can establish a creative dialog with the past.

Each chapter of this book has drawn on a slightly different methodological stance concerning memory and forgetting and selected aspects of Holocaust theories. The main methodological axis, however, has been inspired by Marianne Hirsch's conceptualization of postmemory and Pierre Nora's idea of *lieux de mémoire*. Hirsch's notion of postmemory is fundamental for the study of the displaced and banished whose concept of home and belonging has been irrevocably lost. The younger generation's urge to explore their ancestors' pasts comes from the fact that the Old Places, although no longer available in their pre-

destruction shape, “occupy a monumental place” (Hirsch 2002: 242) in their imagination. As a result of this spatial location of memories, Nora’s idea of sites of memory has been applied in order to demonstrate the importance of their narrative rendition as there is no coming back in history to “the environments of memory” (Nora 1989: 7).

Even if not directly touching upon the discussion of the aftermath of the Holocaust, Ravvin’s characters and Stachniak’s protagonists also have to cope with the aftermath of mass migration, the trauma of exile and the construction of new lives in Canada. Tempted by the oblivion of forgetting, which Bruno Lind in Appignanesi’s *The Memory Man* perfectly adopted, they strive for closure of their quest. There is, however, no conclusion and no way to find peace with the ghosts of the past haunting endlessly. Even if facts prove scarce, as in the cases of all the texts chosen for discussion here, “the paradoxes of indirect knowledge haunt many of us who came after” (Hoffman 2005: 25). As Hoffman further explains,

The formative events of the twentieth century have crucially informed our biographies and psyches, threatening sometimes to overshadow and overwhelm our own lives. But we did not see them, suffer through them, experience their impact directly. Our relationship to them has been defined by our very ‘post-ness,’ and by the powerful but mediated forms of knowledge that have followed from it (2005: 25).

This is why the literature of exile and migrancy tries to accommodate the ghosts of the past. It is the first generation’s task to cope with the painful images, as in the case of Bruno Lind’s experience of Vienna, Cracow, and the Galician countryside in *The Memory Man*, Lucjan from Michaels’s *The Winter Vault*, who continuously sees the Warsaw ghetto and the rubble of the ruined capital of Poland every time he closes his eyes, and Anna, in *Necessary Lies*, who surprisingly starts remembering German debris in the city of Breslau/Wrocław, which was proclaimed Polish and ordered by the Communist regime to be seen as the ever Piast town. The second generation, like Bruno’s adopted daughter, Amelia, who is not linked by the bonds of blood, and Janice Kulyk Keefer whose mother listened to Ukrainian songs sung at times by her grandmother, also experiences the legacy of trauma. Furthermore, the syndromes depicted by Hirsch and Hoffman refer to those who spent their first formative years in Poland, such as Appignanesi or Karafilly (and Hoffman herself), who

theoretically do not remember and have not forgotten, but have preserved post/memory of trauma “being permeated by sensations of panic and deadliness, of shame and guilt” (Hoffman 2005: 63).<sup>2</sup> Their testimonies are the powerful traces of how deeply anchored traumatized post/memories are.

### **After/Images in *Loci Memoriae***

Images of Poland and Eastern Europe from before the Second World War are presented by Janice Kulyk Keefer in *Honey and Ashes* and Norman Ravvin’s *Café des Westens*; war-stricken Łódź, Warsaw, Cracow and other villages and towns are recreated in Lisa Appignanesi’s *Losing the Dead* and *The Memory Man*, Anne Michaels’s *The Winter Vault*, Irena F. Karafilly’s *The Stranger in the Plumed Hat*; finally, after/images of Breslau/Wrocław and are envisioned by Eva Stachniak in *Necessary Lies*. Whether non-fictional or fictional, they testify to both the global history of the once multicultural Poland and vast, even more varied, borderlands, and the *loci memoriae* – the local, personal stories of loss, trauma and immigration to Canada. Insofar as these two notions become dynamic qualities and are subject to change, both fictional works and memoirs have challenged their own generic boundaries and have permeated one another. This is why it is common that fictional works stem from the personal lives of their authors to some extent and memoirs become stories wherein the void of silence is filled in with the creativity of the author.

