

**OTHER LANGUAGE - OTHERNESS IN CANADIAN CULTURE  
AUTRE LANGUE - L'ALTERITE DANS LA CULTURE CANADIENNE**



**OTHER LANGUAGE  
OTHERNESS IN CANADIAN CULTURE**

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**L'AUTRE LANGUE  
L'ALTERITE LA CULTURE CANADIENNE**

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## LE MULTICULTURALISME AU CANADA

Au contraire des Etats-Unis qui compte assimiler tous ses immigrants, le Canada depuis 1980 prône le multiculturalisme pour respecter la culture de chacun des nouveaux citoyens. Le Canada aspire-t-il vraiment à la diversité culturelle ou ne s'agit-il que d'une mesure politique? Voilà ce que je voudrais examiner au cours de cet exposé.

Comme les Etats-Unis, le Canada, depuis la diminution de la natalité, compte sur l'immigration pour augmenter sa population. Au cours du XIXe siècle, la véritable invasion, dont avait profité la république voisine, pouvait servir de modèle pour imaginer l'avenir du Canada. Le premier ministre Wilfrid Laurier déclarait vers 1900 que le XXe siècle serait le siècle du Canada, laissant entendre que son pays jouirait de la même popularité auprès des populations européennes. Mais Laurier se trompait au moins sur un point: le Canada ne bénéficie pas d'un climat aussi favorable que celui de ses voisins. De plus son économie était moins attirante. Même si depuis 1867 sa superficie était aussi considérable, il ne pouvait ambitionner de nourrir autant de personnes. Mais à l'époque, on ne percevait pas l'avenir de cette façon. Le nouveau gouvernement lance donc une campagne de recrutement à travers l'Europe, dépêche dans divers pays des agents de colonisation, mais une crise économique qui frappa l'Amérique de 1873 à 1896 la rend inefficace. Ce n'est qu'avec la reprise économique qu'il peut enfin aménager sa partie du continent. Une ligne de chemin de fer le parcourt de l'Atlantique au Pacifique. Jusqu'au début du XXe siècle, l'immigration avait été limitée aux Iles britanniques. À l'instar des premiers Américains, on voulait un pays WASP, white, anglo-saxon, protestant. Mais on se rend bien compte que les Iles britanniques ne suffiront pas à peupler une pareille superficie. La diversité des immigrants allait changer ce modèle. Des Juifs, des Grecs, des Italiens, des Allemands, des Ukrainiens s'installent au pays, non pas à titre individuel, mais à titre collectif. Ces allophones se regroupent selon leur langue, leur religion et leur culture. Ils fondent des paroisses, réclament des écoles, fondent des journaux. Cependant les divers gouvernements provinciaux dont relève l'éducation n'entendent pas favoriser le multiculturalisme. Dès 1874 le Nouveau Brunswick interdit tout autre enseignement que l'anglais. Au cours des années 1890, c'est le Manitoba qui institue l'enseignement unilingue anglais. Quand en 1905 sont fondées les nouvelles provinces de la Saskatchewan et de l'Alberta, l'unilinguisme

anglais s'impose de nouveau. Enfin en 1912 l'Ontario avec la règlement 17 interdit tout autre enseignement que l'anglais. Le Québec, au contraire, favorise le bilinguisme et même autorise les juifs à fonder leur propre commission scolaire.

Ces diverses mesures indiquent concrètement quel est le projet collectif des Anglo-Canadiens: ils veulent un pays à langue unique tant pour l'éducation, le travail que les communications. Le Québec et les minorités francophones des autres provinces s'opposent à ce plan qui les menace directement. Certains nationalistes québécois prétendent qu'il trahit le pacte confédératif, une entente entre deux nations. Quelle que soit leur langue, les Canadiens auraient les mêmes droit partout au Canada. Au lieu d'émigrer aux Etats-Unis, les Canadiens français devraient être dirigés vers l'Ouest canadien, selon Henri Bourassa, qui lance l'idée d'un Canada bilingue et biculturel. L'abbé Lionel Groulx, de son côté, éveille la jeunesse du Québec au besoin d'affirmer son identité nationale distincte. En 1936 le mouvement national aurait pris le pouvoir, s'il n'avait pas été trahi par Maurice Duplessis qui s'en est servi pour vaincre les libéraux.

Avec Seconde guerre mondiale, l'immigration augmente et se diversifie encore. L'Amérique qui a tiré profit de la Guerre, affiche maintenant une prospérité qui attire les immigrants de partout. En plus des Européens, arrivent des Asiatiques et des Africains. Ces nouveaux venus, d'abord attirés par le mythe américain, ne demandent qu'à s'intégrer à un civilisation qui exige l'uniformisation. Concentrés à Montréal, ils s'inscrivent dans les écoles anglaises et protestantes, même s'ils sont catholiques et orthodoxes. Ainsi augmente la minorité anglaise qui ne cesse de réclamer une place égale à celle des francophones au Québec. À mesure que la société s'industrialise, l'uniformisation s'impose. Les grandes compagnies multinationales, comme Bell, G.M., General Electric..., n'ont qu'une langue, l'anglais. Prenant conscience de cette menace, beaucoup de francophones commencent à s'alarmer. Au début des années 1960, le Front de libération du Québec (FLQ) dépose des bombes dans les quartiers anglais. Effrayé, le gouvernement canadien forme une commission royale d'enquête pour examiner quelles sont les causes réelles de ces problèmes.. La Commission Laurendeau-Dunton dénonce le mauvais sort qui a été fait à la minorité francophone au pays et propose la reconnaissance et le respect de chaque ethnie pour une collaboration efficace. La question de la diversité ethnique serait ainsi réglée

C'est le gouvernement de Pierre Eliot Trudeau, qui serait chargé d'appliquer les recommandations de la Commission. Comme ce premier ministre ne les approuve pas, car il craint de favoriser ainsi le séparatisme, il déclare l'anglais et le français les deux langues officielles au Canada, mais refuse de reconnaître aux francophones des droits collectifs. Partout au Canada les citoyens des deux langues ont droit, en tant qu'individus, à des services dans leur langue, mais rien de plus. Cette concession ne règle cependant pas la question de la diversité culturelle. En tant que collectivité, les francophones ne disposaient pas des mêmes droits que les anglophones. Il fallait donc,



d'une façon ou d'une autre, les reconnaître en tant que collectivité. C'est alors que le gouvernement Trudeau songea au multiculturalisme comme moyen de noyer le poisson. Plutôt que de se modeler sur le *melting pot* américain, le Canada deviendrait une véritable mosaïque culturelle. Chaque groupe ethnique pourrait conserver sa langue, sa religion et sa culture. Un office doté d'un budget sera ouvert à cet effet. C'est ainsi que le Québec devenait une communauté ethnique parmi d'autres.

Cependant, le premier ministre Trudeau savait bien que la mosaïque culturelle n'était efficace qu'en théorie. Pour participer à la vie commune, tous les immigrants devaient apprendre la langue courante et s'initier à la culture contextuelle. Comme l'avouait un fonctionnaire de l'Office du Multiculturalisme au colloque de Messine en 1980, il s'agit-là d'une étape pour l'intégration des immigrants. Au fond, les relations entre les deux communautés linguistiques ne la concerne pas. Depuis l'élection du Parti Québécois en 1976, le Canada anglais redoute l'essor du séparatisme, mais ne consent à aucune concession pour ramener la concorde. L'échec du gouvernement Mulroney lors des Accords du lac Meech l'a bien démontré. Au lieu de recourir à des faux-fuyants, le nouveau premier ministre a voulu pour la première fois s'attaquer au vrai problème et faire reconnaître l'identité particulière des Québécois. Comme il sait que le Canada anglais refuse de reconnaître le Canada français comme une nation distincte, il emploie le terme moins précis de <société distincte> au sein de la nation canadienne. Mais l'échec de cette tentative prouve que le projet collectif des Anglo-Canadiens est toujours l'unilinguisme et l'uniculturalisme.

Façon attrayante d'attirer les immigrants, le multiculturalisme leur laisse croire qu'ils continueront à vivre au Canada comme dans leur pays d'origine. Admettons que la première génération d'immigrants résiste en général à l'intégration pour sauvegarder son héritage culturel, mais les enfants nés et éduqués au Canada s'opposent rapidement à leurs parents pour s'adapter au contexte social et économique. Aujourd'hui, les media, de quelque nature qu'ils soient, conditionnent la vie courante. La radio, la télévision, l'internet, les films, les disques, les journaux et les revues situent un quidam par rapport aux autres et uniformise son univers culturel. Toronto, la ville canadienne actuellement la plus multiculturelle, restera quand même le centre culturel du Canada anglais.

Les deux communautés qui se partagent actuellement le Canada ont chacune un projet collectif distinct, mais, comme elles refusent de le reconnaître, elles agissent comme si elles étaient parvenues à une entente. Elles laissent donc persister le problème, comme s'il allait se régler de lui-même avec le temps. Au fond, les Anglophones ont toujours compté sur le temps pour parvenir à une solution. Ils croyaient par exemple qu'à mesure que la société québécoise s'industrialiserait, elle s'angliciserait, à cause de la langue de travail. Stephen Harper, chef de l'opposition, croit aujourd'hui que l'anglais, comme langue internationale, s'imposera au Québec comme ailleurs. Il ne s'agirait que d'une question de temps.

Nous pourrions donc croire que le multiculturalisme n'est pas un objectif du Gouvernement canadien, mais plutôt une stratégie pour en arriver à faire taire les Québécois qui réclament la reconnaissance de leur distinction nationale. Ils ne seraient qu'une ethnie parmi les autres.

**Naïm Kattan**  
**Ecrivain, Montréal, Canada**

## L'ECRIVAIN MIGRANT

En 1959, cinq ans après mon immigration au Canada, je sollicitais selon la loi de l'époque, la citoyenneté canadienne. Afin de connaître le pays qui allait être le mien, j'ai pris le train de Montréal jusqu'à Victoria et, pendant six semaines, je m'arrêtais en cours de route, dans diverses villes: Ottawa, Toronto, Winnipeg, Regina, Saskatoon, Calgary, Edmonton, Vancouver, je sollicitais des interviews aux représentants de divers groupes ethniques et, ayant choisi le français comme langue d'expression, faisais plus amplement connaissance avec les minorités canadiennes françaises, afin de préparer une série d'émissions radiophoniques pour la Société Radio-Canada faisant part de mes découvertes et de mes réactions.

Voyage mémorable! J'ai d'abord senti physiquement le pays. C'était le début de l'hiver. Les Prairies s'étendaient, un vaste espace de neige, jalonné, ça et là de hameaux, de silos à grains. Ce fut ensuite la traversée des Montagnes Rocheuses, et enfin, l'accès à l'océan. Une nature souveraine dans sa diversité, où l'homme se fraye un chemin dans l'obstination et la solitude.

Les villes surgissaient d'un espace sans frontières et sans limites, miracles du travail, de l'acharnement de l'homme, entreprise démesurée, défi à un territoire quasi abstrait qui se répétait perpétuellement, à l'infini. Comme par surprise, des maisons en bois, de hauts édifices en béton attestaient la réussite, le couronnement de l'effort, le triomphe de l'homme qui imprime sa présence.

L'histoire de ce pays m'apparaissait alors comme la conquête d'un espace impossible, mais aussi, dans différentes régions, comme à la fois une lutte et une alliance avec les premiers habitants, les premiers immigrants innuits et amérindiens, venus des steppes de l'Asie, traversant les plaines et franchissant les montagnes et les détroits. Bref, cette terre était un domaine apprivoisé de siècle en siècle par diverses masses d'immigrants. Depuis ces temps immémoriaux, l'homme d'ici a appris à vénérer une nature dont il avait peur, à la défier, à lutter contre sa dureté ou à établir une alliance avec elle.

Au cours de ce périple, j'ai fait la connaissance des Doukhobors, des Ukrainiens, des Hutterites, des métis, des Allemands, des Islandais, des Juifs et évidemment des Canadiens français, des Écossais, des Irlandais. Vaste étendue, ouverte à tous les vents, où, ici et là, en ordre dispersé, des groupes s'agglomèrent, cherchent, dans des rues souvent encombrées, une chaleur où

la parole est facile surtout quand elle est échangée dans les langues de l'origine.

J'ai souvent eu l'impression que des groupes humains ont été jetés par hasard, par une volonté qui les dépassait, dans un espace désert. Que de bras, que de sueurs ne fallait-il pas pour le transformer en champs de blé. Répondant à l'appel d'une promesse, à l'attente de sa réalisation, des milliers de pauvres, de démunis avaient quitté leurs contrées pour se retrouver dans cette terre en friche qui appartiendrait à ceux qui sauront y planter la vie, qui auront la volonté de la faire fructifier.

Une autorité y était installée, qui imposait ses règles. L'occupation du territoire s'est faite sous l'oeil vigilant de l'ordre et après des luttes, des batailles de conquête, on signait des traités avec les premiers occupants. L'autorité installait sa police et sa langue établissait l'ordre mais aussi les liens entre diverses communautés éparses.

Il n'est pas surprenant que les écrivains décrivent la population Canadienne comme un ensemble de migrants. On peut remonter à Susanna Moodie et Catherine Parr Traill, deux soeurs, nées au début du dix-neuvième siècle à Londres. Installées au Canada, en Ontario à la suite de leurs mariages en 1830, elles décrivent les épreuves de l'acclimatation britannique dans cette Amérique non encore apprivoisée. Je peux aussi parler des Écossais établis au Manitoba, évoqués par Margaret Laurence, de la sensibilité irlandaise transmise par Brian Moore.

Le migrant n'est ni un errant ni un nomade. Pour faire de l'espace épars une terre habitée, ceux qui ont peuplé le Canada ont adopté des règles, légiféré, insufflé à leur action un esprit. Les Canadiens français qui mettent en scène Léo-Paul Desrosiers et Félix Antoine Savard remplissent une mission: faire entendre la parole divine, la voix du Christ.

