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From Nostalgia to *locus amoenus*: Polish Migrants’ Memoirs in Canada and the Idea of Home, Identity, and Belonging

Dagmara Drewniak

In North American literature, life-writing has had a very long tradition. The first texts written by British and French settlers and explorers belonged to the variegated life writing genres, including reports, letters home, diaries and memoirs. Early 19th-century texts by such Canadian pioneer women writers as Susanna Moodie and Catherine Parr Traill are also classified within the domain of autobiographical narratives. They mark the position of women in Canadian literature and culture, which has been significant since its colonial beginnings. Memoir has turned out to be a momentous genre in Canadian literature throughout the centuries as the genre has enabled different previously unrepresentative groups such as migrants and members of ethnic minorities to find their voice and express their experiences. Moreover, in the late 20th and early 21st century many critics of the genre have pointed out a great popularity of memoirs calling the phenomenon a boom (Buss 7, Rak 3) and boom/lash (Gilmore 211). Also, in Polish émigré circles, the genre of memoir has a very long and rich tradition. In this context one has to mention outstanding examples of memoir migrant writing: Andrzej Bobkowski’s *Szkice piórkami* [translated by Grażyna Drabik and Laura Engelstein into English as *Wartime Notebooks, France 1940-1944*] and Melchior Wańkowicz’s diaries and travelogues devoted to his impressions from the travels across the USA and Canada such as *Tworzywo* [published in Polish in New York, 1954, and translated into English first by Virginia Surdacki-Król in 1954 and published in the USA, and, then, by Krystyna Cękalska as *Three Generations* and published in Canada in 1973]. It is beyond doubt that Polish emigrant writing was initially only composed in the Polish language and read by émigré circles in the exile. Yet, after the fall of Communism in 1989, these texts started to be gradually assimilated by Polish literature.¹ Some of them, however, have also been translated into English and published in Europe and America. Some migrants and their
children decided to write their memoirs in English exclusively or in a bilingual version to reach out to the Anglophone readers in North America and worldwide. The aim of this text is to study the first bilingual volume of emigrant memoirs from Poland to Canada *Zwyczajna przeprowadzka / An Ordinary Move* (2014) in the context of its appearance on Canadian literary scene, its significance for the Polish diaspora, as well as a certain move from the nostalgic tones connected to the lost homeland to the acceptance of their new Canadian home seen as *locus amoenus*, typical of the latest generations of migrants to Canada.²

Polish and English-language migrant memoir tradition also has its origins in the competitions for emigrants’ autobiographical texts (memoirs and diaries) announced on a regular basis since the early 20th century and written exclusively in Polish at the beginning. First, such competitions were organized in Poland by Collegium of Socio-Economics at the Warsaw School of Economics as early as in the 1920s. Florian Znaniecki, a famous Polish sociologist was the first proponent of the use of autobiographical method in social sciences (cf. Znaniecki and Thomas *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*). One of the first initiatives undertaken by Znaniecki, after taking up the position of Chair of Sociology and Philosophy of Culture at University of Poznań in 1920, was the announcement of the first memoir competition for the “Records of Laborers’ Lives” in 1921. It gave rise to the long tradition of memoir competition in Poland and abroad as thanks to his publication in the USA, the autobiographical method and its usefulness for social sciences, has become known in North America as well. Ludwik Krzywicki, the then head of Collegium of Socio-Economics as well as other Polish scholars utilized Znaniecki’s methodology and organized similar competitions throughout the whole interwar period publishing volumes of memoirs categorized into *Memoirs of Peasants* and *Memoirs of the Unemployed* to name just a few. It was in 1936 that the Collegium of Socio-Economics launched the first emigrant memoir competition among “Polish émigrés... and they appealed to circles of Polish economic emigration in seven countries” (Andrzejewski 5-7),³ including Canada. The outcome of the competitions was supposed to be published in several volumes of memoirs grouped according to destination countries. Unfortunately, the outbreak of World War II thwarted the plans of the publishers and many of the volumes edited before the war had to wait more than 30 years in the archives. This was also the case of the Canadian part of the series. Although the competition for the emigrants’ memoirs had been announced before the war and the memoirs had been gathered in still in the 1930s, the decision to publish the texts was postponed. Fortunately enough, the texts deposited in the archives survived the war and the devastating Warsaw Uprising of 1944. Efforts to publish the volume were undertaken long after 1945 by a well-known activist Tadeusz Szturm de Sztrem. He finally succeeded in 1971, when the volume entitled *Pamiętniki emigrantów. Kanada* [*Memoirs of Emigrants: Canada*] was published by Książka i Wiedza (one of Polish major publishing houses at that time). Of course, the memoirs that were included in this volume are characterized by a certain severity of notation and simplicity of language. The book consists of texts written by farmers, skilled and unskilled laborers, as well as people without any profession, born at the turn of the century and emigrating to Canada seeking livelihood. This austerity, however, makes it possible to assess the degree of assimilation and the trouble of putting down roots, as well as tracing the emigrant paths from Poland to Canada—from learning the language and taking up a job to applying for Canadian citizenship and reluctance to return to Poland. A similar approach is visible in Kazimierz Koźniewski’s edition of *Pamiętniki
emigrantów [Memoirs of Emigrants] published in Poland in 1965 and including memoirs by Polish emigrants to both North and South America including Canada.

