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Mythical Canada in Polish Minds: the Image of Canada in Polish Literature

In Poland, although in-depth knowledge of Canada is rather meager, the country of the maple leaf invariably carries positive connotations. In the popular imagination, Canada is typically perceived as a land of plenty, offering practically unlimited possibilities of development for its citizens. It is also seen through the prism of its natural environment and Aboriginal Peoples, and this is why the country is enveloped in an aura of mystery and adventure. Such a perception of Canada stems not so much from broad media coverage and ever-present cultural as well as political influence, as is the case of the USA, but largely from a few popular literary works published throughout the 20th century. Among them there are translations of a few Canadian books which are popular in Poland, as well as a few books on the subject of Canada written by Polish authors.

The idea for this paper came to me from reading the book *National Dreams – Myth, Memory and Canadian History* by Daniel Francis. Its author attempts to "locate and describe some of the most persistent images and stories in Canadian history." These "core myths," as he calls them, are the ones which "seem to express the fundamental beliefs that Canadians hold about themselves" (Francis 10). The word "myth" is used in the publication in reference to important images, stories and legends expressing "important truths" (Francis 11) without the negative assumption defining the word as "an unproved collective belief that is accepted uncritically" (Webster 946), and thus associated with falsehood and inaccuracy. Still, Francis explicitly stresses, "Myths idealize. They select particular events and institutions which seem to embody important cultural values and elevate to the status of a legend" (Francis 11). In his book, he presents and to a certain extent confronts, but does not try to deconstruct entirely, some of the most cherished Canadian myths: the myth of the Canadian wilderness and North, the myth of the country's unity, and some other eminent Canadian symbols such as the Canadian Pacific Railway (RCP) and Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP).

Having taught Canadian classes for almost a decade, I became used to certain cherished Polish myths about Canada. In Poland, although in-depth knowledge

about Canada is rather meager, in the popular consciousness the country of the maple leaf invariably carries positive connotations. In the popular imagination, Canada is typically perceived as a land of plenty, offering practically unlimited possibilities of development for its citizens. There is a deep-rooted belief that this country is especially hospitable for immigrants and constantly canvasses for new inhabitants – especially those who are hard-working, willing to take up new challenges and face the vagaries of Canadian weather. Poles perceive Canada mainly through the prism of its natural environment or Aboriginal Peoples, and this is why the country is enveloped in an aura of mystery, adventure, myths and incredible stories (Reczyńska 75). Such a perception of Canada stems not so much from broad media coverage and ever-present cultural as well as political influence, as is the case of the USA, but largely from a few popular literary works published throughout the 20th century.

The literary picture of Canada has been constructed in the minds of Polish readers both on the basis of translations of a few Canadian books that are popular in Poland, as well as a few books on the subject of Canada by Polish authors. For Polish readers, literary encounters with Canada usually begin in their early teens due to the immense popularity of works by Lucy Maud Montgomery. Three Polish translations of the novels about red-haired Anne were published already before WWII: *Anne of Green Gables* (1911), *Anne of the Island* (1931), and *Anne of Avonlea* (1935). Since their publication, they have been shaping the image of Canada in the minds of Polish readers, not only young ones. During WWII, Polish soldiers were issued copies of Montgomery's books as part of their equipment, to help them recall happy family life (Rubio 751; Buchholtz, "Z myślą o młodym czytelniku" 268). After the war, *Anne of Green Gables* was placed on the reading list for Polish primary schools, and the serene atmosphere of Prince Edward Island described in the first and subsequent parts of the multi-volume saga by Lucy Maud Montgomery became the most deeply rooted image of Canada in Poland. Similarly, the saga about the Whiteoak family, by Mazo de la Roche, has constituted another popular source of knowledge about Canada (although not to the same extent as novels by Montgomery). Still, from the novels of both of these writers, their Polish readers get a rather romanticized vision of the Maritime Provinces and Ontario, which can easily lead them to the assumption that Canada is practically only white and British, with hardly any ethnic diversity or social problems (Sojka 215).

Canada is also associated by young Polish readers with adventure, firsthand encounters with nature and First Nations thanks to the Polish translation of *The Adventures of Sajo and Her Beaver People* by Archibald Stansfeld Belaney, alias Grey Owl. The book, describing "a simple story of two Indian children and their well-loved animal friends" in "a part of North America as it was before the white man discovered it" (Grey Owl), was published in Poland in 1938. It had many reprints afterwards, and in 2008 was reintroduced to Polish children when it was included in a very popular book series published under the auspices of a national campaign popularizing reading, called "All of Poland Reads to Kids." Belaney's book helped to imprint in the minds of Polish readers the image of the Canadian wilderness, with its abundant wildlife and the need of its protection. The image was all the more powerful because the majority of Polish readers believed that the book had actually been written by an Ojibwa Indian – it was published under a pen name, WA-SHA-QUON-ASIN (Grey Owl), and began with the following statement:

> While the events recorded in this modest tale did not, in all instances, occur in the chronological order here appointed, all of them have taken place within my knowledge. Indeed, most of them are recorded from personal experience and from first-hand narrations by the participators themselves (Grey Owl).

