



Migrating Memories: Central Europe in Canada, Vol. 1 –
Literary Anthology

Lopičić, Vesna (ed.)

CEACS, Brno 2010, 460 pp., ISBN 9788677462338

Migrating Memories: Central Europe in Canada, Vol. 2 –
Oral Histories

Albu, Rodica (ed.)

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Migrating Memories: Central Europe in Canada, an impressive and unique two-volume collective monograph published thanks to efforts of Canadianists from eight European countries, has two parts and aims: Volume 1 deals with literary activities of immigrants to Canada from Central Europe, while Volume 2 summarizes interviews with immigrants to Canada and is thus an instance of oral history. With these different approaches and focuses, encompassing both the theoretical and the practical, the two volumes put forth a complex and structured view of emigration. Replicating the political schemes of Canada, the languages used in the monograph are English and French (with most published literary texts and most oral history interviews being in English). The project was quite ambitious and demanded as close cooperation and coordination between all teams of contributors from CEACS member countries, as well as all the émigrés, literary authors and other individuals who agreed to be interviewed. Indeed, a variety of views are represented, as the subjects came from eight countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia).

Volume 1 “fictionalizes” the immigrant experience, translating it into elevated language while making sharp observations about “the old” and “the new” cultures. Peter Petro, a Slovak essayist poignantly writes, “after all, not all immigrants are the same. Some came here to live here, to assimilate and to become Canadians; others came to



Canada to build their own small and better Slovakia” (380). Other authors, including renowned Czech immigrant Josef Škvorecký, note the visible and invisible differences between their mother country and Canada: “Outside the window, which is high, marrow and gothic, the cold Canadian wind blends two whitenesses: snowflakes sifting down from lowering clouds and snowdust lifted and whirled by the wind from the land stretching southwards to lake Ontario” (127). Škvorecký calls Canada the “country of cities with no past” and that “uprootedness” is what many authors feel the need to comment on.

In terms of national representation, Serbian authors prove to be the most productive; more than thirty-five extracts were carefully selected from a much bigger number of published authors. On the other hand, Slovakia and Slovenia are represented by only half a dozen authors. That, however, is also an interesting detail – for why is it that some nationalities tend to verbalize their experience more promptly, while the others withdraw, so to speak? If “their” authors wrote any literary reflection of their immigrant experience, it remained unpublished or unrecognized. That is also the question that the authors of the Slovak section try to answer in an interview with present-day writer and poet Ilja Čičvák. “The number of writers depends on a number of circumstances that have to be taken into consideration. First, there is one’s intellectual ability to express oneself in an appealing artistic way that is not only plausible to the eye of the reader, but also to the publisher [...] That’s the degree to which a publisher feels responsible in representing public interests, its culture, the uplifting of the human spirit” (331). Thus the literary anthology not only presents an impressive selection of Canada-related literary extracts, it also opens important literary questions related to the role and *raison d’être* of immigrant literature.

Volume 2 includes transcriptions of guided interviews, all translated into English and accompanied by a foreword or introductory essay analysing the historical, social and political context of immigration to Canada from the respective country. Such a compilation represents a unique set of interviews, as English functions here as a *Lingua Franca* and enables the reader to share and compare multiple experiences of individual immigrants, coming from eight different countries. The immigrant experience varies: there were many famous Czech immigrants in Canada, for example the world-famous tradesmen and shoe-maker Thomas Bata, textile-producer Steinsky and mechanical engineer Karel Velan, to name a few, but also professors and artists: Milan Kymlicka, Jan Rubes and Dagmar Rydlo, among many others (80-81).

Slovak immigration to Canada, meanwhile, can be divided into as many as five different historical waves (294-296) which are mostly unknown to the rest of the world. In contrast, the year 1956 is well-known to history, and Peter Szaffkó discusses Hungarian immigration especially at that time, which according the author “was the year when some of the most important contributions to modern Canadian culture were



started by creative and enthusiastic Hungarian refugees” (121). Serbian and Slovenian immigrants also have common ground, as they were leaving Yugoslavia. Milena Kostić analyses Serbian immigration in a manner similar to Javorčíková and Glavanekov-Yaneva (who analyses Bulgarian immigration) – namely, from an objective historical point of view. However, she also adds a psychological interpretation of the reasons and circumstances leading to immigration of the follow-up double identity of an individual. The in-depth exploration of Romanian immigration by the editor of Volume 2, Rodica Albu, who approaches the topic from a sociological point of view – she points out that the need to create “or recreate the Romanian space in Canada” (168), to create a place where one can belong and return. This project has enormous potential for the research of cultural and Canadian studies in Europe. The interviews can also serve as databases of corpuses for further discourse analysis and linguistic research.

In conclusion it must be said that the monograph, as a result of a long and very demanding preparation including the study of secondary literature and research of references, has summarized and analyzed many valuable pieces of information. The two volumes can be useful as an introduction to emigration study problems in general as well as helpful toward the understanding of the specific questions connected with each group of immigrants to Canada. The literary texts in particular, since they are based on the experience of exiles as well as the life stories of particular immigrants, will acquaint readers with many human adventures and extraordinary destinies. The books make for absorbing reading and can serve as a remarkable source of inspiration.