



Return Visits: The European Background of Transcultural Life Writing

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ABSTRACT IN ENGLISH

In this article I read autobiographies by East Europeans who immigrated to Canada in connection with the Second World War as examples of transcultural life writing. My focus on the representation of return visits of these loyal Canadian citizens to their country of origin after 1989 reveals the underlying intention of relating the experience of life in a multicultural democratic society to the emergence of a new political consciousness in Eastern Europe. In my analysis I distinguish four types of concerns which try to bridge the past of their childhood experiences with the formation of a transcultural life in the 21st century: 1. Anna Porter's return visit to Hungary for family reunion and an encounter with history in *The Storyteller*; 2. Modris Eksteins's political motivation in *Walking Since Daybreak* as a historian who revisits his birthplace in Latvia as well as the stages of his displacement in German refugee camps for research on the history of the war years; 3. Janice Kulyk Keefer's private driving tour of the Ukraine and Poland and the discovery of new political realities in *Honey and Ashes*; 4. Lisa Appignanesi's search for the traces of the Holocaust in her native Poland in *Losing the Dead*. These reconnections with an earlier life from the Canadian perspective in transcultural life writings can be likened to the recent discussions of the constitution of transnational societies in a cosmopolitan world.

ABSTRACT IN GERMAN

Dieser Beitrag begreift Autobiographien von Osteuropäern, die im Zusammenhang mit dem 2. Weltkrieg nach Kanada eingewandert sind, als Beispiele transkultureller Lebensbeschreibungen. Er konzentriert sich auf die Darstellung

von Reisen dieser kanadischen Bürger/innen in ihre Heimatländer nach 1989 und die damit verbundene Intention, die Erfahrung des Lebens in einer multikulturellen kanadischen Gesellschaft mit dem Entstehen eines neuen politischen Bewusstseins in Osteuropa zu verbinden. In meiner Analyse unterscheide ich vier verschiedene Bemühungen, die Kindheitserfahrungen der Vergangenheit mit der Entwicklung eines transkulturellen Lebens im 21. Jahrhundert in Beziehung zu setzen: 1. Anna Porters Reise zu ihrer Familie in Ungarn und die Erfahrung einer veränderten historischen Wirklichkeit in *The Storyteller*; 2. Modris Eksteins' politische Motivation in *Walking Since Daybreak*, der als Historiker seinen Geburtsort in Lettland und die Stationen seiner Vertreibung in deutschen Flüchtlingsheimen für seine Forschung über den 2. Weltkrieg wiederbesucht; 3. Janice Kulyk Keefers Autofahrt durch die Ukraine und Polen und die Entdeckung neuer politischer Grenzen in *Honey and Ashes*; 4. Lisa Appignanesis Besuch der Holocaust-Monumente und -Archive in Polen in *Losing the Dead*. Diese Versuche der Wiedergewinnung von Kindheitserlebnissen aus der kanadischen Perspektive in transkulturellen Lebensbeschreibungen können mit aktuellen Diskussionen über die Entstehung transnationaler Gesellschaften in einer kosmopolitischen Welt in Verbindung gebracht werden.

Keywords: Transcultural life writing, East European Immigrants in Canada, return visits to Eastern Europe, transnational democracies, cosmopolitanism

The tradition of immigrant autobiographies represents an important place in the history of the classic countries of immigration: Australia, Canada and the USA (cf. Boelhower, 1982, Wong, 1991). Since the emergence of this genre of life writing at the beginning of the twentieth century significant changes in the conception and writing of immigrant lives have occurred. In the long list of well-known texts Mary Antin's *The Promised Land* (1912), Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976), and Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation: Life in a New Language* (1989) mark important stages of the genre's evolution and the different cultural contexts ranging from an uncritical embracement of the new country to a critical examination of difference. In this article I will concentrate on the recent phase of this type of life writing at the turn of this century looking at texts written by East Europeans who immigrated to Canada in connection with the Second World War. In the study of their autobiographies the space given to return visits of these New World citizens to their European homelands has been largely ignored. In my analysis I will focus on the importance of these return visits, which take place after the liberation from oppressive political regimes in a new European landscape. I will

argue that the immigrants' political status achieved in Canada can ideally be related to the emergence of a new political consciousness in their Eastern European homes. I will also argue that this cultural negotiation of a self between a country of familial origin and a country of residence contributes to the formation of a transcultural self and prefigures a transnational affiliation.

