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Iva Polak

The One about Coyote Going West: Mimesis and Ethics in Multicultural Literary Landscapes of Canada and Australia

Abstract

Appropriation of indigenous voice and/or subject appropriation (as defined by James O. Young and Susan Haley) in a literary space of the two multicultural postcolonial locations, Canada and Australia, lays bare a very uneasy palimpsest of postcoloniality. Conflation of two different views, that of literary works being the constructs of possible worlds (mimesis), i.e. the space of textual freedom, and literary works being limited by postcolonial ethics especially when they attempt to map the cultural space of the postcolonial other, reveals the setbacks of postcolonial hybridity turning it into a possible minefield. The implications of alleged freedom of creative act is discussed in the context of cultural appropriation leading to various literary “borrowings” and “hoaxes”, and the function of Native/Aboriginal author by showing various views coming from Canadian and Australian Indigenous literati and scholars who most ardently oppose to the outsider’s appropriation of Indigenous imagery. The quote from Thomas King’s seminal short story in the title of the paper serves as a metaphor for a double-bind effect of careless appropriation of Indigenous stories by non-Indigenous writers.

Key words

Cultural appropriation; subject matter appropriation; mimesis vs. ethics; literary hoaxes; alterNative; Indigenous Australians; Native Canadians; James O. Young; Laura Smyth Groening

“I am automatically on guard whenever the white man enters ‘Indian’ country. What does he want this time? I ask. What is he looking for – adventure, danger, material wealth, spiritual wealth (perhaps shamanistic power), a cause, a book or maybe just a story?”

Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, poet, Chippewa of Nawah First Nation

“When Aboriginal people contribute to the discourse on Aboriginality they do not do so from a ‘free’ space. [...] The term ‘freedom of expression’ currently has little meaning in the contested arena of Aboriginal literature.”

Sonja Kurtzer, scholar, Kokatha/Mirning descent from South Australia

The purpose of this paper is to position a well-known Barthes’ claim that “The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture” (“The Death of the Author”, 1977) in the context of Canada and Australia where it is often challenged by the Native/Aboriginal¹ literati and scholars in the context of subject or voice appropriation, a very specific notion of cultural appropriation which claims to appropriate even though nothing is *literally* being taken. As the discussion will show, this is a highly protean problem between the insiders and outsiders to a specific cultural metatext occurring in multicultural spaces.

Comparative studies of colonial history and complexities of postcoloniality of both Canada and Australia are abundant because both countries have the same type of albatross – i.e. the official History – hanging around their neck. Both started off as being identified as settler colonies, then with the development of postcolonial thought in the 1980s they shifted to the category of settler-invader colonies.² This very broad naming re-shifted again when scholars such as Diana Brydon, Steven Slemon and Gareth Griffiths started using the inversed term of invader-settler colony³ to “stress that the narrative of settlement in itself occludes and denies the prior fact of invasion”, as Diana Brydon claims (2004: 177). However, the very same term is used by Laura Moss in the recent anthology of postcolonial theory in Canada for postcolonial spaces of Canada, Australia and New Zealand to denote that there “the process of colonization was predominantly one of immigration and settlement” in comparison to postcolonial spaces (e.g. Africa and the Caribbean) where “colonization was more predominantly a process of displacement, impoverishment, sublimation, and even annihilation” (2005: 2), i.e. the ones more frequently identified as “colonies of occupation” (Ashcroft et al. 2000: 211). No matter how complicated it may seem, this term is a weedy offspring of the great mother of all contemporary cultural terms – postcolonialism, which has been in use, with or without hyphen, in singular or plural, indicating simply via this “typeset play” that we obviously do not know what it means or that there is a specific kind of discomfort connected to the term and its multifarious applications.

It seems that a specific discomfort accompanies many terms that the academy comes up with in order to discuss these two postcolonial spaces. Even landmark dates of the “official History” such as “Canada Day/Fête du Canada” or “Australia Day”, cause unease because the “alternative histories” speak about their precolonial presence and attach the notion of sorrow to the official celebration. Furthermore, Australia and Canada introduced the policy of multiculturalism in their agendas in the 1970s celebrating the plurality of their demographic make-up. Yet again, the Indigenous peoples warn of the easier-said-than-done manner of this claim by challenging multiculturalism with the policy of assimilation and

its accompanying mechanisms, such as residential schools in Canada and Stolen Generations in Australia, both of which were used to integrate the Natives/Aboriginals into the mainstream society. Finally, Australian academia has provided us with the initial postcolonial apparatus with scholars such as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, even though the critical thought of the country remains, broadly speaking, embedded in the documentary realism. On the other hand, Canada, due to its proximity to another overwhelming Anglophone space, has embarked on the discussion of postmodernism with the leading scholars such as Linda Hutcheon and Steven Semon. Unlike the Australian scholars who generally avoid using postmodernism to discuss Australian cultural production, Canadian scholars use it more freely but still in brackets to denote that postmodernism and postcolonialism cannot be “conflated unproblematically” since “the final uses to which each is put may differ” (Hutcheon 2004: 73). In that respect, discursive strategies of postmodernism, such as intertext, hypertext or pastiche, which are taken for granted when one speaks from the privileged space, again receive the prefix of uneasiness because what some may perceive as a textual play, *others* may see as cultural appropriation. Ultimately, it seems that taking part in or discussing specific cultural production of Canada and Australia may place the artist and scholar, depending on his/her cultural background, in a specific Calibanesque position where language and cursing may become synonyms, where “bushed” in Canada or “going native” in Australia may pose a threat.