Dès ses débuts, la littérature canadienne anglaise est une littérature de migrants. Les premiers écrits de Moodie et Traill ont eu des suites jusqu'à nos jours. Romanciers et poètes ont exprimé la vie des groupes. George Ryga ne s'est pas contenté de faire vivre les Ukrainiens dont il est issu mais, comme dramaturge, il s'est identifié aux Amérindiens, créant l'inoubliable figure de Rita Joe. S'inspirant de l'histoire biblique, de la ligature d'Isaac, Adele Wiseman a évoqué les épreuves des immigrants juifs au Manitoba. Un autre juif, le poète Eli Mandel a chanté le ciel d'Erivan au Saslatchewan ce qui ne lui a pas fait oublier la destruction des communautés juives en Europe. D'autres écrivains juifs ont aussi dit leur origine, leur culture tout en évoquant leur nouveau pays. En cela Montréal fut un lieu privilégié. A M. Klein auteur d'une oeuvre significative a même tenté d'écrire des poèmes en trois langues, l'anglais, le français et le yiddish. Roman après roman Richler décrit les rues de son enfance et Leonard Cohen, à partir de la figure de Tetakwita a cherché de faire vivre les mythes fondateurs du Canada.

On sait que, pendant la deuxième guerre mondiale, le Japonais du Canada furent placés dans des camps sans avoir commis d'autre crime que d'être

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originaires d'un pays avec lequel le Canada était en guerre. Joy Kogawa a raconté leurs tribulations. On sait aussi que le gouvernement canadien leur a présenté des excuses.

Aussi, pendant tout un siècle les lettres canadiennes anglaises apparaissent comme des écrits de migrants. Parlant de cette littérature, Northrop Frye l'a décrite comme caractérisée par un esprit de garnison. Il ne se réfère pas spécifiquement aux textes des migrants. Qu'ils soient originaires des Îles britanniques ou d'ailleurs, chacun des groupes s'entoure de murs protecteurs et il en résulte un enfermement. Chaque groupe sait que les autres groupes habitent à côté, sont ses voisins. On les craint, les redoute, les ménage ou les repousse. Ils représentent une menace à la cohésion interne que chaque groupe cherche préserver.

L'ouverture à l'autre semble porteuse de risques surtout si l'autre est manifestement différent. En s'assimilant à un ensemble on craint de se dissoudre et de disparaître. Si le danger ne semble pas toujours aussi présent, il n'en reste pas moins un risque de contamination par des éléments hétérogènes, et perte de la pureté des traditions.

Se sentant étouffées, les jeunes générations font montre de leur dynamisme en désertant les rangs du groupe d'origine sans réussir ni même vouloir rompre tout lien avec lui. De sorte que tout migrant, et on peut aller jusqu'à dire tout Canadien, se trouve tiraillé entre une ouverture fut-ce au risque de disparaître et une auto-protection qui prend parfois les formes d'une oppression ou du moins d'un refoulement.

La littérature canadienne-française n'a pas suivi un chemin foncièrement différent. Secoués par une défaite militaire et politique, les descendants des Français,- le premier et le plus ancien groupe de migrants européens,- ont, au cours des siècles, su forger des outils pour sauvegarder leur spécificité: la terre, l'Eglise, puis la langue et l'Etat. Au départ, réfractaire à tout changement, le peuple de *Maria Chapdelaine* de Louis Hémon et du *Survenant* de Germaine Guèvremont a mis au point des instruments d'auto-protection. Ainsi la religion était une sauvegarde dont les interdits et les rituels pouvaient finir par se transformer en carcan, mais c'était aussi une dimension de l'être, un élément de civilisation que les fils de paysans et de coureurs de bois ont entrepris la mission de transmettre à une Amérique matérialiste qui était, croyaient-ils, en attente d'un tel message.

Plus tard dans l'oeuvre de Roger Lemelin, de Gabrielle Roy, d'Yves Beauchemin en passant par Claire Martin, l'étranger apparaît comme la figure de l'ouverture, de l'hétérogénéité mais aussi de la malice et de la menace. Dans cette littérature naissante, les étrangers étaient admis à condition qu'ils fussent français, belge et surtout catholiques. De Marie le Franc à Michel van Schendel, de Deyglin à Rumilly, on acceptait ces renforts.

Yves Thériault fut le premier à introduire systématiquement des figures étrangères au groupe, Aaron, Ashini... un défilé de juifs, d'Amérindiens, d'Innuits, d'Espagnols, d'Italiens. Des hommes et des femmes qui vivaient à

côté, qu'on regardait passer, qu'on observait et, dont pour la première fois, on se rendait compte que, malgré leurs différences, ils étaient des proches, des semblables. La curiosité cède alors la place à l'intérêt. Les ressemblances sont frappantes. Ces étrangers ne sont pas totalement hétérogènes. On ne les accueille pas encore à bras ouverts mais on les suit avec sympathie. Aussi, l'étranger n'est plus étrange: il s'était installé au coeur de la cité.

Si au Canada anglais, l'écrivain migrant s'inscrit dans une continuité, c'est que le cordon ombilical avec l'Europe, et plus précisément avec la Grande Bretagne, avec l'Empire, n'a jamais été coupé ou rompu. Il s'est dissout graduellement, quasi imperceptiblement. Chez Robertson Davies et George Johnston, on peut encore percevoir clairement cette continuité qui, dans les deux cas s'étend à l'Europe, à Jung chez Davies et aux sagas scandinaves chez Johnston.

Simultanément, l'influence des Etats Unis a, quasi naturellement, remplacé celle de la Grande Bretagne. Tout en transmettant ses modalités d'administrer, de gouverner, Londres cédait le pas à l'envahissement d'une technologie sans frontières, d'un mode de vie quotidien qui s'étendent, dominant sans rencontrer de résistance. Le Canada a profité de la proximité des Etats Unis en en intégrant, sans en payer le prix, les instruments matériels de confort et de bien-être. Grâce à nos riches ressources nous avons pu adopter, conquérir les avantages du modernisme matériel mis sur pieds par nos voisins. Grâce à la présence des Etats Unis à nos frontières, nous avons atteint, sans nous essouffler, un niveau de vie avancé. Cela ne s'était pas effectué sans résistance et il suffirait, pour cela, de rappeler la farouche opposition des intellectuels canadiens anglais au traité de Libre échange.

Cependant, l'influence des Etats Unis dans les lettres canadiennes est on ne peut plus manifeste. En dépit de son opposition idéologique au géant voisin, Margaret Atwood appartient aussi bien dans sa poésie que dans ses romans, à la tradition littéraire du continent américain et son oeuvre est naturellement adoptée par nos voisins. Dans l'Ouest canadien, George Bowering ressortit du mouvement de Black Mountain. Dans l'idéologie américaine, le migrant est appelé à couper ses liens avec la patrie d'origine et à participer à la création d'une nouvelle civilisation, à prendre en mains le cours de l'histoire. Alors que Henry James, recherchant le lien avec le vieux continent et la transition du passage à l'Amérique, faisait revenir ses personnages à Paris en tant qu'ambassadeurs, tournant le dos à l'Europe, Mark Twain, faisait explorer à Huckelberry Finn les rives du Mississipi et Walt Whitman chantait la terre nouvelle.

Le Québec n'est pas né d'une rupture mais d'une reprise. En s'affirmant comme Québécois, les Canadiens français nommaient leur territoire. Tournant la page, les enfants abandonnés par la mère patrie, nostalgique d'un temps où celle-ci était encore fidèle à son passé religieux, habitaient désormais un pays et appartenaient à un territoire autre. Des poètes ont dit le pays et affirmé leur présence sur ce territoire: Jean-Guy Pilon, Gatien Lapointe, Paul-Marie Lapointe, Roland Giguère. Ce territoire est nord américain et je me souviens

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du sourire de fierté et d'humilité de Gaston Miron quand il citait le critique français qui l'avait qualifié de Walt Whitman du Québec.

Désormais, il fallait assurer la continuité en ne comptant que sur ses propres ressources. Les rapports avec la France ont pris un tournant, s'étendaient à l'ensemble de la francophonie. Le temps de la dépendance, de l'imitation, de la plainte et de la nostalgie est révolu. Il existe au Canada et au Québec, une institution culturelle francophone qui permet d'établir des rapports d'échanges avec la France et avec les pays francophones. Finie l'époque où l'on s'inscrivait dans le sillage de Victor Hugo pour se doter d'un caractère, d'une personnalité. Désormais c'est ici, en terre d'Amérique qu'on puise la richesse d'inspiration. On se dit et de ce fait on parle au monde. La langue est récupérée, reconquise, intégrée non pas imitation, filiation mais comme une réinvention. Du coup, l'étranger au lieu d'être une menace, peut devenir un allié, un associé et mettre la main à la pâte.

Les Québécois se reconnaissent dans un territoire culturel réel, vivant, dans l'intégration de la technologie ouvrant la voie à un épanouissement culturel comprenant les arts et un mode de vie en perpétuel réinvention. Ce sont les artistes, les écrivains qui exigent du consommateur de participer à la création en l'accueillant sans passivité.

Au Canada anglais, les écrivains ne sont pas classés comme migrants du fait qu'ils sont venus d'ailleurs. Robinson Mistry n'est pas renvoyé à l'Inde même quand il en parle ni Michael Ondaatje à Sri Lanka même quand il s'agit du sujet d'un de ses livres, et Nino Ricci, né au Canada de parents italiens, n'a de lien avec l'Italie que dans la mesure où il en fait le thème de ses romans. Ce sont des écrivains anglophones du Canada même si à l'étranger on les accole souvent à leurs pays d'origine. Phénomène on ne peut plus nord américain. La littérature des Etats-Unis est faite de diversités culturelles, de minorités ethniques et religieuses. Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, Philip Roth sont juifs comme, Richard Wright, James Baldwin et Toni Morrison sont noirs. Et maintenant, des Américains installés au Canada font naturellement partie des lettres canadiennes: Jane Rule, Audrey Thomas, Carol Shields, Robin Blaser, Warren Tallman...

La littérature québécoise est née de l'affirmation des Canadiens français non seulement de leur survivance, de la survie de leur culture mais surtout de la confiance qu'ils ont dans le présent et l'avenir. Ils sont les héritiers d'un patrimoine auquel il sont aptes à insuffler un élan, à le vivre intensément et à s'y appuyer pour inventer un avenir.

Deux malaises surgissent. Faut-il assumer le passé dans sa totalité, y compris ses points noirs ou gris? Les controverses entourant Lionel Groulx et plus récemment Maurice Duplessis démontrent que la réponse n'est pas simple. En outre, le rapport avec le passé pose un autre problème. Faut-il purger ce passé de tous les éléments qui peuvent devenir des obstacles et retarder la marche vers l'avenir sur une route tracée d'avance? Les rapports avec les Anglophones et encore davantage avec les Amérindiens et les autochtones

dans leur ensemble peuvent faire ressortir les ambiguïtés et les contradictions du passé, sans mentionner les négativités. Cependant, un point me paraît autrement essentiel: à qui appartient ce passé? Aux Canadiens français réincarnés dans les Québécois? Ce groupe a appris, au cours des générations, à prévenir sa dissolution dans la masse anglophone de l'Amérique, de sorte que tout apport extérieur, hétérogène semblait revêtir l'aspect d'une menace. D'où l'absence jusqu'à récemment de ce qu'on nomme aujourd'hui la littérature migrante. Certes Louis Hémon, Marie le Franc, voire Rumilly sont des Français qui relient les Canadiens français à leur passé, définissent leur rapport avec le présent fut-ce au détriment d'une reconnaissance de la terre nourricière, de l'espace américain qui renouvellent le rapport avec le temps.

L'apparition des alliés venus de l'extérieur du groupe, de joueurs hétérogènes, fut d'abord une surprise. On pouvait toutefois accueillir ces groupes, ces individus disparates sans craindre une menace pour la cohésion du groupe. Un malaise subsiste, celui de redéfinir le présent à partir d'un passé qui n'appartiendrait plus uniquement au groupe et ne servirait plus à consolider son hégémonie.

Le Québécois francophone s'est mis à parcourir le monde à visage découvert, sans la nécessité d'une mission, sans excuse pour son accent ou son comportement. Il est un Nord Américain, appartient à ses conditions au Canada, ne s'interroge plus sur son avenir mais sur la nature de celui-ci. La langue est un fondement de l'identité et la religion n'en est plus la gardienne. Langue qui relie à une histoire qu'on ne cesse de récrire. Que font alors le Haïtien, le Grec, le Brésilien, l'Irakien, le Libanais, le Chilien qui en choisissant de partager le territoire, sont devenus porteurs de cette langue qu'ils ont adoptée et assumée? Ils ne peuvent toutefois pas assumer l'histoire sauf s'ils la récrivaient. Ils partagent le destin des Québécois, dans la mesure où ils peuvent participer à sa construction.

Les Québécois francophones sont ainsi pris entre l'appel d'un passé qui comporte des contradictions, des ambiguïtés, des zones grises et un avenir en mouvement qui ne présente d'autre certitude que celle qu'on découvre, forge, choisit. Le migrant fait partie de cette démarche. Il cherche son chemin avec les autres et, en même temps qu'eux, la découvre, la choisit. Dès lors il n'est plus compagnon de passage ni corps hétérogène. Il participe au mouvement et à l'édification d'un destin commun. Certes, pour certains, sa voix continuera à paraître différente, étrangère voire dérangeante ou saugrenue. Ceux-là chercheront à le pousser dans des voies parallèles, dans des chemins de traverse. Pour d'autres, sa parole s'intégrera à un chant commun qu'elle enrichit par la diversité. Les voix communes s'allient dans l'incertitude et la volonté, sans distinction entre celles qui attestent de longues années d'efforts, de luttes, de reprises, d'hésitations et celles qui s'éprouvent en s'extériorisant et qui sont simultanément mises à l'épreuve.

Plus les Québécois sont assurés de leur langue, plus ils inventent leur parole et moins ils chercheront l'appui d'une tradition érigée en mythe qui conduirait à l'archaïsme et la régression. Ils ne renieront pas pour autant le passé mais le



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monde en marche ne leur paraîtra plus comme une menace mais comme défi, promesse et merveille.

Sans disparaître, la qualification qu'on accole au migrant est transitoire, à moins que celui-ci ne choisisse lui-même le repliement, le retrait. Il sait toutefois que sa voix ne sera audible que s'il décide de la faire entendre et qu'on l'entendra plus attentivement dans la mesure où elle est distincte.