Benedykt Heydenkorn, an emigrant activist, editor-in-chief of the Polish diasporic newspaper Związkowiec as well as a founding member of the Canadian-Polish Research Institute in Toronto was inspired by aforementioned tradition and Znaniecki’s heritage. As an author and editor of many texts on the Polish group in Canada, he is also well-known as the editor and originator of the memoir competitions and the subsequent publication of a series of emigrant memoirs. The volumes published in Canada under Heydenkorn’s editorship include texts submitted to competitions held in successive decades of the second half of the 20th century and written in Polish. Such was the profile of these competitions organized as a part of the activities of the Canadian Polish Research Institute at the time. The first three volumes of emigrant memoirs were published between 1975 and 1978 and comprised over twenty texts chosen out of about fifty submitted for the competition. Simultaneously, the need to reach out with the diaries to the English-speaking reader was recognized, so the Institute decided to publish their selection in English translation. This volume, entitled Memoirs of Polish Immigrants in Canada, was published in 1979, and has long been out of print. The next volumes of Polish-language memoirs also followed. The Institute published its fifth book in 1984, and the memoirs of post-Martial Law emigrant wave (also called Solidarity wave) were issued in 1990 and titled Ale i słaby nie zginie [But the weak shall not die], which was the final volume published under the auspices of Benedykt Heydenkorn. Similar need has also been recognized by the editors of other, autobiographical narratives. For instance, Joanna Matejko edited and published a collection of intimate texts written by Poles living in the prairie provinces, titled Polish Settlers in Alberta: Reminiscences and Biographies (1979). However, this was not a phenomenon common at that time. In the 1980s and 1990s it was mostly Heydenkorn who was involved in the competitions and gathering memoirs to be published. In the following decades more and more book-length memoirs by members of the Polish diaspora appeared. A volume consisting of two texts: a memoir and a biography, entitled Marynia, Don’t Cry: Memories of Two Polish Canadian Families was published in 1995. Both Apolonja Maria Kojder, the author of the first part, and Barbara Glogowska, the author of the second, attempt to present the story of their ancestors and friends who emigrated from Poland and settled in Canada, becoming successful there. Another interesting text was Mary A. Drzewiecki’s Born and Raised Under a Straw Roof: A True Legacy of the Polish Spirit (2001), in which the memoirist provided her readers with a biography of her family, with particular focus on his grandparents and parents and their emigration route to Canada, illustrating the text with countless documents, photos and maps, and thus authenticating her story.

In recent years, editors Jacek Kozak and Joanna Lustański, who took over the organization of the aforementioned competition of the Polish-Canadian Research Institute, prepared the edition of the seventh volume of memoirs. They decided to publish the texts submitted to the competition in a bilingual edition. The volume Zwyczajna przeprowadzka / An Ordinary Move: Memoirs of Polish Immigrants to Canada 1988-2012 was published in 2014. As the editors write in the Introduction, the competition opened in 2011 and ran until mid-2012, and was aimed not only at the immigrants themselves, but also their children, i.e., the second generation, with the proviso that the arrival to Canada had to have occurred after 1988 (Kozak and Lustański 169). The competition announcement also in a bilingual version was placed in a number
of Polish magazines, newspapers and websites, as well as distributed in Polish cultural centers and during various festivals (such as the Roncesvalles Polish Festival) of the Polish culture (Kozak and Lustański 171). The organizers of the contest received 11 texts varying in genre and subject matter: from poetry, to diaries and memoirs written with this competition in mind, to authentic diaries of the young author from the time of her childhood and emigration (Kozak and Lustański 171). Unlike the previous volumes, here the authors are overwhelmingly women, educated in both Poland and Canada. As the editors write,