My choice of life writings with an East European background includes authors from Latvia, Hungary, Russia, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Ukraine. I realize that it is next to impossible to do justice to all of these texts and authors in one article. But the expanse of the geographical space of Eastern Europe is vital for my argument about the formation of new cultural selves and citizenships after the collapse of totalitarian regimes. Lisa Appignanesi from Poland, Modris Eksteins from Latvia, Irena F. Karafilly from Russia, Janice Kulyk Keefer from Ukraine, Anna Porter from Hungary, and Hanna Spencer from Czechoslovakia were born into families who had lived under the regime of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and experienced its forceful transformation in the course of the First World War. The presence of many different ethnic peoples in this region with frequently shifting borders and loyalties can be seen as an early example of multi-ethnic societies forming at the turn of this century, especially in North America and Australia, but also in a changing constitution of Europe. This background forms the basis of most life stories under examination here.¹

In *The Storyteller: Memory, Secrets, Magic and Lies* (2000) Anna Porter embeds her own personal story in a vast historical panorama of Hungary, in which the three generations of her own family become part of the succession of 14 generations which exemplify the history of Hungary from 1456 to the 1990s. The often bloody confrontations between different oppressors from the Huns, Romans and Turks to the Nazis and Soviets eventually leads to the escape first to New Zealand, then to Great Britain and eventually to Canada. The Latvian-born Modris Eksteins uses his professional skill as a historian at the University of Toronto to trace the colonization of the Baltic States by the German Hansa and the influence of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until the Baltic States gained independence in 1991. In *Walking Since Daybreak: A Story of Eastern Europe*,

¹ Other forms of life writing include interviews conducted with former relatives and friends by East European refugees who returned to their homeland for visits after the end of Soviet occupation. These memories and the experience of the return visit become the basis of their autobiographical reunion with their country of origin. See, e.g., Vieda Skultans' (1998) account of her return to Latvia, Eva Hoffman's (2010) journey through the new Eastern Europe, or Haldis Haukanes' (2005) collection of memories in the post-socialist Czech Republic.

World War II, and the Heart of Our Century (Eksteins, 1999), he begins his life story with the birth of his grandfather Jānis in 1874, the offspring of a relationship between a Latvian chambermaid and a Baltic-German baron. Such bi-cultural interrelations are part of many life stories, which easily transcend national borders or ethnic boundaries. Thus Janice Kuylik Keefer retells the stories of her grandmother and mother in *Honey and Ashes* (1998) and describes the origin of her family in the Ukrainian village Staromischna, which belonged to the newly created Polish Republic after the demise of the Habsburg Empire. A similar transfer occurs in Irena F. Karafilly's *The Stranger in the Plumed Hat* (2000) from the Russian Orthodox world of the 1920s in Orenburg to Poland at the outset of the Second World War, before the family migrates to Israel and then settles in Canada.

The shifting borders and multiple allegiances also show in the mixture and knowledge of several languages in Eastern Europe. In addition to the colonial master languages other linguistic means of communication develop which create a form of cultural syncretism before the two World Wars. All life writers refer to the linguistic capabilities of their parents, whose knowledge of Russian and Polish reemerges especially in times of distress. Jewish life writers refer to the multilingual Yiddish, which functioned as a lingua franca across all national boundaries. Threatened by the Fascist persecution of the Nazis, the survivors of the Holocaust reconstruct the stories of their family's escape from the memories of their parents and grandparents in the New World (see Lassner, 2008). The Czechoslovakian Hanna Spencer uses the form of diary (*Hanna's Diary, 1938–1941*, 2001) to record the story of her survival in Czechoslovakia, a country created after World War I when the Austro-Hungarian Empire had collapsed. Living in the area of the Sudeten Germans she writes six volumes of her diary in German, recording the political changes after the *Anschluss* of the Sudetenland in 1938 which affect her relation to her non-Jewish school-friend Hans Feiertag, a musician, who has to serve in the war. In 1941, she escapes Nazi persecution by fleeing to England and eventually makes her way to Canada. Lisa Appignanesi begins the reconstruction of her Jewish past in *Losing the Dead* (1999) at the moment of her parents' illness in old age. Since she learned only a little Yiddish and Polish as a child, she cannot understand her father who uses the Yiddish language of his Polish past before his death from diabetes in a London hospital, nor can she communicate with her mother whose memory is locked in her Polish life when she suffers from Alzheimer's disease.

