

Katalin Kürtösi

## “Világok találkoznak”: a ‘másik’ irodalmi ábrázolása Kanadában

[“Worlds Meet”: The Literary Representation of the ‘Other’ in Canada].

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Canadian literature is often considered as a “new literature,” a term which in Europe carries the meaning of not only “recent” but also “different,” since most European literatures have a longer history behind them and are thus “old,” as it were. Katalin Kürtösi’s book concentrates on the aspect of “difference” in Canadian literature, this difference revolving around the “other” within literary representations – an extremely complex issue falling within the larger realm of the philosophy of multiculturalism. This pluralistic feature of Canadian literature is one of the factors contributing to its distinct Canadian nature, a distinctness which nevertheless has special relevance in Central Europe, where there is a history of numerous languages and cultural and national identities compressed into a relatively small geographical area. What at first glance appears to be different, therefore, is found to be familiar upon closer scrutiny from the Central European perspective.

Katalin Kürtösi hardly needs introduction; she was editor-in-chief of this journal from 2001 to 2009 and is known for her many publications, including numerous articles on Canadian literature and the monograph *Valóság vagy illúzió? Metadramatikus elemek észak-amerikai színdarabokban* (2007) [*Reality or Illusion? Metadramatic Elements in North-American Plays*], as well as for her translations into Hungarian of such important works as

Sharon Pollock’s *Blood Relations* and Roch Carrier’s *La Guerre, Yes Sir!*.

Kürtösi’s book is the first comprehensive study in Hungarian of Canadian literature in a wider context, including both English-Canadian and French-Canadian works. While being a pioneering study in this respect, it also complements a body of other Hungarian language studies on Canada, made up by such works as Árpád Vigh’s *Kék mezőben fehér liliom* (2007) [*White Lilies in a Blue Field*] on the history of French-Canadian literature (reviewed by Judit Molnár in the last issue of this journal), and books written on other aspects of Canada, such as István János Molnár’s *Kanada és a Québec-kérdés* (1996) [*Canada and the Quebec Question*] and Ádám Fuglinszky’s *A polgári jogi felelősség útjai vegyes jogrendszerben, Québec, Kanada* (2010) [*Ways of Civil Liability in a Mixed Legal System: Quebec, Canada*]. Therefore, while groundbreaking as the first book-length Canadian literary history in Hungarian – a study of some of the most prominent literary works of English and French Canada – it also fits into and contributes to the growing corpus of Canadian Studies written in Hungarian.

As mentioned, Kürtösi’s study is comprehensive in that it surveys a large array of literary works. However, what makes the book fascinating is the special perspective it adopts: the portrayal of the “other,” of cultural, na-

tional or ethnic difference in Canadian literature, the theoretical implications of which can be approached from psychology and sociology, and from philosophy and cultural studies. The representation of difference as perceived within the framework of cultural pluralism is a key feature of contemporary postcolonial literatures and, as an integral part of the prevailing discourse today, serves as a compelling viewpoint for the analysis.

The book is divided into three main chapters, each revealing new layers of the primary question of the “other.” The first offers a survey of theories of identity and difference, investigating the basic premises set forth by various authors in the past few decades. This part of the monograph references a great number of theoretical works, each relevant to the main investigation and serving as a conceptual basis for the study, paving the way for a comprehensive view of the primary literature explored in the subsequent chapters. The questions under review in this part of the book include modernism and postmodernism, border and space, the centre and the peripheries, identity and hybridity, the problems of canon formation, the main trends of cultural pluralism, including multi-, inter- and transculturalism, and some intriguing questions relating to language, such as multilingualism, silence, linguistic insecurity, the betrayal of the native language, code-switching and deviations in language use, just to name a few.