The authors of the memoirs are only partially representative of the Polish-Canadian community, although (compared to the earlier groups of authors) they represent a wider cross-section of the Polish ethnic group in Canada. Unlike in the other competitions, we have here representatives of two generations: Polish and Polish-Canadian. The immigrants are familiar with Poland through direct participation in the life of the country, which they left as adults, while the generations of authors born in Canada or who came here as young children (the Polish-Canadian generation) know the country indirectly, mainly from stories told by their parents, and their recollections of their native country are fragmentary, sometimes unclear and limited to childhood experiences. (172)

Since the competition announcement was published in the Polish and English languages, it is evident that the editors of the volume aimed at publishing a bilingual volume, but it was unclear how many of the entries would be received in English and how many in the Polish language. From the Introduction to the book we do not learn explicitly whether all the published texts were written in Polish, the editors mention only one authentic memoir in English written many years earlier. There is only information about the group of translators working on the volume’s publication, however, it is not clearly stated who translated which memoir (and from which language). What we can infer from the introductory essay, however, is that most of the texts submitted were in Polish and were then translated into English for the sake of the bilingual edition. In the same Introduction Kozak and Lustański focus rather on a discussion of the authors’ Polish language and the influence of English on the Polish language of migrants. The volume, on the one hand can be located within the context of emigration considerations, while, on the other hand, it seeks to define the place of Poles in Canada in a somewhat broader multicultural dimension.

Among these eleven autobiographical narratives, most present the dilemmas faced by memoirists in connection to leaving Poland and decisions to remain in Canada permanently. In addition to texts which are typically factual and focused on describing when and under what circumstances the authors or their parents left their homeland, they also attempt to capture the emotions accompanying the emigrants as they settle in North America and try to find their place simultaneously negotiating their (un)belonging and (up)rootedness. In this way the migrant narratives try to delineate the importance of place as “being-in-the-world means being placed. At all times, we find ourselves located in a particular place... We are forever in the here, and it is from the here that our experiences take place” (Trigg 4, emphasis in the original). Some of memoirists mention the difficulties and almost traumatic periods associated with the problems of adaptation into the new environment, calling these moments a rift and being in-between. For others, this state is a trap from which there is no way out as it is no longer possible to return to Poland, and the life in Canada does not provide a sense of belonging and satisfaction. However, there is a prevailing perception that Canada is a
new place not only to live, but also to put down roots, no identity choices need to be made, because one can ultimately, in harmony with oneself call Canada home.

The portrait of home, both the Canadian one and the one tinged with nostalgia for Poland, presented on the pages of these diaries and memoirs, is a source of inspiration, but also of frustration. Both the first, as well as the second generation of migrants struggle with a particular rift. Very often personal and financial successes in Canada influence a positive perception of the Canadian reality and allow for a greater affirmation of the migration experience. The volume Zwyczajna przeprowadzka / An Ordinary Move offers both nostalgic and affirmative tones. Sometimes these two are mixed within one memoir and sometimes these are strictly separated. Those memoirists who indulge in nostalgic tones seem to follow Svetlana Boym’s understanding of nostalgia seen as “a longing for a place, but actually it is a yearning for a different time—the time of our childhood... In a broader sense, nostalgia is rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress. The nostalgic desires to obliterate history and turn it into private or collective mythology” (xv). They also favor reflective nostalgia which “lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time” (Boym 41). This happens despite the migrants’ conscious choices concerning migration to Canada and, in the case of second generation immigrants, assimilation into the linguistic and social landscape of Canada.