Moreover, Canada offers a highly idealized and mythologized policy of multiculturalism, which in the course of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 21<sup>th</sup> century has been transformed and has evolved

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<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, Eva Hoffman also writes about another imperative, the “impossible psychic tasks: to replace dead relatives, or children who have perished; to heal and repair the parents, and keep rescuing them from their grief and mourning, from death (...) To keep undoing the past, again and again. A more than Penelope-like devotion, a more than Sisyphean labor (...) A more than Orphic danger, for to look back in this case is to be dragged into Hades...” (2005: 63). This interesting view can be traced in Anne Michaels’s *Fugitive Pieces* (1996), in which Jakob, haunted by the ghost of his perished sister, Bella, tries to bring her back to life and thus haunts her, never letting her die. This is discussed in many critical texts, for instance in Rachel Falconer’s *Hell in Contemporary Literature* (2005). Another interesting development of Hoffman’s thought is Piotr Sadkowski’s (2011) analysis of immigrant literature through the reinterpretation of the myth of Odysseus.

into transculturalism. The omnipresent condition of exile in Canada is therefore a springboard for discussing ethnicity, which is understood by Kulyk Keefer as “a mesh of old place and new, of personal and public history – a mesh that cuts deep into the skin” (Kulyk Keefer, *Honey* 7). Furthermore, the analyses conducted in *Forgetful Recollections* are undertaken from the perspective of remembering and forgetting, the two omnipotent powers governing the immigrants’ lives. According to Bernard-Donals, “writing-as-memory, writing on the edge of memory and oblivion” (2009: 10) frequently constitutes migrant literature. As such, memory proves forgetful, although it offers oblivion and restores remembrances at the same time.

I am well aware of Cynthia Sugars’s notion of “(dis)inheriting the Nation” (2005: 177-200), which focuses on diminishing the importance of ancestry and emphasizes the “danger of such commitment to genealogy” (Sugars 2005: 199). Even if, as she proves in her essay, this approach matches the study of memoirs chosen by her and demonstrates the idea of “elusive ancestry, defined by mystery or secret that was repressed or untold” (Sugars 2005: 181), what *Forgetful Recollections* has tried to exhibit is the importance of even elusive post/memories. The title of this book aims to suggest the value of such fleeting, ungraspable, intangible, and forgetful shards of post/memory which surface in the form of long forgotten songs and words in Ukrainian, Yiddish, Polish, and Russian, images of lost sites, towns, villages which come back unexpectedly, and finally the evolving stories inherited from the ancestors. They all make people, who search for them and recollect them for themselves, more aware of their identities. As Eaglestone states of memory, it “is part of the imagined community, art of the image store (...) that creates and actually is a community: to remember is to bring a communal body (back) together in an act of remembrance” (2008: 76). Memories transformed into stories are, thus, conducive in shaping identities as these texts have shown.

The choice of images of Central and Eastern Europe discussed in *Forgetful Recollections* is subjective, yet its aim was to discuss the narratives by writers who are both clearly connected to the Central and Eastern European diasporic literature and who have entered the mainstream Canadian literature written in English to display some similarities, among which is the urge to revisit European sites of memory and catch glimpses of pictures of this part of the world irrevocably transformed by the events of the traumatic 20<sup>th</sup> century. The after/images

come in various forms, ranging from the elegiac in *The Winter Vault* and *Café des Westens* to the truly illuminative in *Necessary Lies*. Moreover, the inclusion of a Ukrainian-Canadian voice from Ukrainian-Polish borderlands and Jewish-Polish and Russian voices, along with a German perspective enriches the plethora of multifaceted images Canadian literature embraces. The vague and transgressive national boundaries come from the concept of Central Europe as an ‘unfinished project’ (Škrabec 2013) and, as such, widen the concept of diasporic literature. All the texts chosen for analysis here show how post/memory and forgetting intertwine in identity-formation processes. *Forgetful Recollections: Images of Central and Eastern Europe in Canadian Literature* proves that memories can simultaneously offer consolation and agitation; they can bring forgetting and painful knowledge, but only through the recognition of such dichotomies can a viable acceptance of one’s identity be acknowledged and transcultural narratives be written.



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# **Przypominając zapomniane: Obrazy Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej w literaturze kanadyjskiej**

## **Streszczenie**

Książka *Forgetful Recollections: Images of Central and Eastern Europe in Canadian Literature* poświęcona jest studiom nad miejscem jakie zajmują pamięć i postpamięć we współczesnej literaturze kanadyjskiej w odniesieniu do Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej. Wychodząc od koncepcji tej części Europy jako „przestrzeni rozproszenia” zaproponowanej przez Škrabec (2013: 27), Autorka analizuje wybrane powieści i pisarstwo dokumentu osobistego wydane w Kanadzie i napisane przez emigrantów lub ich potomków z Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej. Analiza tekstów autorów takich jak Janice Kulyk-Keefer, Lisa Appignanesi, Irena F. Karafilly, Anne Michaels, Norman Ravvin i Eva Stachniak prowadzona jest w oparciu o współczesne teorie pamięci i zapomnienia oraz ich przestrzennych konotacji. Szczególną i najważniejszą ramą metodologiczną w proponowanym podejściu jest koncepcja postpamięci w ujęciu Marianne Hirsch ([1997] 2002) oraz idea miejsc pamięci Pierre'a Nory (1989). Obie te koncepcje, choć głęboko zakorzenione w badaniach nad Holokaustem, stały się w niniejszej pracy osią spinającą różnorakie podejścia do post/pamięci. Okazuje się, bowiem, że nawet w przypadku tekstów nie będących bezpośrednim zapisem post/pamięci o Zagładzie, występuje podobne podejście do miejsc bezpowrotnie utraconych, zniszczonych, zmienionych w wyniku traumy II wojny światowej.