One way to avoid this position is to speak “in silences”, i.e. not to speak about anything that might be interpreted as the outsider’s gaze. The problem of this, at the first glance, easy way out, lies in the definition of the “outsider”. I am the outsider to the Canadian and Australian cultures. Should I be silent then? Moreover, the further the taxonomy of the outsider and/or the insider goes, the stronger restrictions get. In other words, the categories of “insiders” and “outsiders” can each be further divided into subcategories according to class, gender, age, community, kinship, etc. Consequently, we might ask ourselves whether a white middle-class woman has the right to speak on behalf of a non-white colonized woman, or can an Indigenous middle-class woman who is an active member of the academy speak on behalf of Indigenous women in remote communities. Ultimately, can I as a woman belonging to the white academic mainstream, albeit located in a small country at the edge of Europe, talk about anything removed from my own local (and local patriotic) cultural code, my class and gender? Obviously, such restrictions would make me silent and render most scientific research futile. Hence, the alternative has always been to speak “in tongues”. This is especially true in today’s context of global migrations, cultural synergy and multiculturalism. However, today we should also know that we cannot just speak “in tongues”, but *learn* how to speak “in tongues” because this speech implies various degrees of responsibility depending on the tongue(s) we intend to appropriate, and this conscious effort should differentiate the contemporary moment from the moment when appropriation was rendered unconditional by colonialist endeavour. Hence, the key word is responsibility. Notwithstanding the fact that the problem of re-

sponsibility and appropriation of cultural production has been regulated in various ways,⁴ the least transparent proscriptions lie in the domain of appropriation of artistic subject matter, where the cultural material being appropriated is also the least transparent or “visible” because of the very nature of the medium of appropriation.

To understand this, the scholars studying cultural appropriation have formulated several types of appropriation to reveal the complexities behind each type because every type of appropriation implies appropriating *something* and this *something* comes from *somewhere* which usually belongs to *someone*.⁵ Appropriation of archaeological finds, human remains, genetic material, traditional knowledge (which, as we now acknowledge, is restricted even within a specific traditional community or tribe), tangible works of art (e.g. sculptures, paintings, etc.), and artistic content (stories, songs, etc.)⁶ all testify to the need of the “Enlightened” man to discover, collect, describe, classify and archive pursuant to the Eurocentric epistemological system. All stated types of appropriation are tangible, visible or detectable, and when the transfer of culture is not performed freely or legally, i.e. on the basis of an agreement between the parties, such harmful cultural appropriations violate property rights and denote theft. As we know from the colonial backdrop of Canada and Australia, the scholarly research of the Indigenous material was reminiscent of the scientists of Swift’s third locus of Gulliver’s travels, Laputa, the “true” etymology of the island’s name Gulliver was never able to learn and, hence, let “the judicious reader” (Swift 1986: 160) decide, and I intend to do the same here.

However, the last type of cultural appropriation, the so-called artistic subject matter appropriation, is neither tangible, nor easily visible and detectable, and it cannot be easily claimed on the basis of a property right but rather may be interpreted to constitute “an attack on the viability or identity of cultures or their members” exposing such cultures to “discrimination, poverty, and lack of opportunity” (Young and Brunk 2009: 5). It occurs, according to James O. Young and Susan Haley, when “members of one culture (call them outsiders for the sake of brevity) represent members of other cultures (insiders for the sake of convenience) or aspects of insiders’ culture” (2009: 268). When this appropriation is uttered from the first person, it is sometimes called voice appropriation. Though this may sound as a viable definition, the problem lies when it is applied to the domain that is supposed to be free of any restrictions – imagination. Namely, artistic subject matter has become the contestation point in Canada and Australia having entered the domain of literature which for the Europeans denotes freedom of imagination and creative act from the Romantic movement onwards. Imagination as we know it was imagined in the Eurocentric space as well as the majority of theory by which we analyse, close read, interpret and discuss literary works, and it is in Europe where it can easily gel with the practice. When this freedom was released onto spaces tormented by the very notion of Eurocentrism, it initially became one of the mechanisms of disciplining the colonial other. In that respect imagination was not free and readily available to every writer and it was very much affected