The first memoir that explicitly includes nostalgic tones in reference to Poland is Beata Wilczyńska’s “From Kraków to Toronto” which is full of nostalgia for the author’s lost hometown. The memoirist sets this tone from the beginning by offering a following motto: “Memory is the Mother of Wisdom” coming from Aeschylus (Wilczyńska 267). From the first pages of her text, Wilczyńska compares Canada to Poland in the context of the color of the national flags of both countries, similarities and differences in weather conditions as well as the atmosphere of Christmas. Referring to her childhood memories, she places herself within Boym’s definition of reflective nostalgia which highlights the fact that those who experience it “believe that their project is about truth” (41). The analysis of “From Kraków to Toronto” brings to mind Eva Hoffman’s well-known autobiographical book Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language (1989). Its first part is also dedicated to Kraków, which for Hoffman was a paradise lost. Both Hoffman and Wilczyńska seem to trust the conviction contained in Susan Stanford Friedman’s essay that “Writing about the loss of home brings one home again. You can’t go home again—except in writing home” (Friedman 207). This is exactly what Wilczyńska does, quoting the famous Polish poets such as Mickiewicz and Gałczyński, recounting the history of Kraków and Poland, and giving in to a reflective nostalgia, rooted, according to Boym in the concept of “algia, in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembering” (41). Indeed, leaving Poland was difficult for the Wilczyński family. They left their friends and part of the family behind, the children additionally had to abandon studies, schools and sympathies. However, they chose to emigrate and, urged by their family, who had already established a life for themselves in Canada, moved to Toronto and started their lives on Roncesvalles Avenue among the Polish diaspora. At one point, however, the author asks herself what is home. Is it really the paintings she left behind in Poland (and which she later brings to Canada, making it a symbolic sealing of her decision to stay in the country), or the streets of her beloved Kraków or, perhaps, the people: “Will I find myself in the chaos set forth by fate? Myself, a piece of Poland? Canada is my new home, but in the recesses of my heart, I
turn to ‘those forested hills, to those green meadows’... This is my unforgotten motherland’” (267). Quoting the Polish national poet, Adam Mickiewicz, and dwelling in nostalgia as well as constantly thinking about Poland prevents her for a long time from moving on. Similarly to Hoffman, she declares her emotional ties to her hometown and admits “I am a Cracovian in love with my city, because Kraków is not just a city, it is a state of mind” (Wilczyńska 267). For a very long time, she resists any transformation and seems stuck without any progress. She even confirms explicitly: “but in my heart here will always remain that atmosphere of nostalgia for my native country and city, longing for friends behind... Or in this beautiful and also ugly place—will I find meaning, hope? Because where hope blossoms, that is our home, family, motherland” (269). Finally, alongside the difficulties, hardships and health problems, Wilczyńska gradually decides to actively support in herself the conviction to put down roots. In her memoir, one can see how much depends on the personal approach to migration and even small successes facilitate the processes of adaptation to the new environment. In conclusion, the author points to this self-awareness, but she simultaneously admits she is stuck in-between. She allows herself to feel more positively and acknowledges the new state: “That’s why today I don’t regret making the decision to change my fate. ‘I yearn... I left behind a piece of myself, my dear friends’ – and yet now, torn, were I in Poland, I would miss those around me” (274). This statement echoes certainty that having learned about life in Canada, despite many adversities, the author would also feel torn in Poland if she had decided to return. After all, there is no going back to one’s pre-migration self, and this period of her life remains forever Wilczyńska’s formative experience.

An interesting example of a text written by a person from the younger generation is a poem by a daughter of migrants who envies her parents their Polish memories. In terms of the form this contribution is absolutely unique as it is written in verse. It is not a part of a larger whole, rather it is a page-long poetic memoir opening the volume. As far as the content indicates, the poet declares she dwells in certain nostalgia, or even post-nostalgia, in the approach to the parents’ past. For Sean Scanlan, “nostalgia may be a style or design or narrative that serves to comment on how memory works... Nostalgia is also part of the seducing nature of what things from the past mean” (4). For Karolina Piotrowska, the author of the poetic memoir “Sparrows,” the Communist reality, from which her parents emerged (and we can guess escaped), becomes an idealized and romanticized utopia of Polish lands:

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I envy my parents their
scout’s uniform
their meanderings through milk bars
their clean
unspoiled
Polishness.

Because where exactly will I run to here?
They knew
what they ran from
but I
fool
wander these wet, liberated sidewalks
just to find my way back there. (191)
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The poem is a memoir in itself, a kind of poetic diary evidently recalling emotionally charged memories of the author’s parents from the past. It is their youth: scouting times and dining in milk bars, arguably romantic and pleasant but limited in time, which the memoirist tries to see as a timeless value. She tends to forget that it is rarely possible to be a scout throughout the whole life, and even in milk bars meals taste good probably only in one’s college years. Piotrowska’s text can thus be located within a post-nostalgic paradigm when the nostalgic memories of her parents found their way into her autobiographical text juxtaposing the Poland from behind the Iron Curtain with the free Canada. In her memoir, similarly to Wilczyńska’s one, nostalgia can surface even when the immigrants to Canada left behind Communist Poland that was otherwise oppressive and the vision of it is highly affective and idealized.