The story of the Indian children and a pair of beavers reared by them captures the minds of Polish readers even more so as it is accompanied by illustrations drawn by the author himself, in which he has "made no attempt at artistry" (Grey Owl), but rather sought to explain and illustrate certain phenomena to those who read his book.

Older readers build their image of Canada from the reading of novels by Margaret Atwood and, more recently, short stories by the first Canadian literary Nobel Prize winner, Alice Munro. Margaret Atwood, whose nine books have been translated into Polish, is primarily responsible for the creation of the image and myth of Canadian nature. She pits civilization against nature, presenting the Canadian wilderness as demanding, severe and dangerous. The physical survival of a human being in the remote regions of the Canadian natural world often constitutes the core issue of her texts, but she also refers to a spiritual unity with nature, which can help an individual to survive in the contemporary, urbanized world. Alice Munro, whose collections of short stories have been discovered more recently by readers in Poland (her first book appeared in Polish translation only in 2009) will probably reaffirm the picture of Canada seen through the prism of a small town, rural Ontario and intricacies of human relations pictured against a background of everyday events.

Among few Polish authors who have taken Canada as inspiration for their books, four have managed to attract a substantial number of readers, and in this way have contributed to the construction of a literary image of Canada in Poland. Within the scope of adventure and report literature, the palm of leadership definitely belongs to Arkady Fiedler (1894-1985), who is the author of three travelogues, written on the basis of his six trips to Canada between 1935 and 1980. The first of these, *Kanada pachnąca żywicą* (*Canada Smells of Resin*)[1], published in 1937, presents an account of the author's travels through Quebec, in the vicinity of the St. Lawrence, Lievre and Osklelanoe Rivers. Its sequel, published in 1965, *Znowu kusząca Kanada. Indianie, bizony, szczupaki* (*Canada Lures Once Again: Indians, Buffalos and Pikes*), introduced to Polish readers the Rocky Mountains and part of the North West Territories. The last of the Canada-themed books written by Arkady Fiedler in cooperation with his son, Marek Fiedler, is entitled *Ród Indian Algonkinów* (*The Race of Algonquin Indians*). It was published in 1984, just one year before the author's death. It begins with the fictional story of Iwan Iserhoff and his descendants, pictured in the setting of 17th--19th century historical events, and ends with an account of the authors' encounters with Canadian Algonquin Indians, among them John Iserhoff, a direct descendant of Iwan.

The other three Polish authors presenting Canada to Polish readers and who, in my opinion, can be given the largest credit for creating the literary image of Canada in Polish minds are Melchior Wańkowicz, Jarosław Abramow-Neverly and Jacek

[1] Unfortunately, the majority of Polish books referred to in this paper have not been translated into English. Unless stated otherwise in the bibliography, all titles and quotations within the text have been translated by the author of the paper.

Machowski. The first two of the above-mentioned writers concentrated on the issue of immigration to Canada, though in totally different historical periods. Melchior Wańkowicz wrote a novel about Polish immigrants seeking a promised land in Canada at the turn of the 20th century entitled *Tworzywo*, which was first published in 1960 and as the only of Polish books about Canada was translated into English under a different title: *Three Generations* (1973). Jarosław Abramow-Newerly is the author of *Pan Zdzich w Kanadzie* (*Mr. Zdzich in Canada*), a humorous novel about the life of Polish immigrants in Toronto in the 1980s, first published in 1991. The book by Jacek Machowski entitled *Inuit – opowiadania eskimoskie* (*Inuit – Eskimo Stories*) published in 1999, is totally different in character from the other ones. Even though the above-mentioned publications are not similar to each other in respect of literary genres and content, they share one common feature – they build a literary representation of Canada based on three prevailing motifs: Canadian nature, Canada as a country of immigrants and Canadian Aboriginal Peoples.