The ignorance of the mother tongue and the apparent rejection of the East European past are mostly contingent on the needs to adapt to

the new reality of the North American environment and the initial shock of discrimination. The positive experience of a world of different languages and cultures in Europe, which existed before the rule of totalitarian regimes, was devalued by painful persecution and flight on the one hand, and the wish to embrace the new political rhetoric of liberty and freedom on the other. All life writers, examined here, conceive of their acculturation to Canadian society eventually as a story of success. It is from the perspective of an accomplished professional and private life in the New World that immigrant autobiographers start telling their lives, in which the Canadian part proceeds in a straightforward narrative while the European parts have to be recovered from fragments of memories. Moments of personal crisis, such as the illness and imminent death of parents, coincide with historical moments of change in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Communist Block in 1989. Both the private and the public ruptures in life and history become the primary motivation for writing one's life.² The final stage to complete the picture for the self-narrative is a return trip to the place of origin in Eastern Europe, undertaken in the 1990s. In the following I will focus on the autobiographical representation of four of these return visits more in detail. As vital parts of their life stories they also stand for specific encounters with history: 1. Family Reunion and History; 2. Political Motivation and History; 3. Family Tourism and History; 4. The Dead and History.

All of the life writers and return visitors try to establish a family continuity in relation to history and contribute directly or indirectly to the new political climate based on their experiences of cultural differences in multicultural Canada. As I have argued elsewhere the composite narration of life in these two worlds constitutes a new form of transcultural life writing (Hornung 2009, 2010).

1. FAMILY REUNION AND HISTORY

Anna Porter's *The Storyteller: Memory, Secrets, Magic and Lies* is both an homage to her beloved grandfather Vili and a celebration of the spirit of freedom in her homeland Hungary. Her grandfather was her "childhood hero" (Porter 2000, p. 5) and had taken on her father's role who had separated from the family. Vili's liberal spirit and rejection of all forms of

² This also applies to life stories about the experience of totalitarian regimes written by residents in or refugees from post-Soviet Eastern Europe. See the contributions to *Life Writing Matters in Europe* by Martins Kaprans (2012), Leena Kurvet-Käosaar (2012), and Ioana Luca (2012).

oppression represent the freedom-loving Hungarian position. Anna's conscious memory as a 12-year-old girl of the unsuccessful Hungarian uprising against the Communist occupation forces in October 1956, which led to the family's flight to New Zealand, stands for the intimate interrelation of the personal and the political, which informs the autobiographical narrative. Anna remembers painfully her grandfather's sentence to hard labor for his opposition against the Communists and his eventual escape to New Zealand, which leaves her without his protection. This combination of the personal and the political in the Hungarian tradition also inspires the return visits. It is actually the intention of her two daughters who first make Anna Porter think of making a return trip to her homeland. Although Anna calls them "true Canadians," she realizes to what extent "the old stories that filled [her] childhood have made their way into theirs" (p. 343). Apparently the grandmother's and mother's questioning of their identities makes their daughters aware of a Hungarian component in their Canadianness (see p. 343). Hence at the age of 18 the older daughter Catherine wants to attend "the annual Toronto Helicon Ball, a grand Hungarian affair that resists all efforts to adapt to modern times" (p. 343). When the younger Julia turned 18 "she announced that she wanted to come with me to Transylvania" (p. 344). The plan "to visit the birthplace of our stories, a journey to my grandfather's heartland" is realized in the spring of 1998 (p. 344). The first indication of change is the geographical transformation of Hungary, which—as the map included in the memoir indicates—lost the major part of its former size. To reach places of their past they have to cross the Romanian and the Serbian border. Hence it is no surprise that the journey turns into a lesson about the revolutionary history of Hungary, the advent of the Turks, the War of Independence in 1848, the brutal execution of Hungarian generals by the Austrian Empire, the dispossession of Hungary by the Romanians with the help of the Austrians, and the visible signs of the Stalinist era. Yet the trip is not only a lesson about the past, but also an appreciation of new revolutionary changes in the 1990s. Walking on the Boulevard Revoltei prompts Julia's question about "which revolution" to learn from her mother: "The last one. The Romanians threw out their communist dictator" (p. 344). The dark and dismal look of postwar Eastern Europe seems to be broken only by the "lights" which come "from a McDonald's" (p. 346). Earlier trips of Anna and her mother turned out to be joint excursions with relatives to the former homes, now in Romania or Serbia. On these trips, Anna writes, "we went searching for our emotional inheritance, remembering Vili's stories now, with so many layers of later knowledge obscuring the original" (p. 355). In the epilogue she quotes Vili's conception of life as "a succession of loose ends, roads