A slightly different approach is visible in Asia Tomczyk’s text “Canada: My Second Home.” Tomczyk, despite the many difficulties encountered in Canada as well as an overwhelming homesickness, is very much aware of the processes of detachment from Poland and gradual rooting in Canada. During her frequent visits to Poland, she increasingly feels she is moving away from her former acquaintances and friends. She experiences her migration as being in-between, between longing for her country, which was a surprising affective reaction to emigration: “I never thought that I was so closely tied to this country until I left it” (Tomczyk 195), and the awareness of the chances and opportunities her Canadian life offers. This rift and state of being in-between can be a source of positive reaffirmation of her own decisions and a conviction that “migrant identity is plural, at once incorporating a diversity of cultural taxonomies but all of them in a fragmented, non-unitary form” (Moslund 68). Tomczyk’s readiness to realize the pluralism and hybridity is a testimony to her transformation from purely nostalgic tones towards affirmation of her status as a hybrid. She finally asserts: “An immigrant is probably the kind of person who will always be torn—being in a country he chose for a better life with the pain in his heart, he will think of everything that was left behind, and being in his homeland he will miss all the things that lacked in his life that he has in his second homeland” (198). Calling Canada a homeland and acknowledging the position of in-betweenness situates Tomczyk’s text among transitional memoirs which offer an open perspective and allow for an integration into the Canadian society while simultaneously being interested (and perhaps involved) in the matters of Poland.

Another diary showcasing the transition from being nostalgic to affirmation and sheer love for Canada appears in a text titled “The Immigrant’s Journal” and written by an anonymous person hidden under the pseudonym Dorota. She emigrates to Canada with her husband and two small children in 1996 with a dream for a better life, and despite many problems of physical and spiritual matter, they consciously invest in emotional rootedness. At the beginning when the family cannot afford distant trips they visit the closest areas, see the sights in and near Toronto to familiarize with the parks, lakes and even children’s playgrounds to make the place their own. This may have a double effect as once during a picnic, she notes:

Suddenly I hear a familiar song by the ’70s band, Happy End, called ‘How are you doing, love?’ (Jak się masz, kochanie?) Such an old, classic hit song played at weddings. I can’t help being emotional, tears roll down my cheeks, I come completely undone. And it will always be this way every time I hear the Polish anthem, a Polish author, a Polish work, anything[,] (Dorota 236)
However, after a couple of years, when the family bought a house with a small garden, the affirmative tones are to be heard in her narrative. While coming back from the first vacation spent in Poland, she points out:

We really missed our country, but how pleasant it was to come back home. Yes, to our home, to our Canada. I finally realized where my place is and where home is for me. My roots are planted deep in Poland and I live in its matters to this day, but my home is in Canada... Home is our refuge, a guarantor of peace and safety. (Dorota 250-251, 252)

As a result of having a physical space such as her own house, Dorota starts putting roots also in Canada. In spite of her involvement and interest in Poland, she feels secure in the adopted homeland and calls it home. It turns out that feeling at home can be facilitated by its symbolism and deep meaning of the very building seen as one’s private place which also becomes a way of being-in-the-world (Heidegger 158). In the context of Bożena Shallcross’ discussions on the significance of the concept of home, Dorota sees Canada as *locus amoenus* perceived as “a restored space of displacement amid all that is Other in exilic writing” (2). Indeed, for Dorota Canada and her Canadian house become two most important concepts fused together and “translated into a narrative of a home” as “home in the Polish sense of the word is both a place one identifies with and a place one built and furnished to inhabit... for the home’s frame can be both textual, physical and interpretive” (Shallcross 2).