Nature, especially the Canadian wilderness and far north, has always been a subject of fascination for writers of all nationalities. In Poland, especially the travelogues of Arkady Fiedler, by virtue of their genre, are mainly responsible for construction of the notion of Canadian nature in the minds of their readers, and, to a certain extent, also in the minds of those who have never had a chance to become acquainted with Fiedler's books. Particularly *Canada Smells of Resin*, with its immense popularity before WWII and reprints in the 1960s and 1970s, introduced to Poland the stereotypical association of Canada with the smell of resin, abundant wildlife and boundless expanses of land. Although the book, due to the unusual, archaic language used by its author, does not read well nowadays and is no longer popular, the connection of Canada with resin from its title still functions in Poland as the primary association with Canada. It is solidified in the Polish consciousness as one of the Canadian symbols (Reczyńska 76-77).

Canadian nature, as pictured by Fiedler, means an endless abundance of fauna and flora, completely absorbing anyone who truly wants to become acquainted with it. In the description of Canadian nature, the wilderness constitutes the most important element. In Fiedler's reportage, it is mainly:

> […] lush and lively/vital forest. Circulation of sap in the local trees must be much brisker than in our European trunks. What is striking is the great variety of forestation […] oaks, hazels, beeches, aspens, ashes, lindens, cedars, spruces, firs, pines and species unknown to me. All of them similar to our European tress, but still somehow different […] in the clatter of life everything was stronger, richer and merrier (Fiedler, *Kanada pachnąca żywicą* 22-23).

In Fiedler's description of Canadian forests, their vastness and enormity is inconceivable and unimaginable for Europeans. "Local wilderness stuns by its limitless, empty space. It is a powerful narcotic. It is a fantastic, magnetic and captivating power. And a dangerous one" (Fiedler, *Kanada pachnąca żywicą* 22-23). The author concentrates on the process of "nature taming" as during his travels he has come to the conclusion that it is impossible to subordinate it or to unravel all of its mysteries. In such extreme conditions, a human being, even with all of mankind's notable and outstanding technological achievements, remains just a "meager particle" (Fiedler, *I znowu kusząca Kanada* 159) of the wilderness, and the majority of human attempts to subjugate Canadian nature, especially in the far north, are doomed to failure.

Extreme weather conditions combined with the vastness of the country pose a great danger to any human being, especially when left alone. Fiedler mentions numerous examples of people going insane because of loneliness in the Canadian wilderness or on its prairies.

> The wilderness in the north each year takes a substantial toll on strayed wanderers. Even the trappers, well-acquainted with life in the wild, occasionally fall victim to a certain fuddle and for instance lose their sense of direction. […] Recently, a trapper, because of such a peculiar fuddle, was walking for many weeks north, instead of south, heading towards certain death from exhaustion and hunger. […] Loneliness is the greatest specter of the north. Almost every trapper, living in the wilderness for a few years without any company, became strange […]. The winter months were the most difficult for the lonely people, when even the animals kept to their hideaways and the only sound which a lonely man could hear in the wilderness was the sound of his own steps or voice (Fiedler, *Kanada pachnąca żywicą* 139).

Melchior Wańkowicz, in *Three Generations*, also analyzes feelings of loneliness and fear in his protagonists, who are immigrants starting new farms in the Canadian wilderness or on its prairies in the early 20th century. It was especially a problem for women, who stayed on their farms alone for several weeks, when their men went in search of gainful employment that would supplement tight home budgets.

> The first year Mother Gasior, in her dread of the forest, had spent seven weeks locked up in the house with nothing but a bag of flour. Now, six years later, her daughter-in-law, mistress of an honest-to-God farm, would not set her foot any distance from the house even in broad daylight, let alone at night when nothing in the world would have induced her to step outside the door […]. But then the forest, too, seemed of late to direct against them every manner of living creature. It was whippoorwill season, and all night long the pesky birds would sound their piercing, nerve-racking signal so that the whole woods rang with it. […] Snuggling the baby against her, Hanka spent long nights listening to this infernal chorus […]. One bright, moonlit night Hanka heard grunts and sounds of noisy lapping right in front of the cabin. She peered out of the window, and flung herself back, terrified: a bear was drinking milk from the pail […]. From then on the sly brute returned every night looking for milk, and at times would even scratch at the door (Wańkowicz 96-97).

It seems that such a picture of Canadian nature – wild and impenetrable, but also enchanting and captivating – became archetypal in Polish literature thanks to the texts by Fiedler and, to a certain extent, also Wańkowicz. Both of the above-mentioned authors follow a popular trend which can be observed in Canadian literature, analyzing the influence (very often a destructive one) of unbridled nature on the lives of the people inhabiting remote and sparsely populated parts of the country. Nevertheless, in Polish books, the descriptions of the harshness of the Canadian climate and unimaginable vastness of the country inspire in their readers respect rather than fear. This issue was referred to by Ryszard Kapuściński, a renowned Polish reporter, in his book *Imperium*. In this book, Kapuściński describes various parts of the Russian empire and, in one of the chapters, when describing Siberia he compares it to the northern outposts of Canada, stressing that although these regions share equally adverse weather conditions, the Canadian north does not arouse the same kind of fear and horror as that which is aroused by the very name of Siberia.

