

UNDER THE SPELL OF MULTICULTURALISM: IRENE GUILFORD'S *THE EMBRACE* AND ANTANAS SILEIKA'S *BUYING ON TIME*

Rūta Šlapkauskaitė

Vilniaus universiteto Anglų filologijos katedros asistentė

I continue to sing of other loves,
Places... moments when I am furious;
When you are pale and I am strong –
As we come one to another.

(CYRIL DABYDEEN,
excerpt from *Multiculturalism*)

Since the rise of ethnic studies and postcolonial theory in Canadian academia in the 1960s scholars have become intensely aware of the defining role of ethnicity, race, class and gender in the dynamics of power within the multicultural mosaic. As expected, Canadian literary criticism has also turned into a site of taxing debates about the adequacy of methodological frameworks, terms of reference and modes of argumentation used in analyzing the aesthetic representations and interpretations of cultural diversity in fiction. Most of the studies by such seminal scholars as Enoch Padolsky, Linda Hutcheon, Smaro Kamboureli, Diana Brydon, Neil Bessner and others, have effectively pointed out the complex intersections between discourses on ethnicity, postcolonialism and postmodernism in the wider area of the textual explorations of Canada.

Although it has become somewhat commonplace in the English studies to

identify the postcolonial with the intellectual effort of the Commonwealth and the former colonies of the British Empire, locating and defining postcolonialism inevitably brings forth a number of questions as to how we characterize this institutionalized field of inquiry and what discursive operations we ascribe to it. The major areas of scholarly debate in Canada seem to stretch over postcolonialism's geographical identity(ies), its political ambiguity and its methodological inconsistencies as an interpretive practice. For example, Alan Lawson sees postcolonialism as a complex site of different locations, cultures, nations and subject positions engaged in the relations of power in a definite historical context. In distinguishing Canada's settler-invader society from the postcolonial societies of the Third and Fourth World, he reveals the intrinsic differences within the international body of post/colonial experiences and refuses to melt them down into a single category that would stand for the "global" and the "postcolonial" at the same time. (Lawson, 151–164) A similar idea resonates in Padolsky's essay "Olga in Wonderland: Canadian Ethnic Minority

Writing and Post-Colonial Theory”, where he points out

that the more post-colonial *theory* becomes post-colonial *theories*, the weaker the claim for any general post-colonial “language and political analysis” becomes, and the more crucial each local, group or national social discourse becomes in working comparatively and internationally. (Padolsky, 240)

For Brydon, on the other hand, the comparative dimension of Canada’s multicultural model opens new possibilities of postcolonial research in this country:

Far from separating it from other postcolonial nations, Canada’s pluri-ethnic composition allows for points of connection with some experiences elsewhere which when analysed comparatively may yield insights into how power operates, other than by sheer force, in our own fairly comfortable world. (Brydon, 98)

In a similar spirit, Donna Bennett shows that comparison may work not only as a cognitive bridge between distinct cultural topographies, but also as a medium within the same geographical space. By comparing the historical conditions and consequences of European imperialism and different waves of immigration to Canada, she shows that the Aboriginals may share some of the ideological concerns of the former colonies in India or Nigeria, but the French and English Canadians, although postcolonial, remain in a double bind to the imperial discourse – historically, they have been both the subjects of imperial discipline and the agents of its power.

However, as Hutcheon reminds us, “Some of the immigrants who populate [Canada] are not from colonized societies [at all] and they often consciously resist being labeled post-colonial.” (Hutcheon, 79)

Perhaps this is why Neil Bessner dismisses postcolonialism as a Canadian “condition” altogether, arguing that

Canada is not postcolonial because the very idea of Canada implied in the question is too univocal, monolithic, monocentric, monocultural. Canada is not unilaterally postcolonial; the various kinds of difference increasingly manifest in the culture – differences that were always integral to, even when not recognized by, the critical institution – are too vital to be subsumed, hitched together at any post. (Bessner, 48)

As Stephen Slemon rightly points out, “The Second-World writer [and] the Second-World text...has always been complicit in colonialism’s territorial appropriation of land, and voice, and agency...” (Slemon, 148), and it is this ideological complicity that has caused ambivalences in Canada’s post/colonial writing, where resistance against the dominant epistemology goes alongside its reinforcement of the imperial master codes. From this perspective, the doubleness of postcolonialism is nowhere as apparent as in the ambivalences of Canadian discourse of multiculturalism. Donna Bennett has noted that “By institutionalizing multiculturalism, Canada has encouraged identity through alterity. In doing so, it has effectively institutionalized marginality, and action that is always associated with postcolonialism.” (Bennett, 125) However, by seemingly promoting *differance* as the *ethos* of the nation, Canadian multiculturalism has also effectively reaffirmed the disciplinary regime by which cultural difference is incorporated into the body politic and is stripped of its subversive force.

