

Palla, Mária

[Molnár, Judit, ed. **Different perspectives on Canada from inside and outside: multidisciplinary approaches**]

*The Central European journal of Canadian studies*. 2008, vol. 6, iss. [1], pp. 171-174

ISBN 978-80-210-4943-7

ISSN 1213-7715 (print); ISSN 2336-4556 (online)

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/116068>

Access Date: 22. 02. 2024

Version: 20220831

Terms of use: Digital Library of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University provides access to digitized documents strictly for personal use, unless otherwise specified.

greater and greater numbers and they add to the plurality that characterizes today's Québec. They make Québec's literature "world literature". The French province has survived in an anglophone environment. It provides Hungarians in Central Europe with a model to be followed.

The last chapter talks about the way Québec has been viewed in Hungary and draws our attention to possible misunderstandings which the author hopes will be avoided in the future. This book undoubtedly serves as a great help in that direction.

The long bibliography that is arranged thematically is a very important part: sources on history, language, dictionaries, lexicons,

anthologies, literary histories and collections of literary studies are enumerated here. About one hundred authors are touched upon in the book and it ends with the pictures of twelve of them.

In his preface Alain-G. Ganon, sociologist at the Université de Montréal, ensures us that we shall benefit from the work. He is very right. Vígh's literary history is a very valuable contribution to literary scholarship owing to his deep knowledge of Québec and the way he transmits it in a very delightful manner. Thus it is not a dry piece of writing, on the contrary, a very enjoyable one. This is a book that is difficult to put aside and very to easy to come back to.

**Molnár, Judit, ed.**

**Different Perspectives on Canada from Inside and Outside:  
Multidisciplinary Approaches.**

Debrecen: DEENK Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadója, 2008, 262 pages. ISBN 978 963 473 111 5.

**Mária Palla**

Kodolányi János University College, Székesfehérvár, Hungary

No sooner had summer arrived in Hungary with the academic year of 2007-2008 coming to its end than a new book on Canadian Studies appeared in university bookstores. One of the founders of the discipline in Hungary, Professor Judit Molnár, who introduced Canadian Studies in the English Department of Debrecen University (then Kossuth Lajos University) in the 1980s, has edited an intriguing volume bringing together essays on a variety of topics by internationally acclaimed authors from both Canada and Europe. Her collection

is a fine addition to the series of books printed in Hungary in the past few months, all written in Hungarian and dealing with Canadian literature such as Árpád Vígh's book on the history of French writing in Quebec, Katalin Kürtösi's translation of Sharon Pollock's *Blood Relations*, published in a bilingual edition and supplemented with her preface, her study of North-American metadrama, and a no less important collection of contemporary Canadian plays in Hungarian translation from French and English as well. *Different Perspectives on*

*Canada from Inside and Outside: Multidisciplinary Approaches*, however, will be of interest for both students and teachers in the field not only in Hungary but also in the larger world of academia elsewhere.

The book with a cover illustration by Tom Thompson, an emblematic Canadian painter, is divided into two parts, each opening with a seminal essay by a leading Canadian academic. The first section, entitled “Diverse Voices from the Literary Scene”, is introduced by none other than William H. New, well-known for his more than thirty books including his own poetry and literary criticism such as *A History of Canadian Literature* as well as the *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada*, a comprehensive reference work edited by him. In the present collection he surveys 20th century Canadian prose writing in English in his “Telling the Distances: Notes on Canadian Prose Practice, towards the Post-post-modern”, whose main question is whether changing critical theories affect the practice of prose writing and reading in Canada. W.H. New also problematizes the causal relationship between evolution and betterment in literature similarly to E.M. Forster – whom he quotes in some other context – since Forster also states at one point in his *Aspects of the Novel* that “History develops, Art stands still”. Other modernist icons such as T.S. Eliot’s and James Joyce’s attitudes to progress in culture can be sensed as well behind New’s observation about “[c]ulture as palimpsest rather than [...] logical sequence. Fragment on fragment”. Unlike Linda Hutcherson, who can be very theoretical in her analyses, New distances himself from such an approach and keeps turning to specific literary examples: to the reader’s delight, at one point, he even provides a list of authors and their works he considers indicative of the social and literary changes of the last ten years in Canada. His discussion of modern and postmodern

attributes is enriched with the interpretation of these concepts in the light of postcolonial criticism, which prompts New to rely on the works of contemporary First Nations writers. What runs through his whole examination of Canadian literature of the last hundred years is the recognition how this body of writing has always been connected to society and its reality; this connection, however, does not prevent works of imagination and new “narrative beginnings” from emerging.