> In many states there exist icy territories, lands that for the greater part of the year are frozen over, dead. Such, for instance, are vast stretches of Canada. […] And yet, it does not occur to anyone to frighten children with: 'Wash your hands or they will send you to Canada!' Or: 'Play nicely with that little girl or they will deport you to America!' (Kapuściński 27).

The author further explains that northern Canada, notwithstanding its harsh weather, is a place where people can lead a normal, though difficult, life. There, "quite simply, there is no dictatorship, nobody puts anyone in chains, nobody imprisons anyone in camps, dispatches him to work in hellish frost, to a certain death. In those frozen lands, man has one antagonist – the cold. Here [Russia], as many as three – the cold, hunger and armed force" (Kapuściński 27).

The deep and unshakable conviction that Canada is a land of plenty, offering almost limitless possibilities of development for the immigrants coming to this country, constitutes the second leitmotif visible in Polish literature and solidified in Polish culture. Readers in Poland receive such a picture of Canada mainly from *Three Generations* by Melchior Wańkowicz. The book, first published in 1960, is the outcome of the author's great trans-Canadian travels in 1950 and 1955, and several smaller trips taken between these years (Wańkowicz 5). It is not a classic example of reportage, as Wańkowicz intertwined the life stories of real people with fictional places and characters. On the basis of the life history of Józef Gąsior, Antoni Bombik, Paweł Klakot and Jan Pasik, Wańkowicz presents the main reasons for Polish emigration to Canada at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century.

His characters, barely literate small farm holders from Galicia, one of the poorest and most backward regions of the Austrian part of partitioned Poland, a refugee escaping from the Prussian partition, and the son of a factory worker from industrial Łódź in the Russian partition, manage to become full citizens over the course of only a few years, though they have to overcome all of the hardships of newly arrived immigrants in an unknown land. They become holders of farms which would take a few generations to build in their country of origin. "Seven years earlier, when he became a tenant farmer, Gasior had not expected that he would ever be able to buy four hundred and sixty acres of cultivated land […]" (Wańkowicz 289). Their success is, to a certain extent, the result of luck and coincidence, but much more a result of the ability to struggle against the adversities of fortune retained from the old country, sacrifice and hard work, combined in Canada with favorable economic conditions and possibilities open to anybody who is not afraid to take on new challenges.

> […] The ignorance of the Husiatynia peasant was amply rewarded by Canada as usual. Gasior […] had invested in Canada and now Canada was ready to pay him interest. […] The country rewarded him when he moved into an earth hovel in the middle of a wild forest and settled there without tools or farm implements; it rewarded him when […] he decided to be a sharecropper; it rewarded him for his peasant reactions to drought and hail, for the fact that he used frozen wheat as cattle fodder […]. The country rewarded him when he purchased a tractor before buying a car and finally when he decided not to sell after demobilization but stored his wheat instead. At the end of December, Gasior received two dollars and forty-five cents for a bushel of wheat (Wańkowicz 291).

Of course the author of the above-mentioned book also tackles the adversities of life of his characters and difficulties which are typical for all recent immigrants,

such as the feeling of aching loneliness, uprooting, yearning for the old, well-known model of life or relatives left behind in the country of origin. Still, the general message of *Three Generations* is so optimistic that its readers can easily build in their minds an image of Canada as a mythical land of Eden.