leading nowhere in particular, tales unfinished, so many left unexplored, endless possibilities lighting the way you travel. Often we don't even know what happened until the train we should have taken has already passed by. Whatever you do, grab the rail, jump on. Don't live a half-lived life" (p. 370). The return trips then, which started out as "emotional" reconstructions to family members and the proud Hungarian history, represent the author's intention to explore "the life unlived" (p. 371), which eventually also includes the reunion with her father in Winnipeg. The "half-lived life" also extends to the Canadian citizenship, which needs to be completed by the Hungarian cultural citizenship. The connection between both parts of citizenship seems to stem from the liberal spirit of the Hungarian and the Canadian people. Without mentioning the role of the Hungarian government, which was the first in Eastern Europe to open its borders to the West in the summer of 1989, months before the Fall of the Berlin Wall, this political imperative governs Anna Porter's return visits. Both the new Hungary and a multicultural Canada treasure and live by the spirit of freedom in a stable democracy.³

2. POLITICAL MOTIVATION AND HISTORY

Modris Eksteins's return visit in *Walking Since Daybreak* will serve as an example for the prominence of the political change in Eastern Europe in general and the Baltic States in particular. In the prologue Eksteins comments on his role of an "author-historian as agent of [an] ideal":

If the tale is to be told, it must be told from the border, which is the new center. It must be told from the perspective of those who survived, resurrecting those who died. It must evoke the journey of us all into exile, to reach eventually those borders that have become our common home, the postmodern, multicultural, posthistorical mainstream (Eksteins, 1999: p. xi)

The birth of the author in 1943 when he "was trapped with his mother and sister between the German and Russian front lines" (p. xiii), the subsequent 4-year stay in a camp for displaced people in Flensburg, Germany, the eventual immigration to Canada and the historical rupture of 1945 constitute the frame of his two-fold journey from the margins to the center, beginning, as he writes, "in the 1850s in the border provinces of western Russia and simultaneously in the intellectual borderlands of contemporary North

³ The democratic constitution of the European Union will also counteract potential relapses to undemocratic actions, such as recently in Hungary.

American academe” (p. xii). The true focus of his narrative is the year 1945, events, which led to the “Hour Zero” in defeated Germany and the democratic processes, which evolved from it. The representation of the political and public events is clearly foregrounded and substantiated with maps and footnotes by the specialist of German history. References to private events are always seen against the larger political situation and appear almost as short intertexts in the historical life story. Thus he inserts a short vignette on the year of 1989, called “Annus Mirabilis,” which evokes the images of

... the huge throngs of young people in Tiananmen Square in Beijing in June; the one million Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians who literally joined hands from Tallinn through Riga to Vilnius on August 23, the fiftieth anniversary of the Hitler-Stalin Pact; the three hundred thousand people who paraded after Monday evensong in Leipzig in October; the crowds of young people dancing on the wall of walls, that supreme symbol of our arrogant and mutilated century, the Berlin Wall, on November 9—of all the striking images, perhaps the most evocative are those pictures of Lenin statues being removed by cranes from the city centers of Eastern Europe ... [documenting] the wholesale collapse of the Soviet Union, along with the unification of Germany and the reemergence of independent states in the Baltic. (pp. 36–37)