and shaped by the very society in which the author worked. In other words, the development of Canadian and Australian literatures commenced as one of the mechanisms of colonization introducing and then perpetuating the stories of the noble and less noble other. The stories of the “Indian Two Feet” and “chiefs” in Canada, and “Jacky Jacky” and “kings” in Australia were created within the discourse which the leading Australian scholar in cultural studies and Aboriginality, Stephen Muecke, calls a blend of Romantic and Racist discourse.⁷ In the context of Canada, Margery Fee deconstructs this othering as “romantic nationalism” triggered by a “complicated process, simultaneously a confession and a denial of guilt” (1987: 15). This colonial rhetoric is visible in the survey of representation of Indigenous peoples in Canadian and Australian white *creative* writing. Studies such as Leslie Monkman’s *A Native Heritage: Images of the Indian and English-Canadian Literature* (1981), J. J. Healy’s *Literature and the Aborigine in Australia 1770–1975* (1978) and Terry Goldie’s comparative study *Fear and Temptation. The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literatures* (1989) document a long tradition of what Bhabha would term “the metaphoric/narcissistic and the metonymic/aggressive positions” (1994: 77) taken in order to construct and control cultural stereotypes of the Indigenous peoples. These literary surveys do not testify to the absence of Indigenous topoi in the mainstream postcolonial writing, but rather document a long tradition of authors incorporating Indigenous imagery into their literary works mostly at the time when there was allegedly a total absence of Indigenous creative or any other form of writing. Since the absence was not “natural” or it was “natural” pursuant to the 18th century’s Enlightenment’s notion of nature, the white literary mainstream of Canada and Australia received an unprecedented advantage and right to perpetuate imagery of “the Native” within the framework of their national literatures for over two hundred years, thus creating literary stereotypes.⁸

Interestingly enough, the mentioned surveys were published just in the nick of time to sum up the period in which the reader of Canadian and Australian literatures was accustomed to reading primarily literary works exploring Indigenous imagery written by non-Indigenous authors. This uneasy lacuna of Indigenous writing on both locations will be present until the late 1960s. Then, again at the same time on both locations, the stories told by the First Nations, the Métis and the Inuit of Canada, and Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders of Australia will appear, sharing similar themes, that of dispossession, violence, injustice, lived experience and belonging. The 1970s and 1980s will be written into the genre of engaged poetry, distinct bitter-sweet effect of early internationally acclaimed drama of Jack Davis in Australia and Thomson Highway in Canada, oral histories and autobiographical fiction of Maria Campbell (*Halfbreed*, 1973) and Ruby Slipperjack (*Honour the Sun*, 1987) in Canada or Sally Morgan (*My Place*, 1989) and Ruby Langford Ginibi’s (*Don’t Take Your Love to Town*, 1988) in Australia, and realist novel of Jeannette Armstrong (*Slash*, 1985) in Canada or Mudrooroo (*Doctor Wooreddy’s Prescription of Enduring the Ending of the World*, 1983) in Australia. However, the crucial moment for the development of Indigenous writ-

ing of both countries occurred in the 1990s. Though both countries included the policy of multiculturalism in the early 1970s, the local events of the late 1980s and early 1990s testified to its papier-mâché nature, and both countries found themselves in the limelight owing to the events which evolved the Indigenous peoples: the Bicentenary of 1988 in Australia was accompanied by huge protests by the Australian Aboriginals, and the 1992 Mabo Ruling recalled the concept of *terra nullius* albeit only on paper; in Canada the Meech Lake Accord of 1987 granted Quebec a special status as a distinct society which was beforehand denied to the Amerindians and Inuit, and the Oka Crisis in 1990 was caused by expanding a golf course to the Mohawk nation sacred land which led to deployment of the RCMP against the Indigenous protesters. This is the backdrop of the early 1990s, a very uneasy introduction to 1993, the International Year of World Indigenous People, which was supposed to show that colonialism belonged to the past.⁹

If this looks like a distant past, let us not forget the two events which happened in 2008 in both countries: the Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper issued the official apology to the First Nations, Métis and Inuit for more than a century of abuse and cultural loss caused by native residential schools, and the former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd held the official sorry speech to Indigenous Australians who were forcefully removed from their parents and communities and became known as the Stolen Generations. Both prime ministers talk about a “sad” (Harper) or “blemished” (Rudd) “chapter” in their nations’ histories which is striking and confusing at the same time. If it really is just a chapter, why does it end as late as 2008? Have there been any “happy” or “unblemished” chapters in their nations’ histories, or how many chapters do these histories have? One thing is certain, the presence of the white settlers does represent just a chapter in the Indigenous histories in the sense that it covers just a fraction of time of the Indigenous presence on these locations. It is due to “that official chapter” that discussing cultural appropriation, and in that context, appropriation of artistic subject matter, becomes so poignant in Canada and Australia.

Bearing in mind that the Indigenous writing, which also includes creative writing we term literature, has been created more often than not on the barricades due to the socio-historic circumstances of “that chapter”, and that the colonial drama is still present though it may not be as dramatic as it once was, it becomes quite apparent that the Indigenous writers have not been sharing the same freedom of expression, which includes the artistic one as well. The very freedom of creative act vested in the European author as an innate feature of art and creative process, which has also been shared to varying degrees by the mainstream authors who have gone native (in Australia) or/and bushed (in Canada) in the postcolonial spaces, becomes the recent point of privilege for the Native/Aboriginal authors because the latter are not quite in the position to take this freedom for granted.