Dans l'accélération du mouvement, l'espace devient une modalité de s'intégrer au temps. L'instant d'éternité prend le dessus sur l'intemporel. Pour parer à l'éphémère, le passage devient une ouverture sur l'avenir, l'espoir se conjugue avec l'attente pour donner l'impulsion à l'élan. Le migrant n'est plus dès lors un élément hétérogène qui menace ou dérange mais la marque d'un mouvement universel où le Québec comme le Canada tout entier participent et donnent le signal du départ.

L'écriture migrante, transitoire dans sa nature n'est pas uniquement une phase, une étape mais le signe d'une reprise, une dimension d'une littérature qui ne craint plus la disparition, la dissolution, qui ne s'entoure plus de précautions afin d'éviter toute altération mais accepte tous les éléments d'un mouvement de création qui par son dynamisme est garant d'un avenir et manifestation d'une présence.

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Dans son nouveau pays, l'écrivain migrant fait face à deux options: l'exil ou une deuxième naissance. Cela ne dépend pas que de lui. Ceux qui sont contraints de quitter leur pays, à moins d'y vivre dans le silence imposé ou d'être jetés en prison, traversent d'abord l'épreuve de l'exil forcé. Ils peuvent, après coup, choisir leur nouveau pays, décider d'y rester même si les circonstances changeant, ils peuvent retourner dans leurs pays d'origine. Je pense à deux écrivains tchèques: Milan Kundera et Joseph Skvorecky. Quand Prague a retrouvé la liberté, l'un et l'autre ont décidé de rester dans leurs pays d'adoption, Kundera à Paris et Skvorecky à Toronto. Demeure la langue. Kundera a choisi de changer la sienne, d'écrire directement en français alors que Skvorecky opta pour la poursuite de son écriture en tchèque. Il est vrai qu'au cours des années des exclusions perpétrées par le régime communiste, en exil à Toronto, il publiait, en tchèque, dans une maison d'édition qu'il avait fondée à Toronto, les livres de Kundera, de Vaclav Havel, de Jiri Pelikan.... De plus, l'espace canadien est devenu une dimension de ses propres écrits.

Le choix délibéré de l'exil peut conduire l'écrivain à transformer la terre d'origine en territoire mythique et, sous l'effet de la nostalgie, en monde onirique. Dans la littérature contemporaine, on a vu de grands écrivains assumer l'exil pour le dépasser. Chez eux, le changement de langue devient lui-même une dimension de l'universel. De Becket à Nabokov, de Gombrowicz à Ionesco, on assiste à la présence, même quand elle est à peine perceptible, de la terre ancestrale ainsi qu'à la demeure présente qui s'emboîtent sans se confondre.

Je crois, quant à moi, que le choix d'accepter une deuxième naissance, libère, implique et permet un nouveau départ. L'écrivain commence alors par nommer le lieu premier, le dire, l'affirmer afin qu'il ne devienne pas un arrière-plan, un élément voué à l'oubli ou à l'oblitération, mais qu'il demeure une dimension de sa place dans l'actuel, le présent. En ce qui me concerne, Montréal est ma ville. Elle comprend et intègre dans mon esprit Bagdad et Paris, de sorte qu'au cours de mes fréquents séjours à Paris, cette ville comprend une part de ma vie montréalaise.

Quand l'écrivain migrant refuse le déplacement de son espace, qui est une condition de préserver son univers d'écrivain, il cherche refuge dans un exil qui rétrécit le réel et le fait glisser sur le chemin du silence. Il perd son rapport avec le lieu du passé, forcément transformé par le passage du temps mais aussi avec le lieu ambiant du fait qu'il l'ignore. Il se condamne ainsi à être nulle part.

Il arrive souvent que le migrant condamne le nouveau pays pour l'avoir mal accueilli et le récuse parce qu'il est culturellement moins riche que son pays d'origine. Il est toutefois évident que toute culture est mouvement et que les richesses du passé elles-mêmes se réduisent à une matière d'archéologie quand elles ne sont pas convoquées à vivre dans le présent.

L'un des privilèges de l'écrivain migrant est le regard neuf qu'il jette sur son pays d'adoption. Il cherche alors à le réaménager en s'y adaptant. Ainsi, il participe au mouvement d'une culture perpétuellement en marche, toujours à réinventer.

Le Québec accueille maintenant une pléiade d'écrivains venus de Chine et de Brésil, d'Irak, du Liban et d'Égypte, sans parler des Haïtiens, Montréal étant désormais un foyer essentiel de la littérature haïtienne. Sans menacer la majorité dans sa volonté de contrôler son destin, ils peuvent, par leur intégration au mouvement, en infléchir l'orientation. Le Québécois accepte cette littérature de migration non en tant de marginalité exotique, mais comme un élément d'une démarche qui est désormais la sienne.

Pour l'écrivain venu d'ailleurs, la qualification d'écrivain migrant est une phase transitoire, une étape, appelées à disparaître. Il fait partie d'un ensemble, y apporte sa différence, s'implique à part entière, quoique à ses propres conditions, dans la quête d'un avenir, car, s'il veut poursuivre son chemin, il ne peut pas se délester de son passé et de sa mémoire.

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**OTHERING JAPANESE CANADIANS:  
JOY KOGAWA'S *OBASAN***

*Obasan* (1981) may be called the saga of Japanese-Canadians during and after World War II. It is a sad story about the evacuation, dispossession, internment and dispersal of all these Canadian citizens of hyphenated nationality from British Columbia. It is a story that, as John Moss confessed in *A Reader's Guide to the Canadian Novel*, fills present-day Canadian readers with "curiosity, shame and horror" because "we turned the system against them - Canadian government and law, bureaucracy and public will" (Moss, 201).

In 1941 after Pearl Harbour the Canadian government began a movement to intern in camps Japanese people, many of them Canadian-born citizens, for fear of subversive acts. The Government thus abrogated the civil rights of tens of thousands of Canadian citizens, confiscating their possessions and property,<sup>1</sup> interning them first into ghost towns in Central British Columbia and then moving them farther inland on farms in Southern Alberta.

Although the story is well documented with official statements and newspaper articles, the narrative perspective is not omniscient, but restricted to the subjectivity of the protagonist –narrator Naomi Nakane, a 36-year old teacher belonging to this "visible minority".

The first chapter of the novel gives the reader the time when the narrative begins-August 9,1972. It then continues a month later, when the narrator's Uncle Isamu dies and she hurries to the assistance of her old aunt, Obasan. Aya Obasan, her mother's elder sister, has been her surrogate mother since the age of four, when right before Pearl Harbour her mother left for Japan to tend on her ailing Grandmother and never returned.

The narrative progresses on two time planes: one narrative thread recounts with great affection Naomi's caring assistance to Obasan after Uncle's death; the second narrative thread gives an account of her childhood. It begins in

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<sup>1</sup> In his article "The Japanese Canadian Experience"( in *Wandering Selves*, ed .by Christian Berkemeier) Heinz Antor quotes a Price Waterhouse report entitled *The Economic Losses of Japanese Canadians After 1941* (1986) to reveal that the material losses of the Japanese Canadian community amounted to \$443 million(24).

1941 in Vancouver, with memories of the happy days when the narrator was the daughter of a prosperous and respected doctor. This narrative thread retraces the enforced transportation of all Japanese Canadians from the Pacific Coast. First the women and children are incarcerated in cattle stalls, and separated from the men, who are sent to work camps.

All families are thus dispersed and their property and material assets confiscated. Naomi remembers the poverty, the suffering and the terrible humiliation when she is moved with her brother, Uncle and Obasan first to Slocan, a ghost town in British Columbia, and then to a one-room shack in Granton, near Lethbridge, Alberta, as farm hands working in beet fields.

The very first chapter makes the reader aware of a specific attitude, later on designated as “yasashi” (Kogawa, 50) in the Japanese code of values, embodied in her Isei Uncle and Obasan<sup>2</sup>: modesty and self-effacement, unassuming kindness, a quiet dignity and uncomplaining gentleness accompanied by silence. From them Naomi has learned that “speech often hides like an animal in a storm” (Kogawa, 3). Thus Uncle, the fisherman dispossessed of his boat and forced to leave the sea and turn farmer, never speaks of his wrongs or his suffering, but for eighteen years goes with his niece to a coulee covered by tall grasses, undulating in the breeze just because “[I]t’s like the sea” (Kogawa, 2) which he can no longer behold.

The coulee, a place of pristine beauty and permanence, functions within the novel as the main vehicle for the central binary oppositions nature/civilization, timelessness/history: “Everything in front of us is virgin land. From the beginning of time, the grass along this stretch of prairie has not been cut” (Kogawa, 2). History is inscribed in it as traces of the former presence of Aboriginal North Americans: “About a mile east is a spot which was once an Indian buffalo jump...All the bones are still there, some sticking right out of the side of a fresh landslide” (2). The description of her uncle against this prairie background establishes an ironical analogy, even an equivalence between these two persecuted minorities:

Uncle could be Chief Sitting Bull squatting here. He has the same prairie-baked skin, the deep brown furrows like dry riverbeds creasing his cheeks. All he needs is a feather headdress, and he would be perfect for a picture postcard-‘Indian Chief from Canadian Prairie’-souvenir of Alberta, made in Japan. (Kogawa, 2)

As Frank Davey suggests, it is a description that anticipates a movement perceptible throughout the novel to “naturalize” the Japanese Canadians ; thus they are associated with organic images easily recognizable to readers of Western stories: the north American native and the natural landscape “that

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<sup>2</sup> Isei is the Japanese term for first generation immigrants, Nisei for the second-Canadian born-generation and Sansei for the third generation.

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transcends time and politics, the Wordsworthian refuge that compensates for social cruelties" (Davey, 105).

Naomi's other aunt, Emily, embodies the opposite attitude: she is untiringly vocal about the Japanese Canadians' civil rights as Canadian citizens, she now keeps going to conferences to promote her people's cause. And she is an unexhausted activist, defending the rights of ethnic minorities in Canada.<sup>3</sup> Naomi's description of Emily betrays a slight reserve, even a shade of irony: "Aunt Emily, BA MA, is a word warrior. She is a crusader, a little old grey-haired Mighty Mouse, a Bachelor of Advanced Activists and General Practitioner of Just Causes" (Kogawa, 33). Later Naomi recalls how much her childhood self loved the Japanese story about Momotaro, and also how her Nisei Aunt Emily would correct her "Momotaro is a Canadian story. We're Canadian, aren't we?. Everything a Canadian does is Canadian (Kogawa, 61). The mature narrator sees her attitude as the typically Nisei "desperation to prove themselves Canadian, in their tough and gentle spirit"(33).

When Naomi comes to Obasan's place after her husband's death, the latter remembers to give her a parcel of documents Emily has sent from Toronto for the benefit of her niece. Emily's vision is that of an idealist who relies on universal principles, on documents, and facts. She believes in the rightness of her cause and in the institutions of Canada. She believes the official will finally "get the facts straight". What's right is right. What's wrong is wrong, she peremptorily tells Naomi. But having internalized Obasan's attitude of repressing certain memories in self-protection, Naomi is almost reluctant to read Aunt Emily's papers: Didn't Obasan once say 'it is better to forget?' What purpose is served by hauling forth the jar of inedible food? If it is not seen, it does not horrify. What is past recall is past pain" (Kogawa, 45).

The scrapbook with old newspaper clippings documents the treatment of the Japanese Canadians during and after the war. It starts with the confiscation of their property, then thousands of them are driven into concentration camps that had sheltered animals, to be deported inland from the Pacific coast area, and then farther displaced beyond the Rocky Mountains on the prairie farms where they were forced to labour and live in inhuman conditions, treated as if they were war prisoners.

The objective picture of historical events is complemented by the subjective rendering of their impact upon the members of Naomi's family, recounted in Aunt Emily's diary and by Naomi's own memories.

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<sup>3</sup> As Joy Kogawa confessed in her interview to Harold Ackerman, Aunt Emily is largely inspired by the outstanding activity of Muriel Kitagawa, who kept writing essays opposing racism of all kinds throughout the 1940s. Aunt Emily's letters in chapter 14 are based on those essays. Kitagawa's letters and essays were collected in a volume under the title *This Is My Own* only in 1985.

In her well-off parents' house, in the district of Marple, Vancouver, little Naomi feels "safe and whole", protected and affectionately taken care of. Japanese culture is presented as hinging on affection, mutual respect and dignity, all beautifully evoked in the symbolic scene of family music-making, which becomes a metaphor of togetherness and harmony (55-6).

It is a culture of selflessly helping others, of veneration of the mother, of female solidarity and intimacy.<sup>4</sup> The tact, the caring fondness that made the mother and grandmother intuit a child's needs, are movingly remembered by Naomi (60-1). And so is her mother's teaching of values when drawing moral conclusions about the fairy-tales she tells her daughter: "What matters in the end, what matters about all, more than their loneliness or fears, is that Momotaro behave with honour. At all times what matters is to act with a fine intent. To do otherwise is shameful and brings dishonour to all" (Kogawa, 60).

Yet Naomi has an early encounter with racism: this takes place when her elder brother comes home from school weeping, as a schoolmate has told him that all the "Jap kids" are going to be sent away because they are bad. When Naomi asks her father if what the girl had said is true, he answers "No, we're Canadian" (Kogawa, 76), but her brother poignantly expresses their identity crisis: "It's a riddle... We are both the enemy and not the enemy" (76).

Although only four years old, Naomi is taken advantage of by her family's white neighbour, Old Man Gower, who sexually abuses her and frightens her into silence. Later he will take over the Nakanes' house.

Racial discrimination is the converging site of several symbolic isotopies, such as colour and animal images. Thus, under Old Man Gower's caressing hands Naomi feels like "a small animal" (Kogawa, 67) and later she will frequently identify with a vulnerable, defenceless, animal. Keeping silent about the secret intercourse with Old Man Gower, frightening yet pleasurable as it was, makes Naomi feel a share of guilt for her mother's incomprehensible abandonment. The child has no news of her, which makes it a terrible trauma in her life. Therefore we could say that Naomi's private individual situation parallels the social historical plight of her racial group, she is doubly abandoned as a child by her mother, and as a Japanese Canadian by her motherland. Although theoretically "living in a democracy and not in an officially racist regime (81), in 1942 the Japanese Canadians begin being referred to as "the yellow peril" (17) in the newspapers, and a short time later, they are officially termed as "enemy aliens" (38), a term which the child simply cannot accept to designate her gentle Uncle. On the contrary, she remembers many instances bespeaking their loyalty and devotion (Kogawa, 18, 81, 89, 157).