Taki fenomen można zaobserwować w książce wspomnieniowej Janice Kulyk Keefer *Honey and Ashes. A Story of Family* (1998), która analizuje z perspektywy Kanady, niegdysiejsze pogranicze polsko-ukraińskie, z której pochodzą jej przodkowie czy w debiutanckiej powieści Normana Ravvina *Café des Westens* (1991), w której żydowska rodzina wyjeżdża z Mławy przed hekatombą II wojny światowej i osiada w kanadyjskim Calgary. W obu tych przypadkach bohaterowie (czy to rodzice i dziadkowie Kulyk Keefer, czy fikcyjni protagości Ravvina) utracili bezpowrotnie swoje miejsce, które w kształcie przedwojennym już nie istnieje, a ich post/pamięć o tych utraconych małych ojczynach

kształtuje tożsamość ich własną i kolejnych pokoleń. Podobne podejście do miejsc pamięci ma Lisa Appignanesi w dwóch książkach włączonych do dyskusji w tym tomie, autobiograficznej *Losing the Dead. A Family Memoir* (1999) (jedna z dwóch książek w tym tomie przełożona na język polski jako *Żegnając umarłych. Pamiętnik rodzinny*, wyd. pol. 2007) i fikcyjnej *The Memory Man* (2005), a także Irena F. Karafilly w swojej książce wspomnieniowej *The Stranger in the Plumed Hat* (2000), gdzie kwestia utraty pamięci związana pośrednio z doświadczeniem Holokaustu staje się ciężarem i chorobą, ale i wartością wyzwalającą, która pozwala kolejnym pokoleniom zainfekowanym niepamięcią swych bliskich spojrzeć na swoją tożsamość w twórczy sposób.

Trauma II wojny światowej widoczna jest także w obrazach i powidokach jakie tworzą Eva Stachniak w *Necessary Lies* (2000) (polskie wydanie *Konieczne kłamstwa* 2004) i Anne Michaels w *The Winter Vault* (2009), gdzie doświadczenie transkulturowości kanadyjskiej z jednej strony pomaga dostrzec wielowarstwową tożsamość Polaków i Polski, a z drugiej uwypukla utratę i każe zastanawiać się nad możliwością odbudowy miejsc pamięci, *lieux de mémoire* (w ujęciu Nory 1989) będących replikami (a więc kopiami), które żyją poza fizyczną przestrzenią konkretnego miasta i miejsca.

Analiza wybranych tekstów poprzedzona jest rozdziałem historyczno-literackim, w którym Autorka przedstawiła skrótnie historię emigracji z Polski i Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej do Kanady a także pisarstwo tychże emigrantów i ich potomków w Kanadzie. Dla uwypuklenia pewnych zjawisk, a szczególnie podejścia do post/pamięci, teksty poddane analizie są dobrane subiektywnie choć z pewnością nie wyczerpują tematyki. Celem jednak było pokazanie wieloaspektowości zjawiska pamięci i zapomnienia w różnorodnych teksthach pisarzy kanadyjskich, zarówno emigrantów w pierwszym, jak i drugim, bądź trzecim pokoleniu, kojarzonych z literaturą diaspor, ale i takich, którzy funkcjonują w Kanadzie jako pisarze kanadyjscy. Ponadto kryterium wyboru zastało zawarte do Autorów mających swoje korzenie w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej, ale reprezentujących grupy etniczne kluczowe dla tej części świata, a więc Polaków, Ukraińców, Żydów, Rosjan.

Złożone i nie do końca określone pojęcie tożsamości, jakie jawi się na kartach analizowanych tekstów, jest zawsze związane z kwestią post/pamięci, wspomnień przekazywanych z pokolenia na pokolenie, wspomnień przemilczanych, wypartych i zapomnianych, a także odzy-

skanych. To one kształtują tożsamość bohatera – emigranta w transkulturowej Kanadzie. Gra słów w tytule niniejszej książki ma na celu ukazanie niejasności i złożonej natury post/pamięci, widocznej we wszystkich analizowanych tekstach, pamięci dającej ukojenie i zapomnienie, ale i zapomnienia pozwalającego pamiętać kolejnym pokoleniom.

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DRUK I OPRAWA: UNI-DRUK s.j., LUBOŃ, UL. PRZEMYSŁOWA 13