The arguments for and against the appropriation of artistic subject matter continue to mirror the clash of cultures or yet another “bottom” translation if discussing it implies not taking into consideration the context out of which and in which

this appropriation takes place. James O. Young, one of the leading scholars in the field of ethics and cultural appropriation, claims that subject appropriation

may be a misnomer. Appropriation involves taking but artists who engage in subject appropriation do not, in any obvious sense, take anything from insiders. A subject matter is not something a culture has produced in the same way as its members have created stories, sculptures, or songs that an outsider might appropriate. Moreover, when outsiders have represented some culture in their work, insiders still have the opportunity to represent it. That is, outsiders have not appropriated exclusive use. (Young 2010: 8)

The author claims that examples of subject appropriation are “easy to provide” (7) unaware of what this easiness may denote, while the very examples he provides us with do not clarify his opinion of subject matter appropriation being a misnomer, but rather indicate that it is a highly contestable field. Young’s choice of Conrad’s and Kipling’s novelistic output is an archetypal red flag for any post-colonial scholar because their prose fiction has undergone numerous contrapuntal readings as being not just colonial but colonialist.¹⁰ On the other hand, Young detects the biggest controversy surrounding this type of appropriation. Namely, the argument that subject appropriation in literature does not constitute a theft resides in the fact that “works of fiction do not represent real things” (8), and that artists represent *their* experience of other cultures and take/steal neither the culture in question nor the experience of the insider. In other words, the insiders still have their experience and their culture. This, for a European scholar, might sound like a superfluous discussion because literature is based on the construction of possible worlds and those mimetic worlds reflect Kantian *Ding an uns* thus making literature not capable of stealing anything owing to the very nature of literature as well as the nature of creative act. However, Young goes on with his reasoning adding to this disputable issue a slant which casts a shadow of ethics over the pedestal of mimesis. The author asserts that subject appropriation is

controversial precisely because outsiders draw upon their own experiences on other cultures. Since outsiders do not have access to the experience of insiders, one might argue, outsiders are bound to misrepresent the culture of insiders. Since the works of outsiders distort the insiders’ culture, they may be thought to have aesthetic flaws. Since artists could misrepresent the culture of others in a harmful or offensive manner, subject appropriation could also be morally objectionable. (Young 2010: 9)

The problem, hence, lies in the mimesis constructed according to the outsider’s *Ding an uns* or we could playfully say “*Ding an den Außenseitern*” (thing according to the outsiders), when the object of cognition is perceived by the outsider’s gaze imbedded in a specific epistemological system and, accordingly, represents a misrepresentation, moreover, a harmful misrepresentation of the object belong-

ing to a different epistemological system. This, however, should not constitute a problem if we give the space and voice to the very insiders of the culture. If we apply to this discussion the term “alterNative” defined by Laura Smyth Groening borrowed from the title of Drew Hayden Taylor’s play, we have been exposed to an overwhelming literary palimpsest of representations of the Natives done by non-Native writers and “it is to First Nations writing that we must turn if we wish to find an alterNative to the stereotypical images of Aboriginal people that dominate Euro-Canadian literature” (2004: 27). The problem, hence, is not in the total absence of alterNative narratives coming from the insiders, but in something else. Namely, if there is a limited number of literary works written about and not by the insiders, which are exposed to the outsiders’ gaze or at least the equal amount of the works created by the insiders themselves, or if such works of the outsiders undergo a regular and visible criticism by the insiders, the whole debate about appropriation of subject matter could be solved by a dialogue between the audience and the authors or a gradual re-education of the readership. This is why Christine Nicholls, Australian expert in Indigenous intellectual copyright, claims that “[w]hen it comes to quoting from other cultural traditions, there appears to be an inherent assumption that the playing field is level” (Nicholls 2000: 4).

However, though levelling is highly unlikely, some changes are possible but they are slow and need a critical number of those to shift the so-called dominant. This shift implies that the “elements which were originally the dominant ones become subsidiary and optional” (Jakobson 1978: 85). This definition of the shifting dominant in literature by Roman Jakobson and applied by Jurij Tynjanov on the evolution of literature¹¹ also remarkably reflects the way in which the evolution of thought operates. However, the dominant, or in our case, the legacy of being spoken for and about, is hard to gloss over, decolonize and ultimately shift because of the presence of the “fearful asymmetry” between the number of mainstream and the number of Native/Aboriginal literati and scholars, which gets reflected in the way the book market operates and the book market is dictated by the taste of the readership. The readership is again created through a long process of constructing, introducing and maintaining specific ideologies additionally supported by education systems and various communication outlets. Unfortunately, the situation in Canada and Australia reflects this “fearful asymmetry” in almost all social aspects making it impossible for the Native/Aboriginal authors to introduce and spread the image of “alterNatives”. The basic figures such as the percentage of the Native American Indians and Aboriginal peoples in the national censuses, which is below 4% in Canada and below 3% in Australia based on the 2006 national censuses,¹² problems with housing, health and education, the latter in terms of high drop-out rates, incarceration and crime rate considerably above the national average, to name but a few, do not contribute to what is known in Australia as “overcoming Indigenous disadvantage”. All these data lead to the conclusion that the writers of Native/Aboriginal ancestry are few and far between, and what they usually face is the audience not sharing their ancestry, the audience accustomed to reading specific stories on what is known

in North America as “Indianness” or in Australia as “Aboriginality”, or more recently as “Indigeneity”. Such a situation is bound to perpetuate a debate in which the Native/Aboriginal authors evoke the issue of ethics based on *praxis* when the non-Indigenous, or more specifically Euro-Canadian and Anglo-Celtic Australian authors, would rather discuss mimesis based on *theoria*.