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<sup>4</sup> For a feminist analysis of *Obasan*, see Smaro Kamboureli's "The Body in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*: Race, Gender, Sexuality" in *Scandalous Bodies*

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Aunt Emily records that the Japanese Canadians were more badly treated than the German Canadians, as the latter's property and homes were not seized (Kogawa, 38). She explains it by the fact that they are "a visible minority" ("I guess it's because we look different", 82), they are "other" and they can be easily turned into scapegoats when the front news was bad (88).

They become the objects of "mass hatred" (Kogawa, 83) simply because their racial background can be immediately perceived. But Aunt Emily is determined not to let others deprive her of her Canadian identity: "I am a Canadian", she writes in her diary, a statement which she repeats (40) and underlines and circles in red (39).

However, the Japanese cultural values of solidarity, mutual help and sympathy enable Naomi to valorize positively her internment period:

In Bayfarm, in Slocan, the community flourishes with stores, crafts, gardens, and home-grown enterprise...The ghost town is alive and kicking like Ezekiel's valley of bones...There are times to relax and talk, to visit, to worship, to commune." (Kogawa, 175)

That is why, in spite of the hardships and the persecution, Naomi is seized with a feeling of nostalgia when she remembers the public bathhouse as a place of such communal intercourse:

The bath is a place of deep bone warmth and rest. It is always filled with a slow steamy chatter from women and girls and babies. It smells of wet cloth and wet wood and wet skin. We are one flesh, one family, washing each other or submerged in the hot water...(Kogawa, 176).

But when the Japanese Canadians are farther dispersed inland and from Slocan, B.C. Naomi and her family are sent to Granton, Southern Alberta, the breaking of the community reaches new stages: many Japanese Canadians try to escape persecution by anglicizing their names in mimicry of "white diminutives" using a rather ostrich-like "camouflage" strategy. "Almost all of us have shortened names – Tak for Takao, Sue for Sumiko, Mary for Mariko. We all hide our long names as well as we can..." (Kogawa, 202).

In the end the Japanese Canadians lose their social community: the Sansei are a diasporic minority spread all over Canada, with their language lost to a large extent: the narrator cannot read it, whereas her international brother Steven can hardly understand even any of the spoken language.

As I have already mentioned, animal images and colour symbolism are isotopies of racial discrimination, of being "other", of making the Japanese Canadian minority "visible".

The colour symbolism lends an unforgettable significance to a childhood scene that will recurrently come back to the narrator's memory. In the courtyard of her parents' house in Vancouver they had a white hen kept in a wire cage. As her mother and father had bought a dozen chicks, Naomi put

them into the cage one by one, thinking the hen would adopt them as her children. But the hen did nothing of the sort, on the contrary:

Without warning, the hen's sharp beak jabs down on the chick, up again and down, deliberate as the needle on the sewing-machine. A high thrilling squeal and the chick spreads its short wings like a fan as it flops forward. Again and again the hen's beak strikes and the chick lies on its side on the floor, its neck twisted back, its wings, outstretched fingers. (Kogawa, 63)

After being compelled to associate yellow with her racial group, Naomi will remember the scene again with the new insight into its allegorical meaning. At Christmas Steven had ironically been given a gift of *The Yellow Peril*, a game "made in Canada", a game about war with the picture of the map of Japan with the following words written over it: "The game that shows how a few brave defenders can withstand a very great number of enemies." (Kogawa, 165)

In the box there were 50 small yellow pawns, and three big blue checker kings. No child wanted to be yellow. To Naomi to be yellow meant to be weak, and small, and cowardly. So, when lying ill in the hospital after her near drowning, she decides: "Yellow is to be chicken. I am not Yellow. I will not cry however much this nurse yanks my hair" (165).

Naomi comes to see the white hen as a symbolic equivalent of her motherland that turned deadly against the chicks it was expected to adopt and protect. Scenes of animal victimization are recurrent throughout the novel. The scene with the white hen pecking to death the tiny yellow chicks has a counterpart in an episode of great cruelty when Naomi and her brother watch six boys of Japanese background inflicting a prolonged torture and finally death on a white hen. They seem determined "to make it suffer" (169), an unconscious form of revenge that fills the narrator with revulsion. The racial hatred implied in the six boys' murderous attitude is subtly suggested in the scene that follows the killing: the children are at school and the teacher's gestures are "intense and jerky as a hen and she flutters and broods and clucks over us" (Kogawa, 171).

In Naomi the subjective and objective, the private and the public intersect. Hence, it is interesting to remark that she is able to overcome her deliberate silence and repression of painful memories when she discovers the causes of her mother's apparently inexplicable abandonment: she had been caught in the Nagasaki bombing and was found utterly disfigured.

"Her nose and cheek were almost gone. Great wounds and pustules covered her entire face and body. She was completely bald. She sat in a cloud of flies and maggots wriggled among her wounds" (Kogawa, 263).

Naomi's mother will wear a cloth mask to cover her disfigured face to the end of her life which she will devote to taking care of her bald baby niece dying a



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slow death caused by leukemia. When she is able to write home, she asks her sister Emily to tell the children nothing about her fate. Steven and Naomi learn about it only in 1972, when Steven has practically lost his Japanese in his attempt to assimilate, or rather to become international as a pianist.

This integral unravelling of the past teaches Naomi how much suffering silence can cause, she learns the value of breaking the silence but she chooses a middle way between Uncle and Obasan's attitude of silent, dignified stoicism and the blatant activism of Aunt Emily. For instance she discreetly relates how in 1972 she is still "othered", always asked "How long have you been in this country" (7), although she is a *Sansei*, that is a third generation of a Japanese living in Canada. Or she records the discriminating and patronizing possessiveness with which the English Canadians refer to 'Our Indians. Our Japanese' (Kogawa, 247).

The mood of Naomi when she decides to break the silence is described in the lyrical prelude written in italics and placed before Chapter One. It metaphorically announces the quest underlying the speaker's life. Even before we start reading the book we grasp that the narrator is in search of her mother, a mother that, as we have seen, inexplicably abandoned her and her brother Steven and never returned, even after the war was over. The mother's presence, which is in fact an absence, is metaphorically suggested by a reference to "the amniotic deep" wherefrom "the speech that frees" comes. As the page of this prelude is not numbered, it clearly articulates the state of the narrator before she starts her "telling". She has been petrified by silence, a silence of the type that "will not speak". The epigraph foregrounds the main binary oppositions in the narrative to follow: silence/speech, stone/sea, surface/depth, fixity /fluidity, death/life, confinement/freedom. The mention of the "white" sound implicitly introduces the symbolic opposition white/yellow central in the painful "othering" of the Japanese Canadians.

I have decided to conclude with the prelude in order to emphasize the circular temporal pattern of the narrative, but also in order to dwell on the images the author uses-"the underground stream", "the seed flower[ing] with speech", "the stone burst[ing] with telling- to suggest the power of the word to free, to bring spiritual rebirth.

I differ here from Frank Davey, who considers that the novel does not make Naomi the writer of her own narrative (Davey, 111). It is true that she is unadventurous, that, like Uncle, she trusts the healing power of nature rather than that of personal action, that she repeatedly resists Emily's invitations to join her "crusade", since she ties herself to the *yasashi* values of the *Isei* generation. But there is no evidence in the text that it is not Naomi who has written the brief preliminary first-person prelude outside of her main narrative, or that has chosen to end her narration with the Memorandum of 1946 that she has found among the numerous documents and newspaper clippings in Aunt Emily's scrapbook.

I think that once she finds out that her mother had not withdrawn her love from her and this “ever fixed mark” is restored to her private universe, she can decide to tell her tale and the saga of her people. It is an enterprise she undertakes in the hope that it will free her of the bitterness engendered by her past experiences, that the wasteland of her soul will finally sprout green as she has found “the underground stream” (Kogawa, 270) and makes out the gentle colours of rain. The images of “stone” and of the life-giving “underground stream” that appear in the closing paragraphs of Naomi’s narrative echo those in the preliminary first-person prelude, and this induces into the reader the conviction that they were written by the same person.. Naomi is no longer in a state of death-in-life, the dry plant blossoms into speech. The Word is no longer dead within her, but comes back to life. The renewed contact with her mother, the hindsight that her mother’s silence had not been abandonment but had been meant as protection, acts as the hidden stream that turns her from a petrified soul into a human being that has regained her faith<sup>5</sup> and her self-confidence. Thus she is finally able to respond to Aunt Emily’s call to “write the truth”.

The implicit metaphor of the narrator as a dry plant restored to life and “flowering into speech is also echoed in the lyrical passage that expresses Naomi’s political comment on her Motherland:

Where do any of us come from in this cold country? Oh Canada, whether it is admitted or not, we come from you we come from you. From the same soil, the slugs and slime and bogs and twigs and roots. We come from the country that plucks its people out like weeds and flings them into the roadside. We grow in ditches and sloughs, untended and spindly. We erupt in the valleys and mountainsides, in small towns and back alleys, sprouting upside-down on the prairies, our hair wild as spiders’ legs, our feet rooted nowhere. We grow where we are not seen, we flourish where we are not heard, the thick undergrowth of an unlikely planting. Where do we come from Obasan? We come from cemeteries full of skeletons with wild roses in their grinning teeth. We come from our untold tales that wait for their telling. We come from Canada, this land that is like every land, filled with the wise, the fearful, the compassionate, the corrupt (Kogawa, 248).

The outburst of humanist feeling in this lyrical address to Canada foregrounds the universalizing outlook that Naomi posits as an explanation for her nightmarish past experiences. She considers that the hatred and the greed and the selfishness that had actually motivated her fellow countrymen “remain as constant as human nature” (Kogawa, 219).

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<sup>5</sup> I share the opinion that William Closson James put forth in his study *Locations of the Sacred*, namely that Naomi nourishes “a sense of her mother as an embodiment of the sacred” (216).

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At the same time I should like to underline the Christian spirit of forgiveness wherein the chronicle of that terrible past injustice is undertaken, a spirit conveyed from the beginning by the Biblical epigraph printed under the title:

To him that overcometh  
Will I give to eat  
Of the hidden manna  
And will give him  
A white stone  
And in the stone  
A new name written...

The quotation from *Revelation* (2:17) assures the Christians that will have the strength of character to endure hardships and suffering of rewards. The manna, originally the food God provided for the Jews in the exile and wanderings (*Exodus* 16:35) stands for physical but also spiritual sustenance. The "white stone" challenges the reader to multiple interpretations. Whereas William Closson James reads it as an amulet engraved with a name or a commonly used ancient admission token (Kogawa, 223) to me it suggests the tables of the law or maybe a white statue that becomes a Time-defying symbol of Mercy, perhaps. The new name may be an allusion to baptism, to a new identity acquired through suffering, but it can also be a hint at the prophetic gift that a writer is granted, that of naming the unnameable, the very gift Naomi ultimately receives. It is an interpretation corroborated by Aunt Emily's urge to Naomi, couched in a quotation of the Old Testament prophet Habakkuk: "Write the vision and make it plain" (33).

In Kogawa's presentation of the Japanese Canadians, their Christian faith is active, it is a spiritual and moral support in times of great duress. She shows the majority group of European extraction that they failed to live up to their own ideals in their treatment of the Japanese Canadian minority. William Closson James remarks on the author's view is that minorities can be a healing power within a society, "providing the majority with the means of their own restoration and salvation" (224). Echoing *John* 9:1-12, Naomi poetically depicts the evacuees as being "sent to the sending, that they may bring sight" (Kogawa, 119). It is their fate to accept sacrifice for the sake of making the majority understand, they were born, in Biblical words, "for the sake of the light" (119).

Nakayama –sensei, the Anglican minister drawn on Kogawa's own father, conducts inspiring communion services<sup>6</sup> that stress the family's, as well as

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<sup>6</sup> In an interview given to Harold Ackerman, after confessing the real-life source of Nakayama – sensei to be her father, Joy Kogawa underlines those services'

the community's, support of one another in moments of great strain and hardship, such as before leaving Vancouver, or before leaving Slocan. After hearing the letters of Naomi's mother describing the horrors of Nagasaki he prays movingly for acceptance and strength:

Father, if your suffering is greater than ours, how great that suffering must be...How great the helplessness. How we dare not abandon the ones who suffer, lest we abandon You...Teach us to see love's presence in our abandonment. Teach us to forgive. (Kogawa, 267).

The Japanese Canadians really practise the truly generous forgiving spirit of Christianity, which sets them in sharp contrast with the rest of their fellow citizens. However Kogawa does not describe either majority or minority as black or white. Although Old Man Gower, the white neighbour in Vancouver, sexually abuses Naomi and in Slocan she has a similar experience with Percy, one of her schoolmates, Rough Lock Bill makes up in friendly behaviour for both. He accepts and appreciates the narrator's silence ("smart people don't talk too much", 159) and exchanges names written in sand with her, and in the end he saves Naomi from drowning.

Likewise, among Aunt Emily's documents there is a telegram some concerned missionaries in Slocan send to Mackenzie King when the Japanese Canadians' families are further fractured or destroyed by the enforced choice to go east of the Rockies or to Japan without leaving the segregated members any time for consultation:

Conditions worse than evacuation. Repatriation and dispersal policies the cruellest cut of all. Expensive inhuman and absolutely unnecessary. Not even a semblance of democracy or common sense in this latest racial persecution. Segregation being rushed. Loyal people being squeezed out. Elderly parents separated from families. Work offered to the Japan-bound but none for those who stay...(Kogawa, 203)

Also in 1948, when the Government wanted to extend for another year the interdiction for Japanese Canadians to return to British Columbia, Angus MacInnis of Vancouver and a number of liberals made a valiant effort to have that restriction on the freedom of those Canadian citizens removed, but it was in vain: they were defeated in the House of Commons 73 to 23.