Ewa Prokop’s memoir titled “Canadian Dreams” is a diary of a forty-five-year old Polish librarian in love with Polish culture and literature, who follows with her teenage children her husband who left for Canada in search for a job. Unfortunately, after arrival both her experience and age turn against her and she can only work as a cleaning lady, which makes the initial years of her stay a nightmare. She does not only clean private houses but works for companies taking care of industrial spaces, building sites and offices. She tries not to fall into despair and nostalgia but at some point she realizes her “home was left behind far away” and she does not know “where it is anymore” (Prokop 212). Throughout the first years of her stay in Canada the family suffered from a lack of financial stability and uncertainty concerning the landed immigrant status. These were accompanied by strange dreams Prokop was experiencing. They concerned mainly the late members of the family, some of whom she had not even known back in Poland. She comments on them as follows:

In my dreams, the departed were always alive, always as if they were friends. I spoke with them... I felt how they gave me strength on my new path... I suspect that if I had never left for Canada, I would never have had such interesting dreams—such astonishing dreams like mirror images of my new experiences. (212)

However, as the family was ordered to leave the country due to their unresolved immigrant status, her perspective started to change. The family began to feel the bond with Canada and desired to come back at any price. The difficulties Prokop encountered in Canada and outside of it were reflected in her dreams. They were not among of pleasant ones as the late ancestors came to haunt her and asked varied existential questions about their lives. She was also tormented by dreams about the dog she had left behind in Poland with her mother. All these bizarre dreams were strangely similar to a spiritualist séance and the memoirist recalls that upon awakening she nevertheless felt as if these dead people had been encouraging and supporting her the decision to remain in Canada. Moreover, the stories recreated in her dreams reflected her ambivalent status of being in-between. They also indicate a certain lack of harmony.
stemming from the uncertainty the family found themselves in and resembled a sense of unheimlich. Once she accepted her loss of homeland and her distance from Poland as well as her gradual movement away from Polish culture, the dreams disappeared. Quite surprisingly, she concludes her narrative with a poem:

I left.
Not far at all. Only to Canada.
Maybe I will return in the spring, like the geese.
More like storks, in the case of Poland.
I stayed.
They probably don’t like me here.
Is it the revenge of the betrayed motherland?
Can you have two motherlands?
Some have two mothers.
I will ask for a new set of questions.
Is here a prize for immigrants?
But for what? (Prokop 224-225)

It seems that the author’s desire is to remain faithful to her homeland, yet at the same time to stay in Canada, which is treated as a motherland as well. The comparison of the two countries to two mothers clearly indicates a yearning to equate the Canadian experience with the Polish one—both are important, both are formative and influential to her migrant’s identity, neither of which Prokop would like to give up, although she unequivocally chooses to remain in Canada. The fact that the dreams nevertheless vanish may indicate that she has stopped fighting to preserve her Polishness, and is beginning to accept a situation in which the processes of remembering will inevitably merge and intertwine with the processes of forgetting. As a postscript to the memoir, she adds a note that after many years of anticipation and turmoil, her family was granted permanent residency in Canada, which turns out to be a happy ending for Prokop and her family.

The final example discussed here is a memoir by Grażyna Sanchez Madejska, an author of “You Will Also Become an Immigrant.” Sanchez Madejska’s approach to her migration is positive from the beginning. After arriving in Canada, despite a short period of disappointment when she realized that being an English teacher, a profession she was proud of in Poland, is probably unavailable to her in Canada, she willingly immersed into whatever Canada offered. During a French language course she attended in Montreal, she met a Peruvian, whom she befriended and married later. In the initial period of her stay in Canada she actively tried to struggle any symptoms of longing and nostalgia by meeting people and learning their life stories. She says: “I had a small group of friends by then and did not long for Poland and my family” (Sanchez Madejska 256). The marriage to a person of different traditions made her quickly realize that her attachment to Poland, as well as her ability to pass on Polish traditions to her children were subject to certain cultural negotiations due to the presence of Peruvian traditions and culture in the family. When, upon a move to Toronto, she gives birth to her son, Sanchez Madejska remarks: “Instead of speaking to him in Polish and my husband in Spanish, we decided to continue speaking to him in French. We met in a French language class, so despite living in an English province in Canada, we still continued to use French to communicate between each other and with our child” (258).