If we look at the approximate period of launching of the debate regarding appropriation of artistic subject matter in Canada and Australia, we can find it in the second half of the 1980s and mostly in the 1990s, exactly at the time when Native/Aboriginal writing is significantly on the rise accompanied by the opening of publishing houses such as the First Nations’ Theytus Books (1980) and Métis’ Pemmican Publications (1980) in Canada, and Institute of Aboriginal Development Press (1972) with Jukurrpa Books (1997), and Magabala Books (1987) in Australia. Moreover, this is also the time when the Native/Aboriginal scholars and literati start publishing their papers on the representation of their identity which is visible in still unique publications such as *Looking at the Words of Our People. First Nations Analysis of Literature* (1993) in Canada, and *Blacklines. Contemporary Critical Writing by Indigenous Australians* (2003) in Australia.¹³ In Canada, the debate about subject matter appropriation, or more specifically voice appropriation, was launched in connection to Anne Cameron’s *Daughters of Copper Woman* (1981). If we are looking for the typical colonialists’ clichés of the noble, in this case, female savage, we will not find them. Rather we come across the appropriation of the, then called, Nootka (today Nuu-Chah-Nulth) culture of the Northwest Coast of Canada framed into the narrative of the “powerful non-racial grandmother” (Smyth Groening 2004: 137). Superimposing gender over race made this novel a model example of the second wave feminism which insists on the image of female “likeness” on the basis of “common oppression” of some generic womanhood. The result was that a number of First Nation and Métis women rejected Cameron’s gender policy. In that respect, the reaction of Métis women is even more relevant because they have to “confront their own whiteness if they choose to indict white society” (137). We can find a similar example of rejecting the generic female subaltern in Australia in the late 1980s when Australian non-Indigenous feminist and anthropologist, Diane Bell in cooperation with the Indigenous woman Topsy Napurrula Nelson published a paper on interracial rape in Indigenous communities, which was harshly criticized by the leading Indigenous women scholars.¹⁴ Not surprisingly, in Canada and Australia alike, the unequivocal conclusion coming from the twice colonized female margin is that racial identity glosses over the female one and not the other way around.

The second very famous example in the Canadian context is a dispute between two non-Native authors, W.P. Kinsella and Rudy Wiebe. The highly acclaimed and a very prolific author, Kinsella has an interesting literary output reminiscent of a “novelistic” sandwich: a slice of baseball and a slice of Cree, or the so-called “Hobbema” stories. Though he became internationally acknowledged, back home, his appropriation of the life of the Cree in Hobbema has won him notoriety, especially after bitter comments of another distinguished Canadian writer,

Rudy Wiebe. The case of Kinsella and Wiebe is extremely interesting due to the authors' rhetoric of mapping the Native body. Kinsella appropriates his subject matter, be it baseball or Cree heritage, according to the same principle that, as the author claims, "[f]iction writers can write about anything they damn well please" (Smyth Groening 2004: 6). In this careless play of the author-god, Kinsella adds that "[w]here I need facts I invent them" (6). Judging from Kinsella's reaction we should distinguish between the narrator telling us the stories of the Cree constructed as residues of colonial mentality, and Kinsella the white old man who is earning his living unaware that his very writing technique appropriates the very same principle on which the official History of Canada has been founded for such a long time: invent facts when you need them, or, alternatively, erase them when you do not need them. As fate would have it, Kinsella found himself in the same predicament when his short story "Lieberman in Love" was used as a basis for a short feature which won the 1996 Academy Award for Live Action Short film and when *he* was not listed in the *official* film's credits nor mentioned in the director's acceptance speech. Unlike Kinsella's "Ermineskin", "Buffalo" or "Coyote" who will obviously never receive any apology from Kinsella, Kinsella received a long apology in *Variety* magazine.

When it comes to subject matter appropriation, Wiebe does the same as Kinsella but with allegedly conscious shift. His acclaimed novels *The Temptation of Big Bear* (1973) and *A Discovery of Strangers* (1994), for which he received the Governor General's Award for Fiction, focus on the difference of Canadian colonization in comparison to the American because the author/narrator wishes to document a "different, better way of colonizing a country", and to "criticize that 'better' way for being such a poor thing" (Smyth Groening 2004: 109). As Patrick White's novels *Voss* (1957) or *Riders in the Chariot* (1961), and Judith Wright's poetic output in Australia, Wiebe's work is based on the principle that creative freedom comes with social responsibility in the location where the dominant culture decides to appropriate the marginal culture and where marginality of the latter is a direct consequence of the colonial dominance of the former.