It took the Japanese Canadians a long time to break their dignified silence about their unjust treatment and humiliation. Kogawa's book ends with an excerpt from the Memorandum sent by the Co-operative Committee on Japanese Canadians to the House and Senate of Canada in April 1946. It is noteworthy that this document is not underwritten by any Japanese name. Likewise the mistreatment of Japanese Canadians was revealed and protested

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authenticity with quiet emotion: "Those services really happened, those words really happened, , those prayers really happened"(219).

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against in Dorothy Livesay's radio play *Call My People Home* (1950). After the turbulent 1960s the provincial and federal governments adopted explicit policies of multiculturalism. *The Canadian Encyclopedia* reveals that, although in the first decade the Federal Government allotted these policies far less money than the policy of French-English bilingualism, which was formalized in 1969, federally there has been a minister responsible for multiculturalism since 1972, and since 1973 there has been a Canadian Multiculturalism Council and a Multiculturalism Directorate within the department of the secretary of State (Vol. 3, 1401). Moreover in 1988 the Canadian Multiculturalism Act was passed through Parliament "to recognize all Canadians as full and equal participants in Canadian society".

As a result of this policy a number of books by Japanese Canadians were published, among which we should like to mention Shizuye Takashima's book for children *A Child in Prison Camp* (1971), Ken Adachi's history *The Enemy that Never Was* (1976), Takeo Ujo Nakano's memoir *Within the Barbed Wire Fence* (1980), and the already referred to *This Is My Own* (1985), by Muriel Kitagawa.

In 1993 Joy Kogawa wrote a sequel to *Obasan*, *Itsuka*, a novel which records the movement for redress of the Japanese Canadians during the 1980s. Using again Naomi as a protagonist narrator, the novel reflects the tensions, yet the final solidarity, within her minority group, the numerous impediments they had to face until in September 1988 the Canadian Government at last acknowledged in an official Apology its unjust treatment of this minority in the 1940s.

In *Itsuka* Aunt Emily emphasizes the variety of ways one has in order to struggle against injustice and denial of human rights: "When we follow the light, we extinguish the night, and we do this through politics as much as through art" (248).

Both novels share a political theme, but what makes *Obasan* a masterpiece of superior artistic achievement is the convincing fusion of the objective and the subjective in the symbolic plane of the narrative discourse.

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## OTHER HUNGARIANS IN CANADIAN LITERATURE

“There are times like always  
when we feel as if we are immigrants in ourselves”  
Endre Farkas, 60

Sandor Hunyadi is a household name for all those who study ethnic writing in Canada – the hero of *Under the Ribs of Death* by John Marlyn has become one of the *par excellence* figures of ambitious immigrants who are ready to sacrifice everything in order to be accepted by the majority. During the almost fifty years since the first publication of this novel, several studies have analyzed it from various aspects therefore I do not wish to dwell on it at length. Suffice it to say for our purposes that Marlyn, an immigrant himself, portrayed ethnic communities and the hardships of newcomers, as well as the wish to break out from the ghetto based on his personal experiences during the years of the Great Depression. The novel is written in standard English, with dialogues suggesting the pronunciation of various immigrant groups (German, Hungarian, Ukrainian).

In the second half of the twentieth century, several other works, mainly novels, mention Hungarians among other immigrant groups (e.g. *Big Lonely* by James Bacque, *La guerre, Yes, Sir!* by Roch Carrier, etc.). *In Praise of Older Women. The Recollections of Andrew Vajda* (1967) by Stephen Vizinczey became a best-seller and this novel leads us to another stereotype of Hungarian character, namely that of the sensual lover – John Miska elaborates on this feature in his study *Jelenlétiünk Kanadában*. It is this aspect that I wish to further investigate, based on works published after 1990 by non-Hungarian writers in Canada.

With regard to the central topic of this conference, it seems appropriate to examine the problematics of ‘the other’ and how it is present in Canadian literature – but Tzvetan Todorov, in his *The Conquest of America. The question of the other* has already set up a typology that can serve as useful starting point and I have already published a paper on “Images of ‘the Other’ in Canadian Literature”, so this time I would like to concentrate on two recently published works that show a different approach. Before speaking about *Self* by Yann Martel and *Poèmes perdues en Hongrie* by Danielle Fournier, let me briefly mention that Margaret Atwood in her short story

*Wilderness Tips* creates George, a mysterious character, who does not wish to reveal the secret of his past. In the course of the story it turns out that he has had an affair with both sisters of his present wife. George gives away his Hungarian background only by a spontaneous light blasphemy 'Fene egye meg!' (192). He turns out to be not only a seducer but also an irresistibly sensuous man.

During the past year, Yann Martel has received considerable media coverage thanks to being awarded Booker Prize for his second novel *Life of Pi* and the plagiarism accusation of Brazilian writer Moacyr Scliar. Martel (born in 1963) with this prize-winning novel – which was short listed for the Governor General's Award, too – was compared to Joseph Conrad, Salman Rushdie as well as to Ernest Hemingway, Jorge Amado, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Samuel Beckett (*Toronto Star*, Dec. 19, 2001). A puzzling list of predecessors, but a good appetizer. However, big as the temptation to compare or analyze the two novels by Martel is, let me turn to *Self*, his first novel, written in 1996, which was short listed for Chapters/Books in Canada First Novel Award since this is the one with a Hungarian character in it.

I presume I am not mistaken when I think that this novel is unfamiliar to most readers, so let me say a few words about it. Martel was born in Salamanca, Spain, both his parents being civil servants, more specifically, diplomats – most biographical notes put it as “born in Spain in 1963 of peripatetic Canadian parents. He grew up in Alaska, British Columbia, Costa Rica, France, Ontario and Mexico, and has continued travelling as an adult, spending time in Iran, Turkey and India.” ([www.randomhouse.ca](http://www.randomhouse.ca)). He grew up in a plurilingual milieu – his mother tongues are French, English and Spanish. His father, Emile Martel from the Province of Quebec is one-time winner of the Governor General's Award for poetry.

He first published a volume of short stories, entitled *Facts Behind the Helsinki Roccamations*, 1993 – the title story won Journey Prize.

Vintage Canada advertises *Self* as “A modern-day Orlando – edgy, funny and startlingly honest – [...] the fictional autobiography of a young writer and traveller who finds his gender changed overnight.” *L'Humanite* wrote that “The name of the greatest living writer of the generation born in the sixties is Yann Martel.” Other reviews called it “A powerful story, punctuated by humour and tragedy in much the way real life is. – Like Rohinton Mistry and Michael Ondaatje, Martel is a brilliant storyteller.” (*Vancouver Sun*). “Superb – Masterfully written. – Martel has an almost otherworldly talent. – He is a powerful writer and storyteller” (*Edmonton Journal*) “Yann Martel wonderfully represents the child's universe as a seamless whole. ... [Martel] is a natural and often brilliant essayist and expositor, with ... a rich cultural and literary foundation.” (*The Globe and Mail*) “Mesmerizing ... Linguistic treats dance across the page, and the subject – a young person's life -- careens between the remarkably realistic and the wildly imaginative...Martel is a gifted writer: his language saunters and soars.” (*Calgary Herald*). “This is an exhilarating piece of fiction, ... bold and original ... Superb, psychologically



acute observations on love, attraction and belonging... An intelligent and entertaining meditation on sexuality, language and identity, the nature of longing, and on the very process of creating things: selves, characters and novels." (Charles Foran, *Montreal Gazette*). "A narrative orchestrated by an outspoken 'I' that is candid, intelligent, likable, life-embracing, protean, chatty, smug, and mischievous ... Martel is a bright, amiable, enthusiastic writer with an original, playful mind that he is not afraid to use..." (*Quill & Quire*)

After these raving reviews, let me quote the author himself who in an interview said, "It's a terrible novel. I think it should disappear. Parts of it are good, but overall I don't like it." ([www.bookmagazine.com/issue25/martel.shtml](http://www.bookmagazine.com/issue25/martel.shtml)). Julian Ferraro in *TLS* was almost as negative as the writer himself half a decade after the publication of his first novel. In Ferraro's view

"the absence of structure [is] emphasized by the stagy imbalance between the book's first "chapter" of 329 pages and its second of forty-three words...the conventions of traditional "masculine" narrative development are challenged by a more circular, open-ended, "feminine" unfolding. The result is a novel which rejects plot and character and focuses instead on experience; on the interaction of an evolving individual consciousness with the random contingencies of existence. ... A recurring element ...[is the] outlines of ideas for novels, plays and short stories. ... At the heart of the book is an interesting idea well realized – the changes in sex, each one following a particularly traumatic event ... Surrounding this, however, is a mass of filler that is often simply dull. The abiding impression of *Self* is of a potentially excellent short story ... one of Martel's characteristic stylistic devices, the bifurcation of the narrative into two columns running down the page ..."

Let us look behind these diverging opinions. *Self* is the first-person singular story of a young man, an aspiring writer, who lived in different countries in his childhood and after both his parents were lost in a plane crash, overnight turned into an adolescent girl with all the complications of that age. The protagonist went to college, then university, had several love-affairs – e.g. with one of the professors, then a Lesbian relationship on a European tour – and found true love in Montreal with Tito Imilac.

"He was of Hungarian origin, but not from Hungary. He was from the minority that lives in Czechoslovakia, in south-Western Slovakia. He and his mother had come over in 1968, right after the Soviet invasion, when he was fifteen. They had settled in Toronto. (Father not mentioned. I found out later that he stayed behind, was a liberal apparatchik hoped, fared miserable, died of cancer." (250)

This 'invisible man' – as Tito defined himself – introduced the hero(ine) of the novel not only the typical immigrant community but also to the treasures

of real and fictitious Hungarian culture. Language, of course, was not only a tool for communication, but also a topic for conversation.

“Tito’s French was better than functional. ... But rapid-fire Quebec French lost him. If he handled Hungarian like his bare hands, English like worn-in leather gloves, Slovak like mitts, German and Russian like knives and forks, then French he handled like chopsticks.” (259)

Participating in family events “it was *de rigueur* that Magyar be spoken. ... I remembered in my own case how it was inconceivable that I should have addressed my parents in English. Our relationship was a French-speaking relationship.” (262) The plurilingual upbringing of the hero of this autobiographical novel and of the young man from Bratislava mean an important parallel between them. This plurilingual approach is present all through the novel: depending on the location of the episode in this modern Orlando’s life, passages in the base language (English) and the other one (Spanish, pp. 88-89, French, pp. 107-108) occur side by side (literally) with equivalent meaning. In the case of Hungarian, this “spectacularly incomprehensible” (263) language, however, Martel chose a different strategy. The whole novel is very rich in literary and artistic references – here we can read parts from Bartók’s opera, *Bluebeard’s Castle* in Hungarian (Tito’s mother is also called Judit) while the English column is about her impressions about Hungarians living in Canada.

Their infinite-looking happiness came to tragic end when the girl (pregnant with Tito’s child) was brutally attacked and then raped by a neighbour, after which she never dared to face her lover – and returned to the original gender, i.e. young man. “My emerging penis revolted me ... I lost my baby, my child, my future.” (313) “I left Montreal – left my life – abruptly and untidily. I stuffed my backpack with my novel and clothes (and, without thinking, tampons), and departed. Not a word to the restaurant or to the Hungarian community ... For my dear Tito, a scrawled note, the hardest words I ever had to write.” (325)

The novel closes with the already mentioned 43 words of chapter two:

“I am thirty years old. I weigh 139 pounds. I am five foot seven and a half inches tall. My hair is brown and curly. My eyes are grey-blue. My blood type is 0 positive. I am Canadian. I speak English and French.” (331)

A highly unusual novel, I admit. What I found interesting in it was that Martel (who would qualify as ‘mainstream Canadian author’) used many strategies that are usually considered typical of ‘ethnic writing’, including biographical elements, real and imaginary journeys between countries, cultures, languages, code-switching and characters from ethnic communities – in the latter case as equal partners and not as ‘exotic’ creatures.

After this exciting novel, let me write a few words about a volume of poetry, also linked to Hungarians – more specifically, to Hungary. *Poèmes perdus en*

*Hongrie* by Danielle Fournier are the result of a semester of guest teaching in Pécs and Piliscsaba (it is dedicated to Eva Martonyi). In October 2003, this volume was among the prize-winning books awarded by the 'Académie des lettres' at the Salon du livre de Montréal: Danielle Fournier received the Prix Alain-Grandbois. The poet (born in 1955) lives and teaches in Montreal. Her last volume of poetry is divided into two parts, with three 'chapters' in the first and four in the second part. The title evokes the intellectual milieu of the 1960s when 'found' places for theatrical activities and 'found' texts in writing were popular among experimenting artists – Fournier, however, published 'lost' poems. It is hard to define this unusual work: it has a loose structure, very often reminding of automatic writing ("j'écris comme je respire", 70) rich in allusions and citations from writers and philosophers (Mircea Eliade, Dezso Kosztolanyi, the tectonic plaques by Robert Lepage) – and it is also an 'enquête' into the thoughts, feelings and emotions of the writer. The autobiographical element is underlined in this work, too. Hungary – and a fictional Hungarian lover? – serve as starting point for this discovery. My country is present partly as references to place-names, partly as short Hungarian phrases implanted into the French text.

“moi, longtemps par les forces obscure hantée,  
rompue aux caresses refusées, puis assis dans le  
Bastion des Pêcheurs. Une. Désespérément une  
À explorer cette langue que je tente de *libérer du*  
*Bout des doigts*. Toutes amours déployées, arra-  
Chées aux tempêtes de sable, je me rends à vous.  
Qui des torrents me porte? Fogalmam sincs” (50)

Her most frequently used images are linked to the wind, to bones, various parts of the body, with a special stress on tongue (in both meanings of the word) and on fingers. These are intertwined with the central motif of spiritual and corporal love and the desire to write: („Pour écrire, il faut aimer l'amour.” 72). Both writing and fulfilling love involve struggle and the volume can be viewed as a documentation of this struggle, in which the opposites of man and woman, body and language, East and West are underlined. („*sous tes cris Mozart devient Kodály*” 139) Trying to understand a completely, different strange language and the different body of the man complement each other.

At this point, I should draw some conclusion or establish a typology – but I have to admit that this paper is meant more as sharing some ideas about *Self* by Yann Martel and *Poèmes perdus en Hongrie* by Danielle Fournier than coming up with a ready made theory about this interesting phenomenon in Canadian writing.