The movement within Canada, changing places and linguistic environs let her appreciate the diversity and richness of cultures rather than plunge into nostalgic despair. Her activism, openness and contacts with people of various backgrounds only
help her overcome initial doubts concerning her life in North America. From the very beginning she does not close herself in any ghetto and sees her diasporic roots as an advantage. This conviction is prominent in her narrative from the start. When the family, shortly after the marriage, returns from an unsuccessful trip to the Niagara Falls to Montreal, Sanchez Madejska realizes: “when I was approaching Montreal, with Mount Royal visible from a distance, I felt for the first time that I am home. Moved, I began to hum a then-popular folk song ‘This land is your land’” (256). For her the view of Mount Royal, a symbol of Montreal, becomes a kind of locus amoenus, as mentioned by Shallcross (2). Significantly, however, that it is not contrasted with the locus terribilis, the abandoned (and therefore somewhat dead) territory of Poland. Such clear-cut antinomies are alien to her. As a result of her marriage to a Peruvian, living in Montreal and then moving to multicultural Toronto, frequent contacts with family from Poland and Peru, she has always been open to otherness, new acquaintances and varied cultural codes. Contacts with different people, multiple languages, and a willingness to cross barriers helped her avoid the fate of many immigrants confined to the diaspora, enclosed within a certain ghetto and deep in nostalgic tones.

The selected memoirs from Zwyczajna przeprowadzka / An Ordinary Move discussed here are representative of the whole volume. Most of the authors of the memoirs emigrated from Poland for economic and family rather than for political reasons, as post-1988 migration was the caesura assumed by the organizers of the competition. Hence, the emphasis in these texts is mainly on the personal relationships in and with Canada. The vast majority of contributions end on a positive note and even if they are initially dominated by nostalgic tones, together with a financial and professional improvement the memoirists begin to treat Canada as their home(land). As the editors of the volume state, “[t]his is particularly evident in the cases of those who actively attempt to establish some sort of harmony between the old and the new country of residence” (Kozak and Lustański 174). This openness is also linked to the post-1989 possibility of free contacts with Poland and relatives who stayed in the country—via uncensored letters at first and, then, the Internet, as well as freedom of travel. The decision to publish the volume of memoirs in a bilingual version is by all means noteworthy and, to say the least, commendable. In an article on migrant writers living in the UK Joanna Kosmalska states that the English language “functions as an intercultural mediator” (674), and referring to Alistair Pennycook, adds, “English has become the transcultural language which is in the continuous process of translation” (674). Of course, Kosmalska is referring mainly to texts written exclusively in English, in which authors insert Polish words, phrases, idiomatic language and even whole sentences in their native language. Yet, in this context, these remarks also apply to the Kozak and Lustański’s volume. However, the conscious decision of the editors of the memoirs to reach out to the younger generation, unfamiliar with the Polish language, also draws attention to the changes in the Polish migrant linguistic landscape. Such processes renew and refresh the English language and point to the legitimacy of translating the experiences of migrants into a non-native language. As Pennycook argues, “monolingualism... is the name for a dangerously monolithic traffic in meaning” (42), which inhibits the dynamic exchange of ideas and experiences. This refers, of course, to the ubiquitous use of English, but can also refer to the persistent use of Polish by migrants outside Poland. Kozak and Lustański’s volume decisively attempts to break with the trend that has so far prevailed among the Polish community, and above all dominated the memoir series in particular.
The memoirs collected as a result of the most recent memoir competition organized by the Canadian-Polish Research Institute demonstrate the progress of the Polish diaspora whose members are in most cases able to make a transfer from a trap of nostalgia towards seeing Canada as their pleasant and safe haven, a home and *locus amoenus*. Facilitated by their ability to change professions and places as well as to negotiate cultures, despite initial problems with adaptation, the memoirists manage to immerse in the Canadian multicultural and transcultural society, thus displaying their “transnational status” (Kozaczka 152). Purchasing a house and a professional success are seen as breakthroughs but it is also evident that while some migrants need more time to move from nostalgia to affirmation of their new homeland, more and more migrants are able to accept the rift of in-betweenness quite promptly and, therefore, move forward. They not only physically stay in Canada and inhabit their country but also permeate the place, and, by calling it home, make the conviction that “*the places in which we live, live in us*” valid (Trigg 33, emphasis in the original).