Australian literature has also many examples of the mainstream authors constructing Indigeneity. The subject matter dispute in this nation's context was launched in 1981 with a certain "added value". Sreten Bozic, a Serb who came to Australia in 1960, published several novels on Aboriginal topic in Australia and abroad under the name "B. Wongar" before being unmasked in 1981. The unmasking, however, appeared only in Australia which is why he is still regarded as Aboriginal writer in Europe and the States with over a million copies of his Aboriginal stories sold worldwide. However, unlike Kinsella who is profit-oriented without appropriating Native nom de plume, Bozic still maintains that he does nothing wrong in writing as an Aboriginal. Moreover, following publication of his work in his country of origin, he appears to connect the position of Aboriginals in Australia with the position of the Serbs in the former Yugoslavia.¹⁵

Another case in point is the American writer Marlo Morgan in the USA who published *Mutant Message Down Under* (1991) claiming that her novel is a tes-

timony of her walking across Central Australia barefoot in the company of a lost Aboriginal tribe. Though her hoax was revealed, the author published two novelistic sequels and is often quoted and goes on lecture tours in the USA and Japan as the authority on Aboriginal spirituality. As Kinsella and Bozic, Morgan refuses to apologize for her subject matter appropriation. In 1997, a white taxi-driver from North Sydney, Leon Carmen, submitted an alleged autobiography *My Own Sweet Time* under the fake Aboriginal female name “Wanda Koolmatricie” and won the 1995 Dobbie Award for women’s writing. When he was unmasked for appropriation of gender and cultural identity as well as the subject matter, Carmen gave an honest answer that “in the current climate of political correctness and affirmative action, manuscripts by women and ethnic minority writers were far more likely to be accepted for publication than those of middle-aged white males” (Van Toorn 2000: 43). Unlike others, Carmen was at least honest.¹⁶

If we try to understand why Canadian examples in comparison to the Australian ones are a “different, better way of colonizing a country”, but at the same time that “better” way is such a “poor thing”, answers could be found in the Canadian more expressed postmodernist slant. Reactions to writing by Kinsella as well as by Wiebe lay bare the double-bind aspect of postmodernism because, as Smyth Groening detects, “[h]istoriographic metafiction, for all its determination to centre the marginal, often perpetuates many of the same stereotypes as does 200-year-old historical fiction. It may revalue stereotypical qualities (such as the association of the Indian with nature), but it does little to acknowledge those stereotypes as literary clichés” (2004: 17). On the other hand, non-Indigenous Australians have gone a step further in their appropriations in Australia for their appropriations seem more blunt and more numerous which is also visible in the discourse the scholars discussing this issue use. As Maggie Nolan and Carrie Dawson claim in the introduction to the critically acclaimed edition *Who’s Who? Hoaxes, Imposture and Identity Crises in Australian Literature* (2004), due to the “apparent proliferation of cases of hoaxing and debates about identity in the 1990s and beyond”, one could “identify ‘the hoax’ as a peculiarly Australian phenomenon, one that can properly be attributed to a ‘larrikin’ sensibility rather than any cultural ‘faultiness’, to use Susan Sheridan’s word, that might make certain kinds of identity volatile” (2004: vi). Instead of raising the issue of alleged post-modern aesthetics, the emphasis in Australia is on the inherently Australian ethics of larrikinism, a feature stereotypically linked to the early Australian ethos. However, this specifically Australian self-irony and mockery of authority can hardly account for the fact that it generates, in the contemporary moment, individual gains which make specifically Indigenous and other minority identities in Australia volatile.

That there is something wrong with both nations when it comes to appropriation of Native/Aboriginal subject matter in arts in general as well as in literature is also visible from the editions dealing with the topic such as *Challenging Racism in the Arts. Case Studies of Controversy and Conflicts* (Carol Tator, Frances Henry and Winston Mattis) published in 1998 in Canada, and the already men-

tioned Australian edition *Who's Who? Hoaxes, Imposture and Identity Crises in Australian Literature*. The fact that these editions are written primarily by mainstream scholars clearly indicates that even the mainstream, or at least a specific number of mainstream authors, is aware that appropriation cannot run smoothly. On the other hand, the absence or sporadic presence of Native/Aboriginal scholars in such studies means that they would rather express their critical thoughts in editions specialized only in Native/Aboriginal issues. True multicultural panels are rare. Symposiums such as “Whose Voice Is It, Anyway?” sponsored by *Books in Canada* in 1991, theoretical editions such as *Unhomely States. Theorizing English-Canadian Postcolonialism* (2004) (Cynthia Sugars, ed.), or the new field of whiteness studies with Australian editions such as *Whitening Race: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism* (2004) (Aileen Moreton-Robinson, ed.) reveal that, when it comes to understanding the problem of subject matter appropriation, both Canada and Australia are in the positions of “nations within nations”. In short, the general division is among

those who [...] [see] the Aboriginal request that non Native writers ‘move over’ as the outright censorship of the individual imagination, and those who, while not condoning censorship, [...] [are] convinced that the issue should not be dismissed without simultaneously considering the social reality that ha[s] provoked the initial debate. (Smyth Groening 2004: 7)

Alternatively, we may use the terms from the title of this paper: mimesis vs. ethics. What is also important is that the Native/Aboriginal views reveal that if we think that Wiebe got it right, unlike Kinsella who explicitly reiterates colonialist discourse, or that something changes when “[n]ative characters are created by a good writer who treats his subject with ‘moral seriousness’” (106), we are wrong because the difference between the two in the eyes of the holders of the appropriated culture is not that distinct. Beth Brant explains this in the following manner:

I do not say that only Indians can write about Indians. But you can't steal my stories and call them your own. You can't steal my spirit and call it your own. This is the history of North America – stolen property, stolen lives, stolen dreams, stolen spirituality. [...] You have to tell the truth about *your* role, *your* history, *your* internalized domination and supremacy.