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## **HYPHENATED WRITERS' REPRESENTATIONS OF CANADA**

The paper focuses on some samples of hyphenated writers' "immigrant stories" in order to show how language, style of writing, ethnic background, historical context, social environment, and gender, influence the authors' representations, as suggested by Linda Hutcheon with reference to postmodernism. (Hutcheon, 51) Without leading to crucial theoretical conclusions - for the range of an article would hardly allow it - the approach still highlights some important aspects in the immigrants' appropriation of place.

### **Eugene Giurgiu's "Ewoclem"**

Eugene Giurgiu, born in Iara, Romania, left his country of origin in 1969 when he was already in his mid forties and his reason for this decision is not difficult to guess. Though Ceaușescu's regime had started with a "thaw" after the grim Stalinist period, the invasion of Prague was a sign of the future consolidation of the Soviet influence in the region. Giurgiu's first literary successes had been obtained in his early youth, before the instalment of communism during which he still published three books of fiction but not in the officially supported style of "socialist realism". He returned to writing fiction after a successful career as a musical expert in his new homeland, probably challenged by the fall of communism and the new wave of migration westward that could make his "immigrant story" successful with both a reading public in his native country - as a "cautionary" story -, as well as with the members of the Diaspora who had shared similar experiences. As his articles in the multilingual electronic literary journal *Litterae.net* - whose editor he is - show, he has remained a promoter of the culture from his country of birth and a severe judge of the political developments there. In his fiction Giurgiu uses different formulae and techniques of writing, successfully combining the Romanian tradition of fantastic prose with that of the Canadian gothic fiction.

*Ewoclem* was published in Montreal, in 1996. The novel starts with a foreword "written at the editor's request" by a secondary character as a frame to the main character's story entitled *Ewoclem*, that is the key-word in the unsuccessful quest to find him. The narrator in the story that begins, like an allegory, with a dream is Timotei /Timothy Dumbravă, a Romanian

immigrant to the Toronto of the early seventies. At his arrival he has an idealized vision of the new country that he explores in a round tour and perceives as a land of opportunities where money is easy to earn but also to spend. He is impressed by the grandeur of nature and the merry and carefree disposition of the people. His skills acquired at home enable him to find a job, nevertheless, his experiences in the new country go hand in hand with the recollections of his homeland before World War II generated by the letters of a former childhood friend imprisoned by the communist regime. As a teacher of French and music in a private school, Timothy finds friends and succeeds to gain the appreciation of his students. One of them, Roberta, together with her family, has a substantial contribution in making him feel at home in Canada. But some of the teachers, either influenced by the Quiet Revolution in Quebec and the ideas of Left, or just accepting as true Romania's official propaganda, make Timothy's position as a political émigré quite awkward. Instead of a dissident, he could be considered a "traitor" of his country and a "criminal". His suggests them to visit Romania as tourists and see for themselves the real face of communism there.

In his contacts with the Romanian community in Toronto - generating another series of remembrances of the prosecutions under the communist regime - Timothy realizes that the under-cover agents of the Romanian secret police have infiltrated the immigrants' community hunting down the political émigrés and do not refrain from "executing" them in the country whose democratic regime guarantees its citizens' freedom and safety. Therefore Timothy, who has become the keeper of some compromising documents about the regime of terror in Ceaușescu's Romania, has to leave Toronto in order to escape from the agents determined to kill him too. His retreat to a log house in the romantic wilderness of northern Ontario is an opportunity for him to become aware of certain aboriginal issues. The ghost of an Iroquois princess is haunting the place and Timothy learns about the legend of the sad fate her people had. In the meantime, his former student Roberta and her mother Alison visit Romania and succeed, with the help of the Canadian ambassador there, to obtain the release from prison and emigration of Timothy's childhood friend Denise to France. Consequently, he is freed from his love fantasy connecting him to the old country via Denis and finally realizes that his real love is for Roberta who is also in love with him. For Eugene Giurgiu's hero Canada becomes a happy haven only after he had clarified his status as an émigré, regaining his friends' full trust. "Ewoclem", the Iroquois word for welcome that he had seen on the mat in front of his door at the log house, is also an anagram of the word in English, showing - as hinted at by the subtitle of the novel: *The Entangled Paths* - that the process of integration is not easy. The immigrants not only have to clarify ("dis-entangle") their relationships with the old country and let the past go, but they have to learn about the new land and its people, and acquire a new code of conduct. Attachment to people - especially friendship and love - play an important part in appropriating the place.

Even if Toronto and the retreat in the woods seem to be only backgrounds for the Timothy's story, one could interpret both Roberta and the haunting Indian princess, according to the well-known allegorical representation of a country by a young loving woman, a personifications of Canada's past and present from the immigrant's point of view.

### **Michael Ondaatje's "In the Skin of a Lion"**

Born in Sri Lanka, Michael Ondaatje came to Canada via England before his university studies. He had already published poetry and fiction and was recognized as an important Canadian writer in English when *In the Skin of a Lion* appeared in 1987. The editor enthusiastically recommends it to the readers in 1996 as "a haunting tale of passion", "a love story and an irresistible mystery set in the turbulent, muscular New World of Toronto in the 20s and 30s", entwining adventure, romance and history in presenting "the lives of the immigrants who built the city and those who dreamed it into being: the politically powerful, the anarchists, bridge builders and tuneless, a vanished millionaire and his mistress, a rescued nun and a thief who leads a charmed life." (Back cover) As the book refers to a time span not only before the writer's arrival to Canada, but also before his birth, it has naturally a documentary character. Ondaatje's novel is a re-writing of the "polyglot city" that had been "defined" and "re-defined" by writers and painters since the sixties, beginning with Phyllis Brett Young's *The Torontonians*. (Cooke, 54) John Cooke had convincingly commented upon the relationship between the visual and fictional representations of Canada while Lorraine York illustrated the use of photographs as source or starting point for important Canadian writers, including Ondaatje. But rather than the use of ekphrasis - a verbal representation of a visual image - as it appears in Munro's prose (Redekop, 348-352), I would more incline to see *In the Skin of the Lion* as an illustration of Linda Hutcheon's observation concerning Marshall McLuhan's influence on Canadian writers. (Redekop, 348) A reading of Ondaatje's novel through McLuhan's theory of communication from *Understanding Media* would reveal that it contains most of the media regarded as "extensions" or rather "connectors" of people. The writer not only explores a moment in the history of the largest city in Canada viewed and experienced through a set of characters - the officially anonymous immigrants - but also shows how the various means of communication (roads, bridges, tunnels, cars etc.) have changed the city and its perception.

Instead of a linear plot, following a strict temporal pattern, the reader is faced with a rather nebulous and therefore mysterious development of various stories told during a car trip, as if influenced by the ups and downs, windings and accidents of the road. The writer undermines the alphabetical man's linear vision, using a circular or rather elliptical structure with loops inside it. The end of the book has the same two characters that appeared at the beginning and the reader realizes that the journey and the story start again.

The first story, set at the beginning of the twentieth century, may be read as referring to cartographers' earlier representations of the country. A boy,

Patrick - Irish according to his name - explores his geography book and discovers that the place where he lives is unnamed on the maps though the homestead has been there since 1816. The boy sees through the window of the farmhouse the immigrant workers who pass on the road to their work each morning. His father, learning the effects of dynamite, throws away his axe and adopts a new profession. As one tableau follows another, the reader observes that, like in the silent picture, there is no dialogue.

The following chapter refers to the construction of Prince Edward Bridge in Toronto, an important means of communication in the city. The implications are both historical and symbolical if one thinks of bridging the gap in communication as well as in the construction of Canadian identity. Apparently, most of the historical information is based upon research in the archives, the narrator choosing from the more than 4,000 photographs the ones that could bring to life a coherent story about the builders of the city.

The first character from the photographs gets the name Nicholas Temelcoff and is given the identity of a Macedonian arrived in Canada without a passport in 1914. The immigrant, who had seen many impressive sites in Europe along his journey, is disappointed at sight of the simple sheds of the customs house at Saint John and he thinks the country is "primitive". (Ondaatje, 45-46) But Toronto will change this impression. Not knowing the language, he looks for the Macedonian community in the city. Soon, as a "spinner", he becomes a real "dare devil" among the builders of the bridge and performs the most dangerous tasks, hanging on ropes over the abyss and swinging from one pillar to another in order to connect them. "He links everyone", we are told; "he is real mercury slipping across a map". (Ondaatje, 35) Commissioner Harris who supervises the work, sometimes accompanied by the English architect, watches Temelcoff's acrobatics but never addresses the immigrant.

The photograph with five nuns who pass over the bridge on a windy day gives life to another story. One of the nuns was thrown down from the bridge by the wind in a kind of sacrifice ritual, but Temelcoff rescued the other. The nun will reappear later on in the story as an actress, called Alice, a member of the Parrot Theatre. To connect the two distant chapters, one needs Temelcoff's technique of "swinging" on quite a long "rope". The reader has to return many times in the text, looking for key sentences, and can get the feeling of being an immigrant not only in the world created by Ondaatje but also in the English Language.

A blurred image shows Toronto in fog - reminding of Dickens's London in Bleak House. The workers on the bridge "stay close to each other", as if experiencing a "prehistoric fear", not knowing "what country exists on the other side" (Ondaatje, 39-40). The fog symbolizes the immigrants' state of mind and their difficulties in communicating.

Language as a vital means of communication for the immigrant explains the writer's insistence on language learning. Temelcoff hangs in the air and talks



English to himself. For him “language is much more difficult than what he does in space”. (Ondaatje, 39) Like him, most of the immigrants had begun their language learning by listening to songs on the radio and repeating the lines. Still, his perception of language has also spatial associations. Temelcoff “loves his new language, the terrible barriers of it.” (Ondaatje, 43) Sometimes he is “unaware that his voice splits now in two languages.” (Ondaatje, 41) The immigrant’s language learning goes hand in hand with the writer’s switching from the representation in the manner of the silent film - i.e. a third person narrative without dialogue - to the talking picture. The silent film “brings nothing but entertainment”, in a “North America [...] still without language, gestures and work and bloodlines [being] the only currency”. (Ondaatje, 43) “The event that will light the way for immigrants in North America is the talking picture”, says the narrator. Referring to McLuhan’s media theories, Northrop Frye had also stressed the fact that Canada’s own involvement with the new media, more particularly with the film and the radio, had been a decisive influence in the maturing of the country, giving it a place on the international scene. (Frye, 37) Temelcoff knew that “if he did not learn the language he would be lost”. (Ondaatje, 46) So he decided to attend school together with ten year olds, working at nights. During this period of transition from one language to another, he had even “translation dreams”. When the community is a multilingual one, non-verbal communication seems the only way to mutual understanding. The dumb show and the puppet show appear as excellent means of conveying messages.

The chapter entitled “The Searcher” continues Patrick’s story. He moves to the city where he learns the new profession in order to discover the millionaire Ambrose Small - owner of a chain of theatres in the country. In his endeavour to find Small, Patrick meets Clara Dickens and this time the woman is the “line” leading him. Since Patrick is not a great speaker either, body language and lovemaking become the most important means of communication. His love for Clara is the connector between Patrick and the members of the multiethnic community where he will meet Temelcoff as well. But the love that had brought him among the anarchists connects Patrick also to hate.

The construction of the bridge is followed by the construction of the Tunnel, another symbolic site for the writer who is obsessed also by mines and caves. The underground world, opposing darkness to light, is the subconscious and violence is the most important barrier to human communication. Patrick himself becomes a vehicle of death when, after Alice’s death, he accepts to become the carrier of a load of dynamite meant to destroy another of Commissioner Harris’s constructions, the waterworks.

After five years spent in prison (accused of attempting to murder Ambrose Small), Patrick is released in 1938. He is forced to bridge the time gap and face the changes in Toronto: people crowding to see Garbo play Anna Karenina, Red Squads intercepting mail, tear gassed political meetings etc. Over 10,000 foreign-born workers had been deported from the country and

while the longest bridge in the world was built over the Zambezi, the great waterworks at the east end of Toronto neared completion. The anarchists think that cutting off or poisoning the water supply “would bring the city to its knees”. Caravaggio, whom Patrick had met in prison, takes him to the Italian community in Toronto (and hence the introduction of sentences in Italian in the text). They get the task to destroy the waterworks. But Patrick proves unable to detonate the bomb and lets Harris convince him to renounce. Nevertheless, Patrick is still the prisoner of his death instinct and wants to kill himself for having lost Alice. He is saved and ends up with Alice’s daughter - a second-generation immigrant - whom he tells the stories on the way to Marmora.

In comparison with Eugene Giurgiu’s representation of the city as a background for the immigrant’s individual story, Ondaatje captures the huge scale developments and symbolic sites in the city, revealing the close relationship between place and people and stressing the utmost importance of communication.

### **Myrna Kostash’s “All of Baba’s Children”**

Born in Edmonton, Alberta, into a family of Ukrainian origin, Myrna Kostash studied Slavic languages and literatures at the universities of Alberta and Toronto. While her studies are in English, her environment and interests maintain and strengthen her connection with the ethnic community of her ancestors. After two years spent in Europe and four years in Toronto, she returns to Alberta in 1975, in order to research and write her first book of creative non-fiction. Published in 1977, *All of Baba’s Children*, is actually a monograph of the Ukrainian community of the Prairies in the first half of the twentieth century. It includes both oral and written history, covering a wide range of aspects viewed from different perspectives. George Melnyk’s foreword to the third edition (1987) recommends it as a “classic that enters into the category of “social literature”. He considers Kostash a “product” of the protesting generation of the sixties and establishes her credentials as a senior Western Canadian writer. (Kostash, 1987, VII) The impact of the book is compared to that of Maria Campbell’s autobiographical *Half-breed*, John Marlyn’s *Under the Ribs of Death*, and in poetry to Andrew Suknaski’s *Wood Mountain Poems*, showing “how fruitful a reciprocity can exist between place and the self”. (Kostash, 1987, X-XI)

The book deals with a wide range of topics connected to place: the homestead and family life, school and education, church and religion etc. But the author also refers to politics, racial discrimination, nationalism and assimilation, in connection with the Ukrainian minority’s situation between the two World Wars. There are hundreds of “voices” telling their different stories, quotations from newspapers and histories, interviews, showing the differences between the first and the later immigrants, between those who lived on the early homesteads and those who left for the city, summing up the losses and the gains in the painful and complicated process of becoming Canadians in the Prairies.