W.H. New’s overview is then followed by four case studies focussing on individual writers: Mavis Gallant’s short story collection *The Pegnitz Junction* with special emphasis on the title story itself is the subject of Barbara Gabriel’s analysis informed by the ideas of ethical criticism and, due to its post World War II topic, it finds its place among studies of social memory and of trauma literature alike. Margaret Atwood seems to be an indispensable presence in collections like this and she duly appears here in two essays, one of which looks at her short story “Polarities” from *Dancing Girls*. In his discussion of Atwood’s story, Martin Kuester draws a conclusion emphasizing ambiguities of the text with the help of the structuralist linguist Jakobson’s and the later literary critic David Lodge’s definitions of metaphor and metonymy in relation to communication and characterization. However, Kuester’s use of Blake’s poetry in the analysis appears to be a supplementary source of interpretation less than fully integrated with the rest of his argumentation. The essay by Danielle Schaub (whose misprinted name is, unfortunately, one of the occasional typos in the volume) shares the same thematic focus, as she discusses a novel by Atwood; her approach to *Cat’s Eye*, on the other hand, also ties in with Gabriel’s earlier essay with its examination of traumatic experiences, though more personal than social or historical this



time. Schaub's references to Hegel's work in her treatment of the Master/Slave relationship occasion some truly insightful observations, but the absence in her essay of direct quotations from the German philosopher's work does little to enhance her argument.

If Schaub's concerns connect with previous themes, David Solway's essay already anticipates what is to come in the second part of the collection by addressing prejudices and psychological complexities in the political and cultural life of present-day Québec society, as he reflects on the consequences and impacts of the late novelist Mordecai Richler's non-fiction on various forms of repression. Two essays of a broader scope end this section of the volume: Christl Verduyn provides a vivid exploration of the role played by place, language and gender in the essays of two contemporary women writers Aritha van Herk and Di Brandt, highlighting the challenging and innovative nature of their work thematically and technically alike. Katalin Kürtösi's paper on metadrama and theatricality is located in a larger context both in time (as she traces the roots of metadrama back to the Renaissance) and space (since she concentrates on the whole of North America when selecting her examples from twentieth-century American and Canadian drama).

The second part of the volume, called "Idiosyncrasies of the Historical and Cultural Scenes", begins and ends with detailed studies both looking at the question of diversity in Canadian society though they do so from different angles. The influential scholar Desmond Morton provides the reader with a truly comprehensive survey of Canada's military history in the last two centuries. Supplemented with telling data in the appendices, his essay points out how the organization of an army reflects society's attitude to multi-ethnicity and traces the changes from ho-

mogeneous divisions to diverse units in the Canadian armed forces in terms of minorities, which include women, the Native people and visible minorities to comply with recently introduced constitutional requirements concerning federal institutions. Written by Gabriella T. Espák, the closing piece also examines the decades-old issues of federalism, polyethnicity and multinationality in the context of constitutional debates as the essay focuses on the reasons of the failure of the Meech Lake Accord. Similarly to Desmond Morton, she finds the ignorance of the social and cultural realities of the country on the federal level especially problematic.

In between these two essays appears Gladys L. Symons' analysis of emotional spacetime in organizations. Her major analytical tools are metaphors, of which she has, quite understandably, selected the management-hockey metaphor as a typically Canadian one to study relations and attitudes in Canadian organizations. Her work illustrates the influence of the linguistic turn on the social sciences proving that the examination of linguistic devices can be productive in fields other than literature, too; their usefulness in interpreting a literary work has already been seen in Kuester's study in the first section of the volume. Christian V. Hansel's richly documented essay in the second part of the collection highlights the interrelatedness of trade and transportation routes and information channels as well as their effects on each other in promoting emigration from Ireland to the Canadas in the nineteenth century before the Great Famine. He emphasizes the importance of literacy and the publication of settlers' letters and various travel accounts beginning in the middle of the eighteenth century; though such publications may have started to produce an impact on emigration then, the reader might recall that they had already had a significant influence

on the population of the British Isles in earlier times already, as exemplified by Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, drawing on the details of an actual Bermuda shipwreck, or Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, also inspired by the travel literature of the time.

Carefully selected by Judit Molnár, the diverse pieces of the volume offer a cross-

section of what various contemporary scholars relying on current theories and grounding their work on empirical data find noteworthy in Canadian Studies at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