In her reading of Canada's Multiculturalism Act, Kamboureli suggests that:

Enhancing ethnicity suggests its commodification through an agency over which the ethnic subject might have little control. Although the double intent of preserving and enhancing ethnicity acknowledges the presence of nation-narratives not indigenous to Canada, it does so in a contained fashion; it privileges the group identity of a community at the expense of its individual members, thereby not taking into account the identity politics inherent in such a situation. The result may very well be what has been termed 'third solitude' or 'other solitudes'. The difference of ethnic otherness is recognised not as a sign, with the sign's intrinsic potential for modified meaning, but as a symbol whose meaning is to be preserved and therefore fixed. (Kamboureli, 218)

This is then the Canadian paradox: by aiming to downplay the internal tensions of the discourse of the nation, it uncovers the disciplinary procedures through which the discourse of multiculturalism operates in *contact zones* (Pratt, 7) within Canada's social landscape and produces ethnicity as Other, but one that is always *already* benign, domesticated, and innocuous.

As it is, then, Canada's discourse of multiculturalism cannot help but be ironic. To put it simply, Canada's national consciousness is trapped in a bind between colonial amnesia and postcolonial memory¹. Therefore, the current discourse of multiculturalism operates as a palimpsest that seeks to evoke what Ernest Renan has called "a nation as a spiritual principle" (Renan, 19) by seemingly replacing the colonial orthodoxies with the liberal ad-

vancement of cultural plurality. Yet, precisely because it depends on the historical record of colonial experience, multiculturalism collapses upon itself, uncovering an inherently ironic dialogue, where the articulated promotion of difference is always haunted by the repressed desire to contain it and subject it to the codes of the cultural mainstream.

To a certain extent, the ambivalence of the multicultural agenda may also be connected to the ambiguities of postcolonial theory as it has been analyzed by Graham Huggan in his study *The Post-Colonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. Huggan notes that postcolonialism has become a marketable academic commodity that uncovers the internal doubleness within the study domain itself. In this sense, the postcolonial figures as a site of intersection between *postcolonialism* as a "politics of value that stands in opposition to global processes of commodification" and *postcoloniality* – a "value-regulating mechanism within the global late-capitalist system of commodity exchange". (Huggan, 6) In other words, the postcolonial venture becomes highly ironic, as it tries to overcome its complicity in global market operations against which it seemingly struggles.

This brings us to the main concerns of the present paper. In recognizing the ambiguities of postcolonial discourse, we follow Huggan's observation of how the rhetoric of resistance becomes a consumer product and thereby subscribes to the logic of *exoticism*, a technology of representation that manufactures otherness by domesticating the "strange" and conforming it to the dominant modes of aesthetic per-

¹ I am using the term in the sense it has been used by Toni Morrison in her novel *Beloved*.

ception. In this respect, exoticism works as a mechanism of translation, in which cultural difference is assimilated into the dominant systems of knowledge by gratifying their distorted understanding of cultural diversity. In this respect, exoticism is linked to the marketing of cultural marginality in recent postcolonial and multicultural fiction:

To define the margins can thus be seen as an exoticising strategy: as an impossible attempt to dictate the terms and limits of intercultural contact, and to fix the value-equivalence of metropolitan commodity exchange. To keep the margins exotic – at once threateningly strange and reassuringly familiar – is the objective of the mainstream. (Huggan, 22)

It is in the appropriation of dissent and the turning of the Other into a spectacle – the exotic within the national – that the institution of Canadian Literature seems to produce the literary voices of the nation.

The institutional currency of multicultural names in literary scholarship suggests that Canadian writers operate within a complex domain of power relations that I call the *multicultural conjuncture* – an economy of value where difference is subjected to the disciplinary regime of national pedagogy under the simulation of what Bhabha calls *performance* and *dissemi/nation* as the space of the people (Bhabha, 299). In this site, literary narratives gain their institutional as well as artistic identity through a dialogic relationship with the discourse of the nation. Predominantly, this dialogue unfolds in the aesthetic forms of parody and pastiche – narrative models that are part of what may be called the *multicultural aesthetic*, a text's aesthetic as well as

ideological response to the panoptic gaze of the discourse of multiculturalism.