This stereotypical connection of wealth and Canada present in the Polish national consciousness stemmed from Fiedler's *Canada Smells of Resin*. It can also be seen, for example, in literary works belonging to Polish war literature, for example in Tadeusz Borowski's Auschwitz collection of concentration camp stories, *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*. In the Auschwitz concentration camp, the word "Canada" was used in reference to the labor kommando of prisoners whose task was to unload the transports of people destined for the gas chambers, and also in reference to large warehouses in a section of Birkenau where Jews and people from other nations doomed for extermination were deprived of their belongings immediately after arriving. All things of any value whatsoever were sorted there, and thus the place was perceived by prisoners as a place of abundance, designating wealth and well-being, since those who worked there could occasionally smuggle some of the robbed goods to the camp (Borowski 30). Literary description of the events taking place in Auschwitz's "Canada" can be found in one of the stories, a dispassionate and brutally honest account of experiences inside the Canada Kommando. "And Canada, our Canada, which smells not of maple forests but of French perfume, has fortunes in diamonds and currency from all over Europe" (Borowski 30). The members of the kommando, taking advantage of their "privileged" position, took some booty from the goods seized from incoming prisoners. "The Canada men, weighted down under a load of bread, marmalade and sugar and smelling of perfume and fresh linen, line up to go. For several days the entire camp will live off this transport" (Borowski 49). It should be noted that in the English translation of the text, Barbara Vedder decided to omit the sentence about the smell of Canada, a clear reference to Arkady Fiedler, which is present in the Polish version of the text and was, of course, easily recognizable for Polish readers. The translator, knowing that the book would be read by foreigners who do not know the book by Fiedler, decided to replace the smell of resin with the smell of maple forest – the association typical for readers from other parts of the world.

Mr Zdzich in Canada, a novel by Jarosław Abramow-Neverly, another Polish author who contributed greatly to the construction of the image of Canada in the minds of Poles, constitutes an antithesis of the above-mentioned texts and, in a certain way, deconstructs the myth of Canada as a land of plenty and of limitless wildlife. The publication is completely different from the works by Fiedler and Wańkowicz. First of all, it is not a travelogue or report book, but rather a humorous novel set in a totally different era (the 1980s) and not in the wilderness but in the urban setting of Toronto. The novel constitutes a brilliant satire on resourceful and inventive Polish immigrants who try to lay down roots in a new country but have certain problems with understanding and accepting the Canadian model of life, and thus resort to solving various life problems not fully in accordance with the letter of Canadian law.

The character of Mr Zdzich has been compared by reviewers to the Good Soldier Švejk from Hasek's famous novel, with his simple life philosophy, flowery language and kind-hearted humor (Odojewski, book cover). The main protagonist, Mr Zdzisław Szczawiński, is presented in the book as a "tall and strongly built

muscleman in his early forties," one of many sponsored Poles who came to Canada after the introduction of martial law in Poland. The adventures of Mr Zdzich, described with a huge dose of subtle humor, constitute a literary metaphor for immigrant life of Poles coming to Canada in the 1980s for economic and political reasons, who try to make the most of the possibilities offered by the Canadian immigration program. The main protagonist and his family, broken free from the limitations of the iron curtain, try to adjust themselves to life in a capitalist economy and free society of a democratic country. Mr Zdzich covers his feeling of loss and lack of adjustment with the bravado of a smarty-pants, criticizing the various peculiarities of Canadian life which he finds different from what he knew in the home country. He tries to find the "weaknesses" of his new homeland which would help to support his thesis that Canada is not as ideal as is generally believed in Poland, where the myth of the idyllic and rich country of the maple leaf is cherished. Mr Zdzich, although he may not realize it fully, also cherishes the myth of Canada as a land of plenty, though he associates Canadian affluence with limitless welfare protection which, as he believes, should be provided by the government. He expresses the opinion that, since the Canadian state decided to accept him and his family as immigrants, it is obliged to settle him down without much effort on his side. Thus, he initially represents a demanding attitude. Being reminded that the Canadian state covers the costs of his apartment and living expenses for one year, Mr Zdzich flares up: "What money. Let's be serious. If I had these dollars in Poland… Oh yes, it would mean something. But here? Here, where a crummy celery can cost a dollar? I am not going to economize on the baby's food and stint on everything. At last we are in Canada!" (Abramow-Neverly 7). He does not want to look for a job before the end of a one-year period, as he believes that first he should take the maximum advantage of his welfare benefit. It takes some time before the differences between the people belonging to western culture and a man brought up in a communist country and perceiving the world from the perspective of a socialist economy are leveled, and Mr Zdzich becomes accustomed, at least partially, to a Canadian law-abiding and orderly way of life, thus becoming a successful Canadian citizen, who, however, is rather critical towards Canadian reality and life model.

The main protagonist of the book is shocked by Canada's lack of historical tradition, which he would like to measure with the number of old buildings and historical monuments. Describing Toronto, he says:

> Canada, hell […]. Look! This is meant to be their main street. Yong Street or whatever it's called. […] The houses. Low. Cheap and trashy. A few sky-scrapers added to it, but the rest… […] Back country, my dear. Let's not delude. […] Have you seen here anything old? Historical? In our country, hell, every house could be a museum. Five hundred years, one thousand! Here, if they discover something which is, let's say, fifty years, wow! They erect a fence, provide a plate. And it is a historical monument for them. What kind of history do they have, dimwits?! One hundred years ago Indians were here. Yes, the prairie Indians with bows were riding horses through their Yong Street (Abramow-Neverly 6).