In Eksteins’ composite mind his origin in Latvia expands to a global horizon where he sees regional and national liberation movements as an outcome of the defeat of Fascism and Communism. In the short account of “The Summer of 1989” he simply reports that he spent the academic year of 1988–89 in Europe, based in Lübeck to do research, when he lived “within binocular sight of the barbed wire and guard towers of the East German border” (p. 41), completely unaware of the revolutionary changes to take place in October of that year. Toward the end of the first chapter of his life narrative, in which he describes the forced sexual relation of his grandmother with the Baltic German baron, he seemingly quotes from a journal entry entitled “Return.” The entry is dated on Sunday, July 11, 1993, when he “returned to Latvia ... forty-nine years after [he] had left” on a “Lufthansa flight from Frankfurt to Riga.” The abstract comment: “My fortnight’s sojourn was a difficult one, fraught with emotion,” takes on additional meanings when he sees fellow travelers who “look like Baltic Germans,” a reference which connects directly with his visit to his grandmother’s farm (p. 28). Although the feelings evoked by these sights are not stated, they are subsumed to the author’s global reach of alterity. Rather than despising the former masters of his homeland who raped Latvian women and now return to possibly reclaim or reconnect with the possessions of their forefathers, he transcends ethnic boundaries when he

can no longer “distinguish between the Baltic Germans and the Latvians” (p. 28). Eksteins’s position arrived at in 1993, probably the time when he starts writing his life story, resembles the multicultural situation politically constituted in Canada in 1988. As he proclaims “the postmodern, multicultural, posthistorical mainstream” as the universal model of life, now also at hand in the Baltic States, he recognizes Canada as a country where these principles are now enforced after having undergone himself earlier discrimination as a displaced person:

Despite superficial setbacks and difficulties, this land, this “peaceful kingdom,” proved to be, for our family and for most immigrants, a haven of perfectly poetical nature, a shelter from a world of deprivation and horror, a land of plenty, a country never occupied, never bombed from the air, a veritable Eden. (p. 83)

This idealistic praise of the Canadian society and politics reads like a mission for all people on earth. It is the political manifestation of underlying and unvoiced emotions, which eventually become the basis for a transcultural linkage between the two worlds and generate a transcultural form of life writing.

3. FAMILY TOURISM AND HISTORY

While life writers like Anna Porter and Modris Eksteins, who remember their personal experiences in Europe more or less directly, return to reconnect with their family roots and their implications in the historical developments, the return visits of life writers who have only an indirect knowledge of their family’s origin and were too young to remember concretely are carefully planned excursions into a past only known to them by their parents’ and grandparents’ life stories. Janice Kulyk Keefer, born in Canada in 1952 of Ukrainian origin, spends the major part of her life story *Honey and Ashes* (1998) on the preparation for and the actual driving trip from the Netherlands through Germany to Poland and Ukraine in 1997.⁴ This venture of traveling by car was intended as a more intense interaction with her family’s origin than the short 5-day stay

⁴ Keefer’s novel *The Green Library* (1997), which in the author’s own words “was an attempt to discover a Ukraine to which I had no family connections” and which “occasioned [her] first trip to Kyiv ... in 1993 ... still heavily Sovietized and Russified” (Keefer Interview with Saidero 2010, pp. 203–204), must be seen as a fictional precursor to the autobiographical narrative, whose third part she calls a “travel narrative.” It is not written “in chronological order” but follows “the back-and-forth motion of memory itself” (Keefer 2000, pp. 7–8).