The second chapter concentrates on the representation of “difference” in Canadian belles-lettres from a historical perspective, exploring specific works by renowned Canadian authors. This chapter of the study is divided into three parts: the first discusses Canadian literary history from the beginnings up to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the second examines its development until the rise of multiculturalism, and the third investigates its character-

istics since the emergence of multiculturalism in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century up to the present, this latter part concentrating on immigrant, native and métis literature. In this chapter, Kürtösi examines the work of over twenty Canadian authors to explore the diverging patterns in which difference is evoked.

The third large chapter of the book discusses the portrayal of Hungarians in the works of non-Hungarian authors, such as Robertson Davies, Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje, Linda Leith, Yann Martel and Danielle Fournier. In the literary output of these authors, Hungarian (or half- or partly-Hungarian) characters represent (or more accurately, are represented as) something mysterious and alien; where Hungary is mentioned, the same is also generally true of the country as a geographical place. In Atwood’s title story of *Wilderness Tips*, for example, Kürtösi notes that in portraying the character of the Hungarian “George,” Atwood “used the well-known stereotypes about Hungarians: Hungarians are, on the one hand, endowed with special sensuality, while, on the other hand, they are extremely inventive in difficult situations. As the popular saying goes, a Hungarian will step in the revolving door behind you but will eventually come out ahead of you” (170, my translation). Kürtösi’s sense of objectivity in describing such a portrayal – as any other representation of the “other” in the book, for that matter – prevents her from making any critical comments; her scholarly attitude is focused on making detached observations. It is interesting to observe that this practice differs from Richard Teleky’s more involved approach, who has described Atwood’s narrative technique with harsh words that carry their implications to the value of the whole short story: “By reducing George’s connection with humanity to a kind of ethnic shtick and



making a joke of his ethnicity, the story loses its moral centre, and any potential for social criticism,” adding that “George comes from a genre different from the story’s naturalistic Canadian characters.”<sup>1</sup>

The third large chapter in Kürtösi’s study also includes an analysis of Hungarian-Canadian literature, providing insightful observations on the literary output of a number of authors, while concentrating on the work of György Vitéz, Endre Farkas and Tibor Egerváry in more detail. Since George Bisztray’s *Hungarian-Canadian Literature* and John Miska’s *Literature of Hungarian Canadians*, published in 1985 and 1991, respectively, no comprehensive analysis has appeared on the work of Hungarian-Canadian authors, and by revealing new facets of this ethnic literature within

Canada, Kürtösi provides a welcome addition to the critical literature.

In summary, Kürtösi’s monograph is a fascinating study of the divergent and historically changing aspects of Canadian literary representations of difference. Owing to the substantial theoretical basis and knowledge incorporated in the book, it is an indispensable manual for scholars of Canadian literature in Hungary, while its style, refraining from the use of heavy jargon without proper explanation, makes it accessible to students and a wide readership as well. This is a major milestone in the author’s scholarly output and a promising start for Canadian Studies in Hungary at the outset of the second decade of the second millennium.

1) Richard Teleky, *Hungarian Rhapsodies: Essays on Ethnicity, Identity and Culture* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press; Vancouver, B.C.: UBC Press, 1997), 59

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### **Newfoundland and Labrador – A History.**

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Of all of Canada’s regions and territories, Newfoundland possesses arguably the richest yet least-known history. As distinct in its culture as the more-heralded (and vocal) Québec, the island of Newfoundland and its mainland territory of Labrador have suffered a greater number of slings and arrows, and the resulting outrageous fortune, than perhaps all of the ROC (Rest of Canada) combined. From the arrival of the first Inuit and Innu peoples through to Giovanni Caboto’s mercan-

tile expedition in 1497 to the contemporary administration of the neo-nationalist Danny Williams, Newfoundland has suffered the vicissitudes of climatic catastrophes, ignoble colonial administration, the humiliation of bankruptcy and a shotgun marriage with the Canadian federation, all the while cultivating a reputation as the home of Canada’s warmest, funniest and most musical citizens.

What Caboto observed and passed on to his British sponsors has come to define the one-