The present paper will look at two novels by Canadian authors of Lithuanian descent – Irene Guilford's *The Embrace*, and Antanas Sileika's *Buying on Time* – in terms of their engagement with identity politics and the semantics of cultural translation. Seeing as ethnic minority novels, in Joseph Pivato's words, "speak from the margins [to] the central culture" (Pivato, 64), I will be referring to Huggan's notion of exoticism as "a control mechanism of cultural translation" (Huggan, 14) that may explain the approaches to representation used in *The Embrace* and *Buying on Time*. By way of comparing the ways in which Guilford and Sileika mediate their concerns for the ancestral culture in their narratives, this paper will attempt to point out the operations of the multicultural aesthetic that may explain the two narratives' contrasting relationships to Canada's discourse of the nation.

Buying on Time is a collection of thirteen stories, organized chronologically, which describes how a Lithuanian DP family settles in the residential community of Weston in the 1950s. All but the last story are narrated from a child's point of view and are mostly satirical in mode. Dave, the middle son of the family, recounts their comic confrontations with Canadian culture: meeting the arrogant English Canadian neighbour and the pompous building inspector, learning the rules of ice hockey and those of the Canadian economy. Although the stories show the immigrant family's attempts to come to terms with their sense of difference in

the English Canadian Ontario and often focus on the issues of the generational gap and the clash of cultures indicative of a multicultural society, the narrative makes no direct reference to Lithuania. Rather, it comments on the experiences that were shared by all immigrants in the Canada of the 1950s: mastering the English language, having a proper place to live in, learning to play hockey and resisting the temptations to leave for the US. In fact, the reader finds out that the narrator's parents are Lithuanian immigrants only in the closing story, by the end of which it is hardly of any importance.

By contrast, *The Embrace* tells the story of Aldona, a young Lithuanian Canadian woman, who comes with her aging father to visit her relatives in Lithuania in 1985. Having been born and grown up in Toronto, with the only hint of the Soviet world coming in the form of her cousin Daiva's letters, Aldona is "shocked, stupefied by what [she sees]" (Guilford, 19) of the Soviet reality and fails to effectively communicate with her Lithuanian family. After the fall of Communism in 1990, her uncle Pranas and cousins Jurgis and Daiva come to Toronto, where Jurgis hopes to fulfill his American Dream. Unexpectedly, though, it is Daiva who decides to stay in Canada as an illegal immigrant, fracturing the family even further, so that in the end all the characters seem to be lost in the passage home, a place of no return, a "land where we wait, arms reaching towards embrace." (Guilford, 150)

Located as much within as between cultures, ethnic minority literature operates as a cultural mediator that, in Pivato's words,

"brings together the fragments of a diverse society and...invents a culture for a new audience" (Pivato, 64). In this sense, *The Embrace* operates as a symbolic site of translation, embedded as it is in two cultural contexts: Lithuanian and Canadian. For a Western reader, who will likely see Guilford as a Canadian writer of Lithuanian descent, her novel performs an exegetic function in terms of interpreting her ancestral culture for the English-speaking audience. However, as Huggan has effectively shown in *The Post-Colonial Exotic*, the act of cultural translation is fraught with ideological manoeuvres that subject discourse to the relations of power as well as the demands of market economy. In responding to the politics of value as regulated by the field of cultural consumption, Guilford's novel falls nowhere short of the technology of exoticism that brings the promise of cultural otherness into its aesthetic fulfillment.

How does Guilford cater for the "multicultural" tastes of Canadian readers? *The Embrace* indicates its link to Lithuania in the very opening section of the novel, which reads as the narrator's testimony of her hybrid identity: "The ghost of my life in Lithuania exists, though I have never lived there...Part of me lives there still, a sleeping self snatched up before birth and carried, half by my mother, half by my father, out of Lithuania." (Guilford, 7) Clearly, the homeland of Aldona's parents is just that – a strange entity without a presence, a spectre that haunts the narrator in her attempts to expiate her sense of guilt about growing up in Canada rather than in Soviet Lithuania. It becomes the ultimate source

of tragedy and pain in Aldona's identity as a hyphenated Canadian, in other words, a vehicle for the dramatization of her cultural anxieties.