Because herself is manipulated by the English culture and language that she writes beautifully, Kostash devotes many pages to explore how language can act both ways: as a means of preserving one's identity but also as an instrument of assimilation. She quotes one of her interlocutors: "Our parents were such, you learn ten languages if you want but you must learn your own. It was a must in our home. There was never an English word spoken at meals. It was a rule." (Kostash, 1987, 68) The writer cannot but observe the different position of men and women in this process. If education for men was necessary to achieve economic prosperity and leave the rural community, it did not work in the same way for women. The patriarchal mentality was perpetuated also by intellectuals and "male teachers derided a girl's ambition to be a teacher and told her to marry instead, when parents refused to send a daughter to art school, fearing the virtue, then the fact that the fact that Ukrainian-Canadian women were schooled to the extent they were is a minor miracle." (Kostash, 1987,71) Kostash tries to keep a fair balance between the opinions concerning the Ukrainians' wish to integrate into the new country and their opposition (supported by priests, teachers and intellectual activists) to a forced denationalisation. She also includes the debates surrounding multiculturalism: "It was argued that loyalty and identification with Canada wasn't necessarily the same thing as allegiance to the British way of life." (Kostash, 1987, 85) In the chapter on assimilation, Kostash defines the concept without dissociating it from integration. She shows how and why during this process the Ukrainians did not surrender unconditionally their "exiled identity" to the new one and continued to identify with the Ukrainian nation and culture. (Kostash, 1987, 363) The moments of "retreat" to the other side of the hyphen happened exactly when the dominant culture manifested its lack of trust in the loyalty of the minority.

In "Mythologies", Kostash tells about the "ethnic compromise" of the older generation, the "hyphenated identity" that for the outsider "may seem like a neutralized and attenuated substitute for a real name". (Kostash, 1987, 394) She sees it as a "survival technique" that made of ethnicity "a culture of ambiguity, emphasising now one, now the other identity on either side of the hyphen, depending on the prevailing political winds." (Kostash, 1987, 395) The next generation emerged with different perspectives: "Canadian identity was their birthright, Ukrainian loyalty a learned response." (Kostash, 1987, 394) Still, the Canadian-born generation whose educational background should have facilitated their social and political integration so as to reach the top of the vertical mosaic seem discontent: "the melted-down ethnic has only got as far as the tradesman's entrance to the clubhouse - another strategy had to be employed". (Kostash, 1987, 397) While the "quiet revolution" in Quebec was challenging the exclusive status of the Anglophone culture and sustained that "language retention and cultural survival were inseparable", during the seventies, the "third world" or "third force" of the non-Anglo-Saxon, non-Quebecois population was also claiming recognition, rejecting biculturalism in favour of multiculturalism because by the end of the sixties "no single ethnic group, not even the Anglo-Saxons, represented a clear

majority of the Canadian population.” (Kostash, 1987, 398) Nevertheless, there were voices that pleaded for “individual bilingualism on a regional basis” (Kostash, 1987, 400). Kostash shows how “the ways and means” of multiculturalism have been “as diverse as the imagination and politics of the people and institutions undertaking them”. (Kostash, 1987, 403) The official promulgation of multiculturalism was actually a “normalization of a myth-making process which began with the first immigrant celebration of Canadian experience”. (Kostash, 1987, 406) Kostash even speaks of a “mystique” providing “an agreeable explanation for disagreeable truths” that was ultimately again a “survival tool”. (Kostash, 1987, 407) In her straight and provocative tone, Kostash challenges mythologized versions of history and idealized visions of multiculturalism based upon ambiguous keywords such as: national unity, identity, richness, energy, which hardly reflect individual reality. The simple fact that she needs so many diverse points of view and so many contradictory opinions to quote in representing the Ukrainian ethnic community from the Prairies shows that she has not reached the end of the discussion yet. The concepts need further clarifications and new questions arise as her brochure *All of Baba’s Grandchildren* (2000) - with the subtitle *Ethnic Identity in the Next Canada* - will demonstrate. One of these questions refers to the future of hyphenated identity: “Does it still matter, in the so-called global village, that hyphen is a kind of hinge between two equally compelling identities?” (Kostash, 2000, 13)

Myrna Kostash’s book is more concerned with the problems faced by her ethnic community along its history in Canada than with the representation of the Prairies. Although the region of settlement that had accommodated the first generation of Ukrainian peasants has proved to be profitable for the later immigrants as well, the immigrants’ stories are less about the place where they live and more about their memories and frustrations. Writing non-fiction, Myrna Kostash is inclined to problematize rather than “depict”.

### **Wayson Choy’s “The Jade Peony”**

The Vancouver born (1939) Wayson Choy, who teaches English at Humber College Toronto, published his first novel *The Jade Peony* only in 1995, though his short stories had been included in many anthologies till then. The book focuses on a family’s life in Chinatown, Vancouver, in the late 1930s and early ‘40s as reflected in the reminiscences of the three younger children.

The “only sister”, Jook-Liang’s memories go back to 1933, when she was only five. Her representations of the world, like those of her brothers’, are concerned with the traditional Chinese family and its strong relationships to the old country and values but also with the immigrants’ frustrations due to a legislation meant to sever their ties with the motherland. Grandmother Poh-Poh is the “head” of the family not simply because she is the “Old One” and this is the position she should have according to the Chinese family hierarchy but because her knowledge of tradition has allowed her to preserve her identity unshaken. Nevertheless, with all her efforts, she cannot keep out the influence of the local Anglo-American culture. In Jook-Liang’s eyes old

Wong-Suk, her grandmother's friend, appears as a hybrid hero, a combination of the Chinese legends' Monkey King and Cheetah from the Tarzan movie and her model is Shirley Temple. The little girl's secret talks with Wong-Suk are in "Chinglish". (Choy, 63) But Jook-Liang is too young to understand the use and meaning Wong-Suk's "bone shipment", his taking back to China the bones of the Chinese who had died in Gold Mountain. She is aware only of her personal loss at Wong-Suk's departure. (Choy, 64)

"The second brother", Jung-Sum, is an adopted child. His recollections of his parents' death and of his unfortunate experiences in different other families make him, at his arrival in Salt Water City, identify grandmother Poh-Poh with Fox Lady, a malefic character in Chinese folk tales. Although his integration in the new family does not encounter any difficulty, still, his first attachment is to a turtle that he finally has to return to its owner. Jung-Sum's hero is the American boxer Joe Louis and he also wants to become a champion. As the loss of his family has affected also his sexual identity he falls secretly in love with Frank Yuen, "a sharp-eyed man, earning big money at a lumber mill". (Choy, 111) Provoked by the stronger young man, he almost kills him in a "win or die" fight as he is determined to survive at all costs. But he will lose Frank, too, when the latter sings up with the US Marines who welcome English-speaking Chinese. (Choy, 119)

The last and longest story belongs to Sek-Lung, "Third Brother", whose feeble health makes him more observant of the world around and connects him more to his grandmother. She leaves him the jade peony - a symbol of their being Chinese and her ghost will be seen by Sek-Lung haunting the house long after her death, till the family members accept to perform the old Chinese rituals for the dead. Sek-Lung is thought to be a *mo no* - meaning "without brain" - because of his inability to understand the complicated Chinese system of family ranking and kinship terms. He, unlike his brothers and sister, is more concerned with his identity and is more aware of the differences between cultures, but also more willing to become a real Canadian. Because of his poor health he is sent only to an English school where he does not feel different from the other immigrant children. His first teacher, Miss MacKinney, encourages her pupils to speak English as she has an "accent", too. At the outbreak of war, Sek-Lung's second teacher, Miss Doyle, captures her fond of war-games pupils by introducing a "military discipline" in her classes and pretending to be their "general". She fascinates them by reading the letters her brother had sent her from London before his death during a bombardment.

Japan's role in World War II transforms the Canadian-Japanese into the enemy and thus the historical conflict between the Chinese and the Japanese is brought over to Canada. Sek-Lung gets a closer view of this change of attitude not only at school, where the Japanese children are beaten up by the others, but also when he is secretly taken to "Little Tokyo" by the beautiful girl from the neighbourhood supposed to look after him while his mother is at work. Sek-Lung's story has also a sad ending. The girl, Meiyung, student at an

English high school, has fallen in love with a Japanese colleague Kazuo. But after Pearl Harbour, she can see her boyfriend only in secret and after the deportation of the Japanese from "Little Tokyo" she dies of an abortion performed at home.

The three children spend most of their life in the home and they are closely linked to the objects around. Their exploration of the outside world is a prudent, step-by-step, process, extending to the neighbourhood. When the circle is enlarged to spaces beyond the limits of the familiar one, the experience is always painful, meaning the loss of someone loved. Grandmother Poh-Poh's death should mark the family's integration into the new homeland. But after her bodily departure, her spirit is able to make the family perform the traditional rites. The jade peony, her piece of jewellery symbolizing tradition, the knowledge of making wind chimes that Sek-lung has learned from her as well as the memories of the family keep her alive. But for the three children Canada is already their home.

### **Conclusions**

The four books considered above represent Canada in a counterpoint with the old country. If for Eugene Giurgiu's hero the connection with his country of birth is imposed by the home country's own policy, interfering with its citizen's right to choose where they want to live, Ondaatje gives a more detached, rather objective view of the immigrants' history of integration in the metropolis. The intellectual immigrant from Europe as well as the craftsman can easily find a job in the receiving space of the metropolis. The older members of Ukrainian farmer community and those of the west coast Chinese community are more attached to the land and traditions and thus are less prone to "let go" their links to the old country.

With all the differences between the Ukrainians from the Prairies and the Chinese from the west coast, there are some similitudes between the two communities' relationships to the new country. It seemed less hospitable in accommodating their ethnic groups in the past. The immigration laws for the Chinese and the segregation of the Ukrainians - similar to that of the Japanese during the war - made them nourish feelings of resentment towards the "Anglos".

The Chinese community, as a visible minority, seems more self-contained and therefore more united and bound to preserve their traditions. The strong visual insignia of their culture mark also the space they inhabit. Moreover, some elements of their culture - like wind chimes, fung-shui, gyseng etc. - seem to be successfully spreading over the globe. Still, the younger generation for whom language learning is easier sees the way to integration into the new cultural patterns as more attractive. The influence of both the traditional Chinese and the American pop culture on Canada's west coast seem specific phenomena imposed by the geographical location.

Language learning as a sine qua non means in the process of integration/assimilation and in appropriating the country is present in all four

books. To support the idea that language acquisition is connected to the representations of Canada in immigrant stories I would mention another novel, by a much younger writer, born in Germany (1960) but who grew up in the Ottawa Valley. Stephen Henighan's *The Place Where Names Vanish* is a necessary additional example because his immigrants settle in Montreal. As if illustrating the separatist tendencies in Quebec, Henighan separates also formally the country of birth from the place of immigration in two distinct parts of his novel whose heroine is a woman, although the numbering of the chapters preserves its continuity, as life goes on irrespective of place. Part One is about Marta's life in her homeland, Ecuador, that she wants to leave thinking that her name changed at birth by the slip of the priest's pen entitles her to a different fate than a life in the small, poor, mountain village. Part Two is set in Montreal. It begins with the problem of language and is almost entirely connected to the process of language learning, with hints to the conflict between English and French. Marta's husband, failing to sell vacuum-cleaners when using French with English speakers, gets the impression that he was taught the wrong language and prefers to earn his living playing the guitar and singing in his mother tongue, Spanish. Marta, willing to offer a better life to her daughter, is more determined to learn. She gets over her shocking experience while learning English combined with cultural skills and is more successful with French that she learns benefiting from the generous government financial support for language learning immigrants. Her little daughter, like the Chinese children in Choy's novel, encounters no difficulty in learning both official languages of the country, besides her parents' mother tongue that is not unitary either, as its dialects are known only by the grandmother.

Thus Canada appears in immigrant stories not only as a multicultural, polyglot country, but also as a place where survival can be achieved, as everywhere else in the world, by non-verbal means as well. Besides work skills, arts and crafts are means of communication. But still, learning to speak the languages of the country helps in its appropriation. Canada is the country where the problem of identity and language learning are strongly connected to place.

According to Myrna Kostash, physical proximity is very important for people to "build common values", but according to her observations while collecting material for *The Next Canada*, the young generations are less concerned with "place", their values being "increasingly tangled up in interests like technology, ethnicity, sexuality and work." (Kostash, Interview)

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**SPATIAL LAYOUTS IN A HUNGARIAN IMMIGRANT'S  
JOURNEY TO CANADA: A CASE STUDY OF *IN LIGHT OF  
CHAOS* BY BÉLA SZABADOS**

The paper seeks to study the way the retrospective method is used in exploring the space of "elsewhere" in the autobiographical novel *In Light Of Chaos* (1990) by Bela Szabados. Geographical, cultural, political and ethnic spaces will be focused on. The paper will suggest that a possible harmonious relationship may exist between alien and lived spaces even it means constant "crossing borders".

I would like to start with a quotation by John Miska "Unlike its Hungarian counterpart, English-Hungarian fiction is enjoying a renaissance" (*Literature of Hungarian Canadians*, 31). The novel under discussion was published a year earlier than the above quotation that is in 1990. Miska mentions three waves of Hungarian immigrants and connects Szabados with the second wave, which is characterized by Miska in the following way: "This wave, being mainly of middle class, professional origin, settled in large cities. The host society received them with a certain degree of reservation, regarding them as alien intruders snatching the scarce job opportunities, and disrupting the nations' traditional way of life governed by colonial Puritanism. The primary concerns of this generation were of a social rather than of economic nature, focusing on social acceptance and integration into the new environment without having to give up Hungarian national traditions" (*Literature of Hungarian Canadians*, 32). This is where Szabados belongs. The author, who was born in Hungary in 1942, left the country together with his family in 1956. He explores his childhood; because of food shortages, they often suffered from hunger, had to leave their house for just a room in a dirty, shabby place. He lost his father, who returned from a Siberian gulag. For obvious reasons the first two parts in the novel where he describes the advance of the Soviets and his family's journey to Canada via Austria and Germany, are different from the third part, which is set in Montreal.