As visible in the last two sentences of the above quote, Mr Zdzich's knowledge about the history and life of the First Nations is also quite peculiar and, unfortunately, typical for the majority of Poles who invariably associate all Canadian Indian tribes with bows, arrows, war bonnets and buffalo-hunting.

Mr Zdzich is also scandalized by many other things which are taken for granted in Canada. For example, he feels uneasy about the use of the second person singular in contacts with unknown people. "They have such a beautiful form: sir. And they hardly ever use it" (Abramow-Neverly 36). Also, the permissive upbringing of children seems unacceptable to him. "A child can do everything here, you can do nothing. […] In Canada a brat is like a sacred cow in India. You can worship it, but do not dare to touch" (Abramow-Neverly 38). He is also shocked by publicly organized demonstrations of sexual minorities and the active life of Canadian seniors. Thus, Mr Zdzich's beginnings in Canada are, at least in his own mind, beset with obstacles, and the myth of Canada as the promised land seems far-fetched to him, as he does not realize that initial troubles result mainly from his demanding attitude combined with lack of understanding of Canadian social and cultural norms.

The picture of multiethnic and multicultural Canada constitutes the third leitmotif present in the Polish perception of this country. In the books by Arkady Fiedler, Canadian multiethnicity is practically reduced to Aboriginal Peoples – Indians and Métis. In *Canada Smells of Resin*, the Indian thread is rather marginal, but in the other two books by the same author, *Canada Lures Once Again – Indians, Buffalos and Pikes* and *The Race of Algonquin Indians*, Indian and Métis motifs are central. Fiedler describes the situation of Ojibwa and Cree Indians from Quebec and Ontario, also briefly mentioning the Iroquois from the basin of the St. Lawrence River and prairie Indians inhabiting Western Canada.

Generally, throughout his books, Fiedler consistently presents Canada as a country of huge economic development, civilization progress, prosperity, efficient and effective administration. However, when referring to the life and situation of Indians and the Métis population, certain flaws appear in this picture. The author tries to present to the Polish reader the situation of the above-mentioned aboriginal groups in a broader, historical and social context, yet he is not free from the prejudice of a white man, and in many of his descriptions of the situation of Indians and their life, the contemporary reader can easily trace white ethnocentrism. The situation of Indians is presented in his books as a "stain on Canadian honor" (Fiedler, *I znowu kusząca Kanada* 26). He refers to the history of early contact between the colonists and the Indians, presenting such problems as diseases, alcohol addiction, forced change of lifestyle and overdependence on help from white men.

> Each family acquired from 500 to 600 pelts on average, which they sold to Falkland, a Hudson Bay Company agent. In exchange they received goods: petrol, flour, clothes, traps. Not too much, just enough to keep them in constant dependence, yet to make sure that excesses and luxury would not turn the heads of the good people. The company also had to make a good profit (Fiedler, *Kanada pachnąca żywicą* 172).

According to Fiedler, such a situation was typical until WWII. After the war, in progressive and prosperous Canada, the problems of aboriginal societies became even more visible, "putting Canada to shame abroad" as "hundreds of years of neglect and crimes which were perpetrated on Indians throughout generations" (Fiedler, *I znowu kusząca Kanada* 26) were revealed, mainly due to a post-war renaissance of freedom movements in Africa and Asia, but also due to increased interest in the deposits of mineral resources located on Indian land as well as large-scale

investments, such as construction of the Alaska Highway. Canada, having an ambition to belong to the "avant-garde of progressive countries," decided to "radically shut down the mouths of United Nations malicious officers" and "make up for the wrongs in an express way" (Fiedler, *I znowu kusząca Kanada* 27). He further asserts that such sudden and ill-considered help, which "favors and bounties, falling on the Indian as if from the horn of plenty," poses to the Aboriginal Peoples a threat equally great as alcohol, European diseases and exploitation used to be. Sudden access to government funds and help programs disturbs the delicate balance in the Indian groups, killing their self-reliance, independence and will to take up gainful employment. "One and a half centuries ago, the Indians were intoxicated by deadly alcohol; today, the Indians are inebriated with an avalanche of Samaritan generosity" (Fiedler, *I znowu kusząca Kanada* 27).