For Sileika also, Lithuania remains the ghostly shadow that operates not unlike the derridean *differance*, a sign of both difference and deferral – a trace of the immigrants' otherness that makes them marginal in the Canadian society of the 1950s. However, although the stories evoke the DP family's sense of displacement in facing the dominant codes of English Canadian culture, by refusing to name the narrator's ancestral roots, they simultaneously refuse to reward the reader's zeal for cultural exotica and grant the pleasure of "ethnic" tourism. Significantly, the narrator does not give the names of his parents either. Throughout the cycle they are usually called "Mother" and "the Old Man", which is suggestive of their metonymic representation of the ancestral culture in the Canadian context.

More generally, though, the absence of names, both that of the parents and their country of origin, alludes to the common problems confronted by most immigrants in Canada. Sileika has a sharp eye for the dynamics of power in the acculturation processes in post-war Canadian society. In "Going Native", the first of the stories in the cycle, the narrator's family defines itself against their English Canadian neighbour, who represents the cultural idiom they need to adopt in order to integrate into the cultural mainstream and "become native":

Mr Taylor was a special kind of Canadian, an 'English'. They were the only kind who really

counted, and observation of them could pay dividend. Mr Taylor was *our* English, the one who lived across the street and whose habits could be observed at will. We were astonished that he stayed in dress shirt and tie as he read the evening paper in a lawn chair in his back yard. The lawn chair was just as astonishing. Who else but an English would spend good money on a chair that could only be used outside? (Sileika, 9)

In ironising Mr. Taylor's behaviour, the narrative voice of *Buying on Time* displaces the "anthropological" gaze of the dominant society and subverts the power of the English mainstream to define its ethnic Others. To borrow Hutcheon's remark, the double-voiced discourse of irony in ethnic minority literature "include[s] an increased emphasis on its ability to subvert from within, to speak the language of the dominant order and at the same time suggest another meaning and another evaluation." (Hutcheon, 1992, 16) Thus for the young narrator in Sileika's story, it is the English neighbour who is "astonishing" to the point of absurdity – he becomes the target of both the family's "anthropological" inquiry (Mr. Taylor is *our* English) and their subtle ridicule. Undoubtedly, in tune with the story's title, the narrator's observation suggests an evident parody of the scientific practices of Western anthropologists in Native communities, where they studied the vanishing cultures of North America. In this sense, the irony of "Going Native" partakes of the mockery in an Aboriginal newspaper cartoon depicting an Inuit who, not unlike Sileika's narrator, addresses his friend with a question "Who is *your* anthropologist?" In a spirit of derision, both the Inuit cartoon and Sileika's

story share in the subversion of the traditional frame of cultural perception, turning the ethnic gaze into an “anthropological eye” that exposes the exoticizing practices of the cultural mainstream.

A similar subversion happens when the narrator’s father, the family’s patriarch, mocks the English neighbour’s complaints about their cat’s “trespassing” on his lawn and thus, by implication, putting into question the existence of boundaries which separate the neighbour’s “Canadian” world from the ethnic Otherness of the narrator’s family. By resorting to scatological rhetoric that ironizes Mr. Taylor’s sense of cultural superiority and linguistic “purity”, the Old Man undercuts the Englishman’s power to posit the immigrants on the clearly demarcated lines of Canada’s cultural map and maintain them there. With questions such as “It shits on lawn?” “It pisses on flowers?” (Sileika, 11), the narrator’s father makes the neighbour aware of his own vulnerability to a degree where his “civilized” language cannot contain the immigrant voice: “Mr Taylor’s linguistic squeamishness had backed him into a corner.” (Sileika, 11)

The same subversive force of the immigrant’s discourse unfolds in confronting the town building inspector’s threats to take hold of the family’s cellar-home. The father, we are told, reacts by feigning linguistic incompetence: “Wait. My English bad.” (Sileika, 13) In effect, as the narrator explains, “This was another tactic in my father’s strategy for life in a foreign land. He could deny he had understood anything, and an order not understood never existed in the first place.” (Sileika, 13) The

inspector’s patronizing that “it’s not decent”, “the roof doesn’t have any pitch”, “the snow could crush every one of you [and especially the baby]”, are cut short by the father’s paradoxical willingness to submit to the municipality’s “wish” to raise his child, a responsibility that leaves the inspector powerless:

‘Danger?’

‘For the baby. Yes. You must move out for the sake of the baby.’

‘Then you take baby.’ My father took Tom from my mother’s arms, and she did not complain, did not hesitate.