in 1993 when she had flown in from Frankfurt to Kiev. This car trip of several weeks corresponds to Keefer's belief in an intimate connection between mapping geographical space and biological genes: "... families," she argues, "are more than gene pools: their stories travel through and map us, too" (p. 15). The goal of the trip is Staromischna, also called the Old Place where her grandmother was born and where all the stories she has heard originate. In this sense the family's stories serve as a road map to guide Keefer through the new political realities between Ukraine and Poland, regions which formerly belonged to Galicia, Austria's largest province. In her own words she wants to return to "somewhere I have never been" (p. 215). Relying on local guides and translators she traverses several historical and political stages of warfare and ideological positions, which cause several changes in place names, political powers and language domination. Thus the Galician city of Lemberg changes into the Polish Lwow and then the Ukrainian L'viv. When she walks through the city of L'viv she self-consciously thinks about her role as a tourist and raises the question of belonging: "I am a tourist: I give alms. But am I also, somehow, a native of this place, at however many removes? What in this country, its language and culture and history, has had a hand in making me who I am?" (p. 257). These self-reflective questions intensify when she arrives at her Grandmother's house in Staromischna and when she visits its cemetery. For her this becomes "the one place," in her words, "where I feel safe ... the only place that speaks the past to me as if it were a living language" (p. 287). This sensation of a living language derived from the memory of the dead translates into her project of life writing, which for her is, as she explains in the prologue, an attempt "to build a bridge out of words" (p. 8). This linguistic bridge-building extends to geographical divides such as the rivers in Staromischna and in Canada, or the Atlantic Ocean, but also more importantly to the communication between different people. While she sees on her trip the vestiges of the Ukrainians as "a viciously colonized people," she also critically refers to their "equally vicious anti-Semitism" (p. 199).⁵ Before the trip ends with a visit to distant family relatives in Pomerania on the Baltic Sea, Keefer not only recognizes the romantic underpinnings of her talk about her "family in Eastern Europe" as an adolescent in Canada, but she also transcends the historic divisions in a final bridge-building act: "I don't want to have to choose between them [Poland and Ukraine] or to parcel out my loyalties. ... What I really want" she tells her husband Michael, "is to

⁵ For a critical assessment of Keefer's ambivalent attitude toward anti-Semitism in Ukraine as represented in her novel *The Green Library* and in *Honey and Ashes* see Babiak (2003, pp. 110–12).

go home” (p. 303). In my reading of Keefer’s life story this manifests the multicultural reality instituted in Canada and reconfigured in Eastern Europe which links both places culturally and politically. Her recovery of “a country of imagination called ‘the Old Place’” (Keefer 2000, p. 6) in pursuit of “bloodlines” (see Kostash 1993) established in the matrilineal stories of her youth combines with her Canadian life for the formation of a Ukrainian-Canadian identity (Keefer 2005).

4. THE DEAD AND HISTORY

A similar kind of difference between ethnic roots and political affiliations initially underlies Lisa Appignanesi’s return visits to her Polish place of birth in *Losing the Dead* (1999). Although she was born in Łódź in 1946 and lived there until her parents’ emigration in 1948, she has little or no memory of her Polish origin and has to rely like Janice Kulyk Keefer on her own delayed impressions from visits, often accompanied by friends or family. Hence Appignanesi’s life story also represents a project of historical reconstruction and personal experiences, which are interrelated throughout the narrative. A few years after her father’s death, Lisa Appignanesi travels back to Poland for the first time in 1988 in an official capacity and with a colleague, the Director of London’s Institute of Contemporary Arts, where she was Deputy Director. In her spare time she also makes a visit to her parents’ town of Pruszków and to Łódź, her birthplace. What stays most prominent in her recall of this visit is the seemingly awkward hesitation of Polish authorities and people in dealing with their relation to the Jews in past and present. This partial perception of the situation in Poland is due to Appignanesi’s lack of intercultural and linguistic competence. Although she retains a passive knowledge of the language, she still needs to rely on an interpreter to understand (see Bessemers 2004). As a “child of the West,” who has her own prejudices about anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe, she recognizes the *modus operandi* Poles had adopted after the war “as an exercise in mythography” and summarizes the impressions of the first trip: “Jews in Poland, it occurred to me, were fine as long as they could be framed in the exoticism of utter difference and had nothing to do with the complexity of recent history or common everyday encounters” (pp. 76–77). Her belief that this would be the final word on her Polish past is shaken when the Polish family history reemerges in the course of her mother’s Alzheimer’s disease which motivates the mother to contribute to the memory of Jewish history in Europe in a “so-called Survivor Interview [given] to a ‘Living Testimony’ research team at McGill University in Montreal in 1991” (p. 82). The fragmentary nature of the eruptive memory spells and the video interview leave the daughter unsatisfied, and she sees