Fiedler presents the economic situation of the Indian groups which he had visited as stable and satisfactory. He seems quite surprised that even in far-away locations they are comparatively well-dressed, live in decent houses and possess motor boats and cars.[2] The author risks the statement that in "many spheres of life they are better off than the white citizens," and "became some kind of mistaken caste of privileged lucky men." They do not have to pay taxes, so they are "free from this specter which strangles their white brothers" (Fiedler, *I znowu kusząca Kanada* 32), and additionally receive a full range of social protection: unemployment benefits and additional food subsidies, pensions, and single mother allowances. The author even established that it is profitable for Indians to have many children, as every month they receive additional allowance for every child and thus he attributes the high birth rate in Indian communities to the desire to acquire more money from social benefits. He also mentions house and farming grants, a full range of health care available even for inhabitants of the most remote locations, and free education for Indian children and youths at all levels. He enviously makes a remark about additional school feeding: "At school Indian children are fed with milk and biscuits – it is something that white children do not get" (Fiedler, *I znowu kusząca Kanada* 32).

Having presented all the help programs offered for the Aboriginal Peoples by the Canadian authorities, the author asks a rhetorical question: why are the Indians not grateful for all the generosity from Ottawa, why do they not take advantage of the opportunities that are open for them, why do they "resent white people"? (Fiedler, *I znowu kusząca Kanada* 32). According to Fiedler, the answer is connected with the fact that:

> Indians until nowadays actually remained hunters, fishermen, trappers, excellent experts of life in the wilderness and to a certain extent nomads. What was expected from them, however, was to miraculously jump into the white man's complex world of the second half of the 20th century and to feel comfortable in this perfectly alien world (Fiedler, *I znowu kusząca Kanada* 233).

[2] Fiedler's surprise may stem from the fact that he compared the material situation of Canadian Indian tribes with the situation of South American Indians with whom he had had contact during his earlier expeditions. It should be noted also that in 1965, i.e. the year of the book's publication, in Poland possession of a car was also synonymous with wealth and high social status.

Arkady Fiedler also refers to the fact that Indians and their culture are very often treated as a kind of commodity – sold in the form of cheap and trashy souvenirs or big shows during mass events like the Calgary Stampede or Indian Days in Banff. The same issue is also highlighted by Jacek Machowski in his book *Inuit – opowiadania eskimoskie* (*Inuit – Eskimo Stories*). His book is a combination of a scientific publication, providing well-grounded knowledge about the history, culture and art of the Inuit from all arctic regions (Siberia, Alaska, Canada and Greenland) and an anthology of their most popular legends and traditional stories. The author, an explorer but also a diplomat and law professor, writes in the introduction that his main aim is to present how the contemporary Inuit groups are trying to combine a modern way of life with their traditional values and culture (Machowski 9). He wants to show that the historical image of an Eskimo[3] solidified in the popular imagination by advertisements for refrigerators, ice cream and winter clothing, featuring "a smiling, slant-eyed and chunky man in a fur-hemmed anorak sitting in front of an igloo in the light of an aurora borealis, hunting in a leather kayak with a harpoon in his hand or speeding with his dog team through the immense iced desert" (Machowski 7-8), is no longer valid nowadays. Although only part of the book is devoted to the Canadian Inuit, the author makes his Polish readers aware of the fact that WWII constituted a breaking point in their history. After the war, due to the introduction of a new political order and division of the world into two separate blocks by the iron curtain, the Inuit of Canada suddenly emerged from obscurity at the edge of the Arctic peripheries of the Earth and became a part of the global political and economic game. Certain Inuit groups, especially from northern Quebec, were forcedly relocated further north, closer to the North Pole, in order to back Canadian territorial claims. The Canadian government also initiated an Inuit settlement campaign, which resulted in a dramatic change in their lifestyle, a "sudden and difficult developmental leap from the period of the late Paleolithic era […] straight into the era of atom and space technologies" (Machowski 8).

Machowski describes many years of Inuit's' determined efforts to make the government acknowledge and observe their rights. Intense negotiations aimed at defining their status and rights in Canada, leading to the creation of Nunavut, the Inuit homeland, in 1999, are also described in the Canada-related section of the publication.

[3] The author uses the word "Eskimo" interchangeably with the word "Inuit." However, he makes his readers acquainted with the fact that the word "Eskimo," officially adopted in 1932 as a uniform term to denote all Aboriginal Peoples belonging to the group, comes from the language of Algonquin Indians and denotes "raw meat eater." In the 1970s, this term was replaced by the word "Inuit," which comes from their own language and means "human being." The author justifies his decision to use both terms interchangeably with the argument, raised also by the people of the north themselves, that the term "Inuit" is too ethnocentric. However, he does not point out the fact that in Canada, the following terminological rule was introduced on the basis of section 35(2) of the Constitution Act, 1982: "(2) In this Act, 'aboriginal peoples of Canada' includes the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada. From that time on, it is an accepted practice and a general rule, that the term Inuit replaces the term Eskimo," and consequently the term Eskimo is not used in the contemporary context in reference to the Canadian Inuit. Source: *A Note on Terminology: Inuit, Métis, First Nations, and Aboriginal*, Inuit Tapirit Kanatami. Web. 10 October 2013. https://www.itk.ca/note-terminology-inuit-metis-first-nations-and-aboriginal.