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NOTES

1. In this context, some critics call for treating Polish literature holistically after 1989 rather than maintaining the division into literature written at home and in exile. Jerzy Jarzębski, however, is quite cautious when it comes to unreflective statements saying that post-1989 Polish literature is one and should not be divided into domestic and émigré. This otherwise correct slogan should be applied very carefully. He claims: “I remain with the conviction that the slogan: ‘Polish literature is one’ is not so much a statement of fact, but rather an invitation to solid and long-lasting work—for critics, researchers, also readers” (Jarzębski 231) and continues: “The emigration fate of literature—seen from the perspective of the home country—has something of a non-being about it, but a non-being as if intensified, meaningful, producing a hard envelope around the vacuum breathing from it, signaling the lack, incompleteness, insufficiency of what was allowed to exist by the authorities in Communist Poland” (Jarzębski 233). Given this perspective, one should look at contemporary writers of Polish origin, not as writers in exile, but as Canadian or migrant writers (cf. Stephan). Still, many emigrant writers were present in Poland, even under Communism, thanks to underground publishing houses and smuggling the books and literary periodicals from the west. This is just a fraction of the problems connected to the definition of migrant literature, which is beyond the scope of the present inquiry.

2. This volume of memoirs is also discussed and contextualized within migrant literature in a monograph in Polish (cf. Drewniak, Figura domu).

3. All the quotations from Polish, if not indicated otherwise, are translated by the author of the article.

4. According to Gliński (361), the first competitions were announced as early as 1957 and the collected memoirs were partially published by Związkowiec (Polish diasporic paper in Canada).

5. These book-length memoirs have been given a separate critical attention (cf. Drewniak, “‘It Was Empty and Silent’”; Reczyńska; Rzepa, Drewniak and Macedulska).
There are two exceptions to the rule in this volume, namely, two memoirs of people who came to Canada in the year 1985 for political reasons. The decision to include these texts in the volume are discussed in detail by the volume's editors in their foreword (Kozak and Lustański 171-172). In these two diaries we find rather bitter statements about Canada. The authors of these memoirs were expelled from Poland with one-way passports.

According to the information included in the volume, translations and revisions were conducted by Tomasz Frydel, Gabriela Kasprzak, Michal Kasprzak, Kacek Kozak, Joanna Lustańska, Patryk Polec, Regina Olszówka, Camilla Szczesniak, and Anna Bożena Wolańczyk.

At this point, we should point out one more autobiographical text worth mentioning in this context. It is an autobiographical text entitled From the Vistula to the Canadian Great Lakes: A Life’s Journey by Lucjan Krause, a Polish-Canadian physicist and scientist, which was written and published in English by a Polish academic press—Nicolaus Copernicus University Press (2017) in the series Archives of the Polish Emigration. Krause, born in 1928 in Poznań had wartime experience, participated in the Warsaw Uprising, survived captivity in Bergen Belsen, emigrated via France, Italy, England to Canada, climbing to university heights. Krause, due to his long-standing cooperation and support that he directed from the University of Windsor in Canada to Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, published his memoirs in Poland. The book—on the one hand—is a form of thanks to the author by the Nicolaus Copernicus University for many years of cooperation (the publication is preceded by a foreword by Rector of NCU Prof. Andrzej Tretyn, as well as an introduction by Prof. Józef Szudy of the Institute of Physics, Prof. Anna Branach-Kallas of the Center for Canadian Studies at NCU, and Prof. Mirosław A. Supruniuk representing the NCU’s Archives of Polish Emigration), while on the other hand—an expression of a desire to make a name for himself on the Polish market (somewhat incomprehensible due to the choice of narrative language).

ABSTRACTS

The aim of this article is to analyze the latest volume of migrant memoirs from Poland to Canada Zwyczajna przeprowadzka / An Ordinary Move: Memoirs of Polish Immigrants in Canada 1988-2012 (2014) in order to track the changes in attitudes to the migrants’ perception of Poland and Canada in the context of finding/losing home, (un)belonging and Polish-Canadian identity. This edited collection and its examination will be situated within the history of Polish life writing in Canada as well. The texts gathered in the volume are written in prose and verse and prove the migrants’ variegated perspectives ranging from nostalgic and painful tones discussed in light of Svetlana Boym’s The Future of Nostalgia to affirmative ones that can be described through the concept of finding a friendly space or the so called locus amoenus (Shallcross). This contribution also addresses the question of the usage of Polish and English as languages of expression as the recent publication is the first bilingual edition in the series. All in all, the memoirs show not only the constant need to write one’s experience of migration and narrate the immigrants’ attitude to their Polish identity but also testify to the possibility of migrants’ “transnational status” (Kozaczka 152).
Keywords: memoirs of migrants, Polish-Canadian migration, life writing, memoir competitions, Polish diaspora in Canada

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