the need for another trip to Poland (see also King 2004, p. 270). This time she travels with Monica Holmes, an old friend from New York, also a refugee from Poland who, however, speaks Polish. The climate in 1997 is entirely different and more accommodating, especially with respect to accesses to documents about the Jewish fate in the war years. In a combination of research in archives, visits to concentration camps, such as Auschwitz, and to places of her own biography she reconstructs the Jewish history of the war years filling in gaps with scraps of memory from her mother's stories and her own imagination. Aptly the chapters of this visit are called "excavations" where the information is culled from the missing dead. Even though she cannot find the grave of her Grandmother or any other family members, the spirit of the cemetery makes her "feel at peace" (p. 199). By the time the two friends leave Poland, they are convinced that they have come much closer to the recovery of their pasts, making amends for not having paid attention to their "childhood stories of war and emigration" (p. 87). The last chapter of *Losing the Dead* is entitled "Ghost Language." It relates the daughter's efforts to nurse her mother in the final stage of Alzheimer's disease and focuses on making peace and bridging differences. The parents' and hence her own attitudes towards their past appear in a different light when seen from the perspective of the holocaust and death. On the last day in Warsaw Lisa and her friend hear the Jewish anthem played twice by a Polish military band, once in the official ceremony performed for a foreign dignitary to Poland, who ironically happens to be from Oman, and later in front of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. The reaction to these unexpected coincidences refers to the changed political situation which Appignanesi states laconically: "Polish-Israeli diplomatic relations, resumed only in 1990 after a twenty-two-year lapse, are evidently on an upswing" (p. 223). But this historical reference also creates a link between the fate of the Unknown Soldier and the missing traces of Lisa Appignanesi's dead family members. This analogy, then, can be seen as a resolution of former cultural differences in a new multi-ethnic and democratic environment. In the final analysis, it is the narrative achievement of transcultural life writing.

Many of the immigrant autobiographers to North America have addressed this status of transcultural lives as a new form of the correlation of several cultures. The return visits by Canadian citizens to the East European countries of their families is a conscious expression of a transcultural self. Janice Kulyk Keefer has repeatedly commented on her Canadianness and the practice of "transcultural aesthetics," which surpasses the legal status of multiculturalism (Clayton 1999, p. 194). As early as 1996, Elisabeth Mårald has devoted her dissertation to these aspects of transculturalism in Keefer's travels (Mårald 1996). To what

extent these formations of new political affiliations to both Canada and Eastern Europe are part of a new ideological interest of the West “fascinated by the disintegration of Communism in Eastern Europe,” as Slavoj Žižek has argued, or whether they are rather signs of postnational democratic processes taking place at the beginning of the twenty-first century is subject to further analysis (Žižek 1993, p. 200; see also Babiak 2003). Instead, I would like to evoke the autobiographical work of yet another East European, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant of Königsberg, now the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad. His legacy in *The Eternal Peace* of 1795 now appears like a precursor to the forms of transcultural life writing whose origin I have located in the multi-ethnic history of Eastern Europe transplanted to North America. In this late work, Kant (1795) elaborates on the role of the stranger who should be granted hospitality everywhere in the world and advocates a form of cosmopolitanism. In the current debate about the multi-ethnic constitution of democratic societies Paul Gilroy (2005), Gayatri Spivak (2003) and Anthony Appiah (2006) among others have reinterpreted Kant’s position of cosmopolitanism and have related it to a planetary consciousness and the idea of alterity. In my interpretation, the return visits of North Americans to their Eastern European homelands represent the necessary trajectories of belonging for the realization of transcultural life writing and the constitution of potentially transnational societies in a cosmopolitan world.

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