‘You take baby and bring him back in April when snow gone. If you want, bring him back in September, after we have walls and roof.’

[...]

The inspector slammed the door down on us. (Sileika, 13)

Clearly, irony in *Buying on Time* functions as a rhetorical strategy that challenges the authority of dominant discourses to construct Canadian national identity: it is the English “centre” that captures the gaze of the ethnic “margin” and becomes a source of mockery and linguistic subversion. As a narrative form of the multicultural aesthetic, irony opens up a space of creative resistance where the *pedagogical* imperative of Canada’s discourse of the nation is displaced by the *performative* move of the ethnic subject, through whom the nation itself emerges as Renan’s “daily plebiscite”, a living principle of the people. (Renan, 19)

Unlike Sileika’s characters, Guilford’s protagonist needs the otherness of her Lithuanian relatives to overcome her own sense of alienation in Canada. She remembers her childish frustrations when her

grandmother spoke Lithuanian in a street in Toronto:

When she met an acquaintance, my grandmother let loose a stream of talk into the air. I squinted up into the thin April sun. These words, spoken only in the hot, close privacy of church and home, were like birds let out too soon into the cruel spring air, birds whose membranes were still wet and stuck together and whose bones were too fragile for flight. They would not survive.

“Stop”, I cried, frightened, yanking on my grandmother’s basket. (Guilford, 72)

Aldona’s reaction to her grandmother’s use of Lithuanian in Canada is suggestive of her feelings of shame about not being English and thus “natural”, dominant and safe. The episode reflects Guilford’s response to the discourse of the nation, in which Aldona feels alien as an ethnic, and therefore marginal, body: she is trapped in the ironies of multiculturalism which preserve her difference only to distance her from power. However, as she travels to Lithuania, the narrator finds that access to the discourse of the nation may be granted through her observations of the external Other – one that, in Aldona’s view, displaces her own sense of self.

The Lithuanian characters in *The Embrace* operate as a metonymy of the oppressed nation: they are the native informants of Aldona’s travel narrative. As such, they are largely perceived as a single mass – inarticulate and indiscriminate:

Suddenly, they appear, a ring of faces with dark eyes, wide cheekbones and gold teeth. They stand staring, a circle of silent stone. Then, one by one, they step forward and shake hands. Uncle Pranas, Aunt Sofija, and six of my seven cousins – Daiva, Grazina, Jurgis, Ausra, Andrius, Danute – each one married, each with

children. Twenty-seven of dry kisses fall upon my cheeks. Twenty-seven whispered names rustle past my ears like dead leaves. Again, we fall silent. (Guilford, 13)

Aldona’s rhetoric is somewhat reminiscent of Margaret Atwood’s translation of Susanna Moodie’s cultural imaginary in *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*. Much like the animals in Atwood’s poems, the Lithuanian characters of *The Embrace* “have the faces of no-one” (Atwood, 31) – they are the ultimate strangers welcoming the anthropological gaze of the Western tourist. Aldona’s narrative records the impressions of her “traveling eyes” which see her relatives as tokens of cultural exotica, both objects of desire and repulsion. In reducing them to a single sign of difference, however, she uncovers her own complicity in the colonial system of meaning where signs refer to the binary opposition between Self and Other. Thus, Aldona’s search for cultural identity in Lithuania marks her attempts to convert the Other into the Same, while at the same time keeping the Other at a safe distance to avoid cultural contamination. No wonder that, for her, Lithuania remains a haunting spectre that has no voice and no effective presence.

As narrator and protagonist, Aldona is by no means what Barbara Godard calls a “faithful bigamist”, whose loyalties are split between two or more languages”. (Godard, 92) Guilford may well be interested in reclaiming Aldona’s Lithuanian heritage, however, this “desire” eliminates itself in the inconsistencies of the writer’s narrative technique. Formally, the novel consists of Aldona’s narration of her experiences of meeting relatives both in Lithu-

ania and in Canada, and Daiva's letters from Lithuania. Although, ideally, the two forms of discourse should be suggestive of a bakhtinian dialogue between the Lithuanian and Canadian parts of the family, in fact, the novel offers us but a single interpretation of culture and identity – that of the Canadian-born Aldona. Written predominantly in English, the “Lithuanian” letters operate as a reinforcement of Aldona's point of view in perceiving the differences between the Soviet propaganda and Canadian democracy. Daiva writes:

In Amerika, people do not have equal rights. Here, we are all equal. We have no unemployed... I have seen Amerika and Canada on television. You have much crime. Naturally, there is some here too, but not as much. (Guilford, 83)

Curiously enough, Guilford's narrator shows no sensibility to either the historical or ideological context of her cousin's language. Rather, Aldona accepts the Lithuania as it is mediated through the filter of communist ideology and offers her own observations only as a patronizing gaze at her ethnic relatives. In this, Guilford teaches the metropolitan consumer how to read the social script of Soviet Lithuania. Thus, Lithuania emerges as an ideological rather than a cultural entity, which in effect cannot speak for itself because Aldona's narrative seeks to contain the voice of the Other in its own discursive operations. This explains why the novel does not provide a reading of the very ideology that turns its Lithuanian characters into exotic Others, but reads Lithuanian identity through the lens of the metropolis-based Canadian narrator.

The ambivalence of Guilford's novel is that, although it imagines Lithuania rather than Canada, it seems to do so by recreating the dynamics of cross-cultural relationships in Canadian society, where ethnicity is simultaneously preserved and mystified by the displacing look of the mainstream. Similarly, the act of translating Lithuania for Canadian readers in *The Embrace* operates according to the laws of the multicultural conjuncture where difference is given value on the basis of its compliance with Canada's pedagogical narrative. By erasing the space of resistance against the anthropological gaze of the metropolitan narrator, Guilford's novel conforms to Canadian national pedagogy and reinforces the tradition of representation of cultural otherness in a form of *pastiche*, where the ambiguities of Canada's national imaginary are reinstated and consolidated.

From this vantage point, Guilford's strategy of representation is suggestive of the technology of exoticism that develops the consumer appeal of many of Canada's recent ethnic minority fictions. The limitations of cross-cultural dynamics in *The Embrace* partake of Huggan's observation that “As a technology of representation, exoticism is self-empowering; self-referential even, insofar as the objects of its gaze are not supposed to look back.” (Huggan, 14) The ways in which Aldona portrays her Lithuanian family are also suggestive of the logic of exoticism: Daiva and the other relatives are mirror images of Aldona herself – incorporated desires to belong in Canada, even if at the expense of their conscience.

Arguably, also, it is because Aldona sees so much of herself in her relatives that she

needs to emphasise their incommensurable difference from her Canadian self. During her visit in Soviet Lithuania, the narrator comments on how the environment imposes itself on her own self-perception:

The days move like molasses. Every morning, I wake filled with dread, and delay as long as possible the moment of coming down to the lobby, where they will be waiting, seated on the vinyl couches, silent as big, black birds. I, too, have started to walk with drooped head and shoulders, casting furtive glances about. I don't dare smile. I start to worry that I am becoming indistinguishable from those around me. That I will never get out. (Guilford, 29–30)

Again, there is not a hint of reflecting on the historical and ideological context in which Aldona finds herself dislocated. Rather, both history and ideology are taken for granted, ignoring the fact that they are human constructs which condition the ways we make sense of the world. This results in what Huggan calls “the aesthetics of decontextualisation” and “commodity fetishism”, through which the technology of exoticism domesticates otherness and promulgates cultural ignorance. (Huggan, 17) It is by fetishising the Lithuanian characters as strange, inarticulate, and inferior that *The Embrace* turns its Lithuanian cultural context into a marketable commodity which promises to satisfy the Western reader's curiosity about the Soviet system and Lithuanian “endurance”.

The dynamics of the multicultural conjuncture in *The Embrace* is somewhat reminiscent of the tradition of formula-writing that Northrop Frye deplored in his “Conclusion to a *Literary History of Canada*”: Guilford shows a reasonably low degree of self-reflection and follows in the steps of

previous ethnic minority writers, producing little more than a set of literary clichés filled with the charms of cultural exotica. By comparison, Sileika demonstrates an acute awareness of the limitations of fiction that deals with cross-cultural experiences. This may explain why *Buying on Time* is less concerned with selling the myth of Lithuania to its English-speaking audience than uncovering the Canadian imagination itself. In “Tempus Fugit”, the last story of the short story cycle, the brothers are considering their ethnic origin:

“You know what I hate about the name of the homeland?” Gerry finally asked.

“What?”

“The name.”

“It's just a name,” I said.

“Yeah, but it sounds corny.”

I said it out loud. “Lithuania.”