(quoted in Smyth Groening 2004: 9–10, emphasis in the original)

Daniel David Moses's comment illuminates another aspect of subject matter appropriation by comparing the teller and the reteller:

I think the concern with appropriation has more to do with the fact that most people aren't sensitive listeners, so they are not sensitive transmitters of stories, partly because the cultures have different values. When someone from

another culture hears a story I tell, they perceive only the things that relate to their values. If they try to retell my story they are going to emphasize those things that are important to them. That only makes sense. So all we're saying is don't retell our stories, change them and pretend they are what we're about, because they are not. (Moses and Goldie 1998: xxvii)

This claim introduces uneasiness into retelling the stories from the generic position of historiographic metafiction, because the purpose of contemporary writing is not in dismantling the former centre just to construct a new one. Lee Maracle points out that there is a specific standard of Native story telling:

[...] those of us who have pondered our memorized stories know we have a criteria [sic] for story.

If the speaker achieves oneness with the listener, it's a good story.

If the listener is empowered to move to this dreamspace, and re-imagine his/herself, it's a good story.

If the listener is empowered to move to this dreamspace and re-imagine oneness with humanity, earth, flora and fauna, it's a good story.

If the story enters the world from the dreamspace where all good stories are born, it's a good story.

These are my culture's standards – conscious and unconscious – and until they become standards alongside of yours, colonialism in literature will prevail. (Maracle 2004: 208)

The issue of a specific cultural “criteria” for writing is never raised in connection to the mainstream author's creativity: the mainstream author enjoys his/her space of creative freedom, moreover, takes it for granted and, as we have seen, finds it insulting if the notion of any censorship is mentioned, while the Native/Aboriginal author needs to take into consideration or at least be aware of specific preconditions in order to tell the story. This becomes even more apparent in the wording of Jeannette Armstrong:

Our task as First Nations' writers is twofold. To examine the past and culturally affirm toward a new vision for all our people in the future arising out of the powerful and positive support structures that are inherent in the principles of cooperation... Lies need clarification, truth needs to be stated and resistance to oppression needs to be stated, without furthering division and participation in the same racist measures. This is the challenge that we rise to. (quoted in Heiss 2003: 163)

In the context of Euro-Canadian or Anglo-Celtic authors in Australia, the issue of “task”, if ever raised, does not imply literal preservation of culture, or if we play with the title of the story by famous Australian writer, David Malouf, the majority does not have to write stories from the position of the last speaker of his/her tongue.¹⁷

The freedom of creative space from which Native/Aboriginal writers speak and write is also limited by a series of roles they have to play, according to the Native American writer, poet and filmmaker, Sherman Alexie who claims: "We are more than just writers. We are (Native) storytellers. We are spokespeople. We are cultural ambassadors. We are politicians. We are activists. We are all of this simply by nature of what we do, *without even wanting to be*" (quoted in Heiss 2003: 162, emphasis mine). "Without even wanting to be" implies that the Native/Aboriginal writers *per se* have to create and write having their community or broader identity in mind which narrows down their space of free production of what is usually termed "transcultural narratives" (Frazer 2000: 9) based on "glocal imagination" (Riemenschneider 2005: 16)¹⁸ because the very colonial history and colonial tropes are so overwhelming that decolonization process is far from being over, and this consequently narrows down the very space of Native/Aboriginal creative freedom.

The mainstream in this debate often warns of censorship and self-censorship unaware that the very colonial censorship has led to the current situation. The only reason why we are now listening to the cry for artistic freedom by the mainstream authors lies in the fact that owing to some really multicultural changes on both locations, Native/Aboriginal peoples have received the right to publicly express their views. Furthermore, there is a specific critical number of Native/Aboriginal scholars, reviewers, public persons and writers in general who challenge the mainstream views that have been taken at face value, and this has happened notwithstanding the development of whiteness studies, yet another discipline coined by the white academia.

If we still need additional explanation to whether this debate really matters or makes sense, imagine the reversal of colonial history and continuation of such colonial history for five, i.e. three hundred years as shown in the often forgotten Australian Aboriginal short mockumentary *BabaKiueria* (1986). This short feature by Indigenous director Don Featherstone reverses colonization of Australia by showing Anglo-Celtic Australians as the first Australians, and Aboriginals as invaders. The title comes from the opening scene in which a group of uniformed Aboriginals comes ashore and meets a typical white Australian family enjoying barbecue. When the Aboriginal invaders ask the white natives what the country is called, the whites not understanding the invader's language reply "Barbecue area" which the invaders hear as "BabaKiueria". This becomes the name of the new colony.¹⁹ Of course, *BabaKiueria* is a model example of fantasy for its total reversal of the consensus reality.