Jacek Machowski's collection of Inuit legends and stories, apart from providing historical and political knowledge, makes Polish readers aware that the Inuit try to cultivate their traditions and symbols, combining them with the demands of modernity. Thus, the author introduces Inuit symbols, some of them associated by Poles with the Arctic but not necessarily with Canada – for example *igloo*, denoting a traditional lifestyle and fight for survival, or *Niqirtsuituq* (North Star), remaining the everlasting symbol of traditional leadership of Inuit elders. Other symbols important for the Canadian Inuit and introduced by the author are virtually unknown to average Polish readers, such as *inuksuk*, an Inuit stone monument and signpost which is also metaphorically perceived as the Inuit sign on the road to the future, or *qulliq*, which means an oil stone lamp, symbolizing the warmth and unity of Inuit families and communities. Through legends, he also introduces his readers to the fauna of the Canadian north, which in the past used to be the basis of existence and survival for the Inuit and now constitutes the shared heritage of the northern communities. In this way, apart from being acquainted with multiethnic Canada, Polish readers are once again referred to the mythical notion of Canadian nature, its wilderness, empty spaces and the severity of the far north.

In *Three Generations* by Wańkowicz, the Polish reader also gets a picture of Canadian immigrant, multiethnic society. In Wańkowicz's book, Polish immigrants function quite well within the mosaic of Ukrainians, Germans, Irishmen, Italians, Frenchmen, Scots and Swedes populating the Canadian prairie provinces. The author stresses the ability of peaceful coexistence and cooperation among immigrants who have completely different life experience, and admires the fact that they were able to put aside cultural differences as well as old conflicts and grievances retained from their countries of origin.

> Now the bank director had strongly urged Colonel MacManus to get in touch with 'Mister Gasior, one of the best farmers in the province,' and that is how the one-time laborer of Husiatynia County in Poland came to sit opposite the scion of a British aristocratic family in the office of a Canadian bank director. The aristocrat offered Gasior tobacco and was interested to know what blend the gentleman his neighbor used. […] Gasior kept a discreet silence on the subject of tobacco blends but he could and did say a great deal on the subject of wheat brands. As time went on the Colonel came to rely more and more heavily on Gasior's advice (Wańkowicz 399).

A very interesting picture of Canada's multiethnic society on the eve of WWII is also presented in the last chapter of the book. It describes the wedding ceremony of the children of the main protagonists. It is a Polish-Irish wedding, which is attended also by Ukrainian, German, Italian and Swedish relatives, friends and neighbors, thus the ceremony "[…] would in fact be Canadian, a gathering of the ethnic groups that made up the population of Alberta and Saskatchewan" (Wańkowicz 404).

So what is the image of Canada constructed in the minds of Polish readers like? Is the Polish version of Canadian myths concurrent with the most cherished Canadian ones presented by Daniel Francis? From the reading of the above-mentioned Canada-oriented publications, it seems that definitely the myth of the Canadian wilderness and the North is the prevailing one in Polish texts. In Polish literature, Canadian nature is presented as both breathtaking and dangerous, man's great ally and mortal enemy. The myth of the country's unity is also, to a certain extent, present in

some of the works, but mainly in the image of co-operation between various ethnic groups in the formation of their new Canadian homeland and their peaceful co-existence on Canadian soil. The two other important Canadian symbols discussed widely and in various contexts in Francis's analytical publication, namely the Canadian Pacific Railway (RCP) and Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), are only occasionally mentioned in Polish reportage and short stories, and thus do not seem to play any important role in the construction of the vision of Canada in the minds of Polish readers. Polish writers, however, managed to reinforce one Canadian myth which is not discussed or analyzed by Daniel Francis, namely the leitmotif ever-present in Polish literature of Canada as a land of plenty, providing limitless opportunities, a virtual heaven for its inhabitants. Such an image of Canada "has become to numerous Polish readers the objective and unalterable truth" (Buchholtz, "The Image of Canada" 404) and will probably largely outlive the popularity of the books which helped to create it.

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