“Gerry's right,” said Tom. “It's embarrassing. And nobody knows where it is. It's one of those nonexistent countries.” (Sileika, 228)

On the one hand, the brothers' dialogue is indicative of the degree of assimilation they have achieved and the marginal role ethnicity plays in Canada's Lithuanian diaspora. On the other hand, it also testifies to the exoticism of Lithuania in the Canadian imagination, so that by refusing to write explicitly about Lithuania in his *Buying on Time*, Sileika refuses to gratify an ignorant Western audience with colourful bits of ethnic exotica. For Sileika's characters in Canada, therefore, Lithuania may remain a non-existent country, but significantly, it does not become a simulacrum of their cultural identity.

Unlike *Buying on Time*, *The Embrace* indulges in the simulations of cultural authenticity. Lithuania resurfaces as the

spectral Other that haunts the protagonist's conscience with a promise of the lost *arche*, an "authentic" cultural voice. However, on her trip to the lost "homeland" her impressions of the country are more reminiscent of a tourist's diary than a celebration of different voices and world-views. Guilford makes use of the metaphor of silence, emphasizing the divide between the Canadian and Lithuanian parts of the family: "Silence envelops us. Andrius, the cousin with the teapot face, flicks open his lighter, lights a cigarette, inhales, exhales. He gazes out the window. What next? I think. What happens now?" (Guilford, 18) Throughout the novel Aldona finds herself unable to speak, shocked as she is by the constraints of ideological discourse imposed on her and her relatives in Soviet Lithuania.

While both the narrator's and her relatives' silence is metaphorically suggestive of the Iron Curtain that separated the two parts of the world until 1989, it also operates as a marker of the multicultural aesthetic through which Canada's ethnic minority fictions mediate the cross-cultural encounters in Canadian society. In this respect, Aldona is inarticulate because she represents the impulse of ideological containment that is sublimated in multiculturalism as the discourse of power. In *The Embrace*, however, silence also becomes a convenient formula for the marketing of the inarticulate Soviet exotica and the narrator's self-pity. Aldona's silence and disgust in the face of the Soviet regime are the reflections of her own frustrations about growing up hyphenated between English Canada and the "lost" Lithuania. Seeing

as "the discourse of tourism generates a rhetoric of moral superiority" (Huggan, 196), it is not surprising that the narrator uses her tourist gaze to simultaneously "discover" and distance herself from her ancestral roots in order to overcome her sense of alienation. Inevitably, Aldona's "traveling eyes" make her Lithuanian relatives doubly displaced – first as victims of the Soviet regime and then as objects of Western, post/colonial exploration.

The intellectual efforts of Irene Guilford's *The Embrace* and Antanas Sileika's *Buying on Time* make them particularly interesting examples of how a creative consciousness may respond to the operations of Canada's multicultural conjuncture. While Guilford espouses the schematic pattern of individual trauma within a family context and invites the reader to participate in the nightmarish fantasy of the Western gaze directed at the Soviet Other, Sileika resorts to irony and parody as a narrative strategies that enable him to avoid ethnic stereotyping and escape the diasporic obsession with ancestral nostalgia and guilt. Thus by reinforcing the national imaginary of the Canadian state, Guilford produces a *pastiche* that replicates the ambiguities of multiculturalism and gratifies the expectations of the Western reader – i.e. translates the Other into a cultural fetish for a metropolitan consumer. Sileika's *irony*, on the other hand, unveils the internal ambiguities of Canada's national pedagogy and subverts this discourse from within, simultaneously embracing its Canadian readers in what Bhabha calls the *nation as narration*.

In other words, whereas Sileika's *Buying on Time* ironises the ideological pro-

cesses of identity-making in multicultural Canada, Guilford's *The Embrace* recreates the very ambiguity of Canadian discourse of multiculturalism that promotes cultural diversity by simultaneously aiming to contain it. Paradoxically then, the novel's title collapses upon itself, since by seemingly wishing to embrace the Other, Guilford's narrative distances and repudiates it. These may be the ultimate pitfalls of the *multi-*

cultural conjuncture: representations of cross-cultural encounters in aesthetically organized spaces become inevitably complicit in the operations of linguistic and ideological containment that characterize the disciplinary gaze of Canada. Not surprisingly, writers are tempted to market cultural difference as predictable and pacified exoticism rather than as an act of defamiliarization that has an ironic twist.