Hence, business in literary landscapes of Canada and Australia is not as usual and this is where multiculturalism of both locations shines most brightly. Returning to the quote in the title of this paper, we learn from the seminal story that the Coyote "goes to the west, and there is a pile of snow tires. And there is some televisions. And there is some vacuum cleaners. And there is a bunch of pastel sheets. And there is an air humidifier. And there is a big mistake sitting on a portable gas barbecue reading a book. Big book. Department store catalogue"

(King 1999: 77–8). If this is the story of the West, the Western storytellers should tell it. Otherwise, the stories get “flat”, as the narrator tells the Coyote, because “That’s what happens when you try to fix this world. This world is pretty good all by itself” (King 1999: 82). Hence, literary multiculturalism is not about fixing the world because a multicultural world needs no fixing. Literary multiculturalism is about Coyote going West without getting “westernized” as Thomas King’s trickster has done so many times. The question is whether the West can come to Coyote with a good story without trying to get “coyotized”.

Notes

- 1 The term “Native” is used here to include the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis in Canada, and “Aboriginal” in the Australian context refers to the First Australians, i.e. Aboriginals from the mainland Australia and the Torres Strait Islanders.
- 2 See, e.g., Ashcroft et al. (2000: 211–2); Tiffin (1996: 162); Wylie (2002: 35, 52); Besner (2005: 44); Brydon (2005: 56, 57, 59); Sugars (2004), especially Part IV.
- 3 See Brydon (2004: 177); Slemon (1996: 181); Griffiths (1996: 169).
- 4 For the so-called ‘Protocols for Producing Indigenous Australian Writing’, see http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/research/literature/reports_and_publications/writing_protocols_for_producing_indigenous_australian_writing. The so-called self-censorship checklist in the Canadian context is mentioned in Heiss (2003: 167–9, 173).
- 5 The latter part of the sentence plays with the title of Young and Haley’s “‘Nothing Comes from Nowhere’: Reflections on Cultural Appropriation as the Representation of Other Cultures’. See Young and Haley (2009: 268). The fact that cultural appropriation is very complicated is already visible in the ‘Introduction’ by Young and Brunk to *The Ethics of Cultural Appropriation* (2009), in which the scholars state that some of the contributing authors to the edition do not agree on key issues regarding cultural appropriation. This essay is also a good starting point for researching the field of cultural appropriation. See Young and Brunk (2009: 1–10).
- 6 See Young and Brunk (2009: 2).
- 7 Muecke (1992: 30–1) claims that the “Romantic and the Racist are separated by only a thin line of difference. Neither articulates knowledge (that is the domain of the Anthropological); each is displacement from any desire to know. The Racist discourse is either dismissive or silent in the face of racial difference, or it allows free rein to the obsessions of the speaker, as in exaggerated descriptions of ferociousness of cannibalism. The Romantic justifies an irrational involvement with a people on the basis of ‘love’ and ‘concern’. One of its techniques is to mythologise the Other People.”
- 8 This time span obviously excludes the abundant corpus of travel and other writing which appeared prior to the constitution of national literature in both countries. In the case of Canada, this period lasts almost three centuries whereas in Australia it refers to the 18th century settler writing.
- 9 Interestingly enough, this is also the time when the mainstream publishing industry started publishing a considerable number of anthologies and collections of the so-called “Native” literature in Canada and “Black” literature in Australia.
- 10 For distinction between the two discourses, see Boehmer (1995: 2–3, 50–51).
- 11 See Tynjanov (1978).
- 12 Statistical data for Canada are taken from the Canadian Government site at <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2006/as-sa/97-558/p2-eng.cfm#nt1>. The census includes individuals who identify themselves as “Native American Indians”. Data for Australia are from the Australian Government’s Bureau of Statistic site at <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/>

- abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/3101.0Sep%202009?OpenDocument. It offers experimental data on the individuals identifying themselves as “Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders”.
- 13 The overwhelming majority of the articles in this edition date from the 1990s.
- 14 The paper entitled ‘Speaking about Rape is Everybody’s Business’ (1989) triggered a heated debate with Indigenous feminist scholars, Jackie Huggins and Aileen Moreton-Robinson resulting in numerous letters to the editors of the journal in which Bell’s initial article was published, as well as subsequent attacks via academic publications of Bell and Moreton-Robinson. The debate on this specific issue went for over ten years. It is also worth noting that from the mid-1990s, Indigenous women in Canada and Australia alike have become more active in what might be termed their own feminist agenda discussing the most sensitive issues troubling Indigenous women. This led to publication of the editions such as *I am Woman. A Native Perspective on Sociology and Feminism* (1996) by Lee Maracle or *Talkin’ up to the White Woman. Indigenous Women and Feminism* (2000) by Aileen Moreton-Robinson, to name but a few.
- 15 See preface by Ratomir Ristić in Vongar (2004: 155–65).
- 16 For detailed account on Morgan and Carmen, see Ellis (2004: 149–64) and Nolan (2004: 134–48) respectively.
- 17 The original title of Malouf’s short story is ‘The Only Speaker of His Tongue’ (*Antipodes*, 1983).
- 18 The term “glocal imagination”, introduced by Dieter Riemenschneider, refers to postcolonial texts as products of the “transglobal multiple exchanges of global and local factors that encompass economic, social and political aspects as much as cultural ones” (2005: 16).
- 19 The film won the 1987 UN Media Peace Prize.

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