REFERENCES

- Atwood, Margaret, 2001: *Eating Fire: Selected Poetry 1965–1995*, London: Virago Press.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail, 2004: *The Dialogic Imagination*, Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Benett, Donna, 2004: "English Canada's Postcolonial Complexities", Sugars, Cynthia, ed., *Unhome-ly States: Theorizing English Canadian Postcolonialism*, Toronto: Broadview Press.
- Bessner, Neil, 2003: "What Resides in the Question, 'Is Canada Postcolonial?'" Moss, Laura, ed., *Is Canada Postcolonial? Unsettling Canadian Literature*, Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- Bhabha, Homi, 1995: "DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation", Bhabha, Homi, ed., *Nation and Narration*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Brydon, Diana, 2004: "Reading Postcoloniality, Reading Canada", Sugars, Cynthia, ed., *Unhome-ly States: Theorizing English Canadian Postcolonialism*, Toronto: Broadview Press.
- Frye, Northrop, 1995: *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination*, Toronto: Anansi.
- Godard, Barbara, 2003: "Translation Poetics, from Modernity to Post-Modernity", Susan Petrili, ed., *Translation Translation*, Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi.
- Guilford, Irene, 1999: *The Embrace*, Toronto: Guernica.
- Huggan, Graham, 2001: *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Hutcheon, Linda, ed., 1992: *Double Talking: Es-says on Verbal and Visual Ironies in Contemporary Canadian Art and Literature*, Toronto: ECW Press.
- Hutcheon, Linda, 1995: *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Kamboureli, Smaro, 1998: "The technology of ethnicity: Canadian multiculturalism and the language of law", David Bennett, ed., *Multicultural States: Rethinking Difference and Identity*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Lawson, Alan, 2004: "Postcolonial Subject and the 'Settler' Subject", Sugars, Cynthia, ed., *Unhome-ly States: Theorizing English Canadian Postcolonialism*, Toronto: Broadview Press.
- Padolsky, Enoch, 2004: Olga in Wonderland: Canadian Ethnic Minority Writing and Post-Colonial Theory", Sugars, Cynthia, ed., *Unhome-ly States: Theorizing English Canadian Postcolonialism*, Toronto: Broadview Press.
- Pivato, Joseph, 2003: *Echo: Essays on Other Literatures*, Toronto: Guernica.
- Pratt, Mary Louise, 2003: *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Renan, Ernest, 1995: "What is a Nation?", Bhabha, Homi, ed., 1995: *Nation and Narration*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Sileika, Antanas, 1997: *Buying on Time*, Toronto: The Porcupine's Quill.
- Sugars, Cynthia, ed., 2004: *Unhome-ly States: Theorizing English Canadian Postcolonialism*, Toronto: Broadview Press.

MULTIKULTŪRALIZMO UŽBURTI: IRENE GUILFORD „GLĖBYS“ IR ANTANO ŠILEIKOS „GYVENIMAS IŠSIMOKĖTINAI“

Rūta Šlapkauskaitė

S a n t r a u k a

Straipsnyje aptariamos pokolonijinių studijų teikiamos teorinės perspektyvos Kanados multikultūrinės literatūros analizei ir interpretuojami lietuvių kilmės Kanados rašytojų du kūriniai – Antano Šileikos apsakymų rinkinys *Gyvenimas išsimokėtina* ir Irenos Guilford romanus *Glėbys*. Suaktualinant kolonijinės kanadiečių istorijos patirtis, išryškina mos multikultūralizmo diskurso vidinės prieštaros – jo atvirai skelbiamas išsipareigojimas laikytis hibridinių tautinio tapatumo formų – ir latentinė, t. y. slapta, kolonijinės galios struktūrų nostalgija,

per kurias kultūrinė kitybė Kanadoje paverčiama egzotikos objektu. Grožinėje literatūroje dėmesys kultūrinei egzotikai aiškinamas *multikultūrinės estetikos* samprata, nusakančia estetinį ir ideologinį meninės sąmonės santykį su multikultūralizmu kaip kanadiečių tautą aprašančiu ir disciplinuojančiu diskursu. Tad Šileikos apsakymų ciklo ir Guilford romano analizėje bandoma atskleisti ir apibūdinti naratyvines strategijas, per kurias šie du tekstai įsiterpia į Kanados diskursyvinės steigties ir diasporinių tapatybių egzotizavimo procesą.

Gauta 2008 02 26

Priimta publikuoti 2008 05 10

Autorės adresas:

Anglų filologijos katedra

Vilniaus universitetas

Universiteto g. 5, LT-01513 Vilnius

El. paštas: ruta_slapkauskaite@yahoo.ca