I would like to show how spatial discourse is generated in *In Light of Chaos*. Before doing that, however, some theoretical clarifications are in order. I shall rely on Yi-Fu-Tuan's differentiation between space and place.

In experience, the meaning of space often merges with that of place. "Space" is more abstract than "place". What begins as undifferentiated space becomes

place as we get to now it better and endow it with value. (*Space and Place*, 6)

Place is a special kind of object. It is a concentration of value, though not a valued thing that can be handled or carried about easily; it is an object in which one can dwell. Space [...] is given by the ability to move. (*Space and Place*, 12)

I also find it important to bear in mind Margaret Atwood's famous concept according to which Canadians are basically concerned about the question "Where is here"?. *Here*, of course means, Canada. (*Survival*, 17) According to David Staines the question has changed into "Where is there?" (*Beyond Provinces*, 27) (Works by Michael Ondaatje, Sherill Grace, Rohinton Mistry, Neil Bissoondath etc. would be obvious examples.) Where *there* means the homeland, the old world. Szabados is interested in both and also what is in-between. It is manifest in the narrative organization; the novel falls into three parts: *Nothing* (1943-1956), *Neither Nothing Nor Something* (1956-1958), *Something Else* (1958-1966).

The different elements of spatial structuring is delicately woven. The textual fragments in each part are numbered. The work is set in an experienced presence and goes back in time because spatiality and temporality cannot be separated. The author becomes his own text. In the process of writing he creates his own self. *In Light Chaos* is an ethno autobiography in which actual and figurative spaces are created. Szabados thinks that the mental reconstruction of time and therefore of space can easily be false. He quotes Dostoyevsky: "A true autobiography [...] is an impossibility; a man is bound to lie about himself." (n.p.) The different spaces co-mingle in the novel. It seems that for him the dearest physical space is the house, the home. In this domestic space he can establish his own private place and be, at the same time, part of communal places. The house is a multifunctional place. When he moves from one house to another, or is forced to, together with his family, he always gives detailed descriptions of it.

Our home is beside the river. On the other side is a park. There are stones in front. The rooms have huge windows and everywhere there is light. As you come in, you enter a large room where you can take off your coat and what not. There is a small bathroom for guests off this front hall. To the left, there are three bedrooms. To the centre, there is the kitchen overlooking the garden. Pushing forward, there is a guest room on the right and a cold room where food is kept and stored. (23)

This is what the old home looked like in Hungary before they had to move out. Yi-Fu Tuan in his often quoted *Topophilia* remarks,

To be forcibly evicted from one's home and neighbourhood is to be stripped of a sheathing which in its familiarity protects the human being from the bewilderments of the outside world. ... Awareness of the past is an important element in the love of place. (99)

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Szabados's personalized memories in the first two parts are set in highly politicized spaces. Architected space/s is/are described in a somewhat more detailed way in these two parts than in the third where there is a shift towards social and behavioural spaces. The spaces in the first two parts include places like the school building, the swimming pool, the church, confessional box, the camp where they stay in Austria, its surroundings, the ship they took to Canada. Some of these places recur in each part, like the school, the swimming pool, the church in different forms. He has strong sentiments for most of them, but he is not tophofilic for each and every location where he used to be, he instead experiences spatial constraint. He creates topological and cognitive spaces. Paul L. Knox's definition of these terms can be applied here.

One example is *topological space* defined as the connections between, or connecting of, particular points in space. ... Topological space is measured not in terms of conventional measures of distance but rather in terms of the nature and degree of connectivity between locations. (*Places and Regions in Global Context*, 37) (emphasis added)

[c]ognitive space is defined and measured in terms of people's values, feelings, beliefs, and perceptions about locations, districts, and regions. Cognitive space can be described therefore, in terms of behavioural space, landmarks, paths, environments and spatial layouts. (*Places and Regions in Global Context*, 37)

The author develops a mental space of Canada before arriving there through films that they are shown at school in Austria.

The vastness, stillness, ruggedness of the diverse Canadian landscape captivates me. The canoe cuts the quiet lakes like knife. The Rockies' vast snows and the idea of grand, unfilled *space* makes me shiver with solitude, yet I feel this is the *place* where I can do "something": where I can contribute. A *place* which needs people. ... How can I make a *place*, a *home*, in the midst of such beauty? (62) (emphasis added)

Without being familiar with spatial theories, I assume, he instinctively differentiates between *space* and *place*, also the longing for a *home* is here again. However, on arrival he suffers from sea-sickness only to recover from it very soon. "Montreal. Terra firma feels less than firm upon disembarking. It is as if the waves pervaded my being" (85). He very soon discovers the city; the text does not lack in locational references among them to Hungarian cafes and restaurants that he goes to. He keeps cultivating his cultural past which is manifested in his constant reading of European authors. So Montreal is more a *mental space* with a rich European heritage than a physical one for him. Since he easily deals with different contact zones he hardly ever experiences cross-cultural frustrations. Never disclaiming his origin he easily goes through the acculturative process. He has odd jobs and studies languages and literature at

the same time. He always wanted to do that so it provides him with a large *space of joy*. The *linguistic space* in the novel covers different languages: English, Hungarian, German, and more and more French as the novel develops. The broader linguistic space he can move around the more capable he is to find his way in the *pragmatic space* of the new World, which is badly needed, too. He is immersed into the multicultural fabric of Canada already on the board of the ship. "I feel as if the layers of my past are peeling off. The ship is Greek; it is impeccably white and the crew is barbarously multilingual - they speak a bit of all languages. Babel: *Ok; jawol; d'accord; jól van; yeah!*" (81) He really enjoys the cacophony of languages. English he wanted to study right from his childhood. "The rhyme and nasal quality of English is seductive. I decided there and then to learn to speak this language. It is close to me" (47).

His strong sentiment for another kind of space is the *geographical landscape*. He admires the Alps, different parts of Quebec and the prairies. He literally devours these *natural spaces*. "As we ascend, the landscape becomes orderly, as if arranged. And then it disappears altogether. I resolve always to stay close enough to see the terrain clearly, never to lose sight of the terrain" (125). This what he says in the closing sentence of the novel.

In conclusion, I think that the space/s that Szabados is really concerned with are actually borders; it is both implicitly and explicitly in the text. As it was mentioned earlier spaces allow movement and he is on the road continuously even if at times against his will. Being a "border man" demands a lot emotionally, culturally and physically.

My euphoria subsides when I look back from the truck: I seem to hear some plaintive sounds - my father, Dr. Buda and Petofi, all crying, and suddenly I am overwhelmed by a sense of grief and betrayal. I lie prostate on the truck, unable to suppress my tears. (128)

I keep crossing this *border* for ten years. At night. In my nightmares. (56) (emphasis added)

"Bordering" seems to be a way of existence for many immigrants in Canada; be it between the old world and the new world or among different geocultural spaces and places within the country.

At the end of this narrative of self-definition we say good-bye to him, as he is crossing another border, after all borders are his spaces; this time from Montreal to the prairies where he will have a completely different sense of space than he has ever experienced before.

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**CHINESE VOICES IN CANADIAN CHILDREN'S  
LITERATURE:  
PAUL YEE (1956-) AND SUI SIN FAR (1865-1914)**

Children's literature of any country has a very important educational and socializing function; at its best, it promotes moral values and artistic standards that are deemed crucial within a given society. In multicultural societies, children's literature has the additional function of preserving ethnic identity. The question of language is in this context pivotal. It is no wonder then that authors representing ethnic minorities frequently in a self-referential manner thematize such activities as speaking and writing. The focus of attention in the present paper is on Chinese (often female) voices heard in selected texts by Sui Sin Far and Paul Yee, two Chinese Canadians living a century apart. All of these texts were written in English, and not Chinese, which may be viewed as an act of despair (as if the authors were saying that there is no way to recreate the old identity) or an assertion of power (there is room for variety within the dominant English language). I seek to show how weakness (physical and verbal) is often transformed into strength in their narratives. I begin with an analysis of Paul Yee's most recent book, and then compare his literary endeavour with that of his predecessor.

In 2002 Paul Yee published a collection of tales entitled *Dead Man's Gold and Other Stories*. In his "Note to the Reader," Yee explains that his book is part of a larger project. On one level of continuity, the book looks back to his widely popular and highly acclaimed earlier volume *Tales from Gold Mountain*, published in 1989 (see notes on critical reception in Cope, 442). On another, it inscribes itself in the tradition of ghost stories, which Yee defines as "a popular narrative form in China" (Yee, 2002, 112). The popularity of the genre in the Western hemisphere proves that readers' emotional needs are alike all over the world. It is precisely upon the assumption of shared human characteristics that Yee constructs stories which combine the qualities of the Old and the New World, and join communal tradition with individual invention. In both collections, as well as in two separately published tales, *Roses Sing on New Snow* (1991) and *Ghost Train* (1996), Yee seeks to create "a New World mythology" (Yee, 2002, 112), often within a clearly defined historical context.

Like many hyphenated Canadians, Yee was for a long time "uninterested in his Chinese roots," and as a child "often felt uncomfortable being 'between'

cultures” (Cope, 437). His Chinese heritage came to fascinate him only when he entered the University of British Columbia. Educated in Canada to become a historian and archivist, he began to combine in his stories the conscientiousness of scholarly research with the style and motifs of traditional Chinese folk tales he had heard from his Aunt Lillian (Cope, 440). Jim Cope repeatedly describes Yee’s style as “spare” and “muscular” (Cope, 440, 441), ascribing to his narrative voice a clear gender identity. It seems that racial hybridity coincides in Yee’s fiction with the crossing of the gender boundary. The perspective adopted by Yee’s narrators is always from within the Chinese community and often from within the woman’s heart and mind. The tone is always that of accepting intimacy over the boundaries of race and gender.

*Dead Man’s Gold and Other Stories* brings a wide spectrum of character types and spans a long period of time. Yee’s references to the history of Chinese immigration to the New World are brief and unobtrusive, but sufficient to give the reader a sense of the changing policy. Resentment is evident particularly when he refers to the nineteenth century, when only Chinese immigrants of all immigrant groups had to pay the head tax to be able to settle down in Canada (Yee, 2002, 44). Later on the laws became even more restrictive, altogether forbidding the Chinese the right to enter the country (Yee, 2002, 54). Historians’ remarks on Chinese immigration help us to understand this change. Until 1885, when the last spike was driven in eastern British Columbia to mark the completion of the Central Pacific Railway, the Chinese were exploited as cheap labour (Eaton and Newman, 83). An earlier story by Paul Yee, *Ghost Train*, is set in those times, and could be read as an elegy on countless and nameless immigrant victims of Canadian industrial progress. “With the completion of the CPR, the Canadian government moved swiftly to limit Chinese immigration” (Bumsted, 29). During World War II, however, “public attitudes toward the Chinese changed, because China fought with the Allies against Japan, and Chinese Canadians enlisted in the Canadian armed forces. Now that Chinese were viewed as fellow Canadians, immigration laws were amended to admit them in small numbers” (Yee, 85).

Yee’s decision to number the stories, and to arrange them chronologically, beginning with those narrating events that took place in the nineteenth century and ending with those set in the twentieth century, suggests a unity characteristic of a typically Canadian genre, that of the short story cycle. Dieter Meindl argues in his essay that the short story cycle – suspended as it is between the novel and the short story collection – reflects in its very form the idea of the fragmentation of human experience (Meindl, 32). Relying on two major unifying principles; the genre of the ghost story and the Chinese history in the New World, Yee varies in his stories the protagonists’ age and gender identity. He narrates the adventures of adolescents and adults, rather than very young children. This is a contrast to Yee’s earlier stories, in which the experience of ethnic discrimination was often compounded with the experience of disadvantage suffered by a teenage girl in a patriarchal community (*Roses Sing on New Snow*) or a handicapped girl (*Ghost Train*).



Many of Yee's stories in *Dead Man's Gold* begin in the city of Hong Kong (Yee, 2002, 52, 92) or Canton (Yee, 2002, 33), or in small villages of South China, places that come alive in masterly vignettes (Yee, 2002, 11). The plot is then relocated to the New World, either Canada or the United States. References to real place-names in North America are rare and hardly ever specific (e.g. the Canadian prairie in "Alone No Longer"). Names such as "the Pacific Northwest" or "Chinatown" have a generic quality that signifies the sameness of immigrant isolation. It is the distance from home that matters, the sheer fact of being an immigrant, and not the precise location. The destination of numerous Chinese immigrants is the mythical and invariably disappointing place called Gold Mountain (Yee, 2002, 15, 18, 24, 34, 42, 48, 72, 91). By using this name, Yee stresses the predominantly economic motivation guiding the Chinese immigrants' steps. The very first sentence of the opening, title story brings a definition of gold which is rich in rhetorical figures and puzzling in its reversal of a traditional image: "Gold attracts men like a magnet awakening metal pins, like honey humming to bees" (Yee, 2002, 11). Immigrants emerge in this sentence by implication as metal pins animated by their attraction to a superior quality or – and more surprisingly – as busy bees responding to the sound they seem to hear in an ore resembling their own product. The reference is to subhuman creatures and to their delusion of hearing their own language from a distance.

Although written in English, Yee's stories reveal in a varied and subtle way many socio-linguistic dilemmas faced by immigrants. The Chinese language enters the narratives through character names (Yuen and Fong in "Dead Man's Gold," Chung in "Digging Deep," Shu in "Sky-High," Choi Jee-yun and Yen Wah-lung, the assumed name Yung Gim-lan in "Seawall Sightings," Shek and Ping in "The Brothers," Ko in "Alone No Longer," Lok-hay, Lew So-ying, and Jee-wah in "First Wife") and place-names (e.g. "a man from Yen-Ping," Yee, 2002, 12). Some of these names have been translated into English and acquired a symbolic value (e.g. the lovers Willow and Ox and Ox's daughter Blossom in "The Memory Stone," Big Field in "Dead Man's Gold," Pearl River Region in "The Memory Stone," Middle Creek in "First Wife," or Pig Pen in "Seawall Sightings"). The names of Little Lo or Old Poon in "The Peddler" are examples of hybrid names, part English and part Chinese.

The diction employed by Yee's narrator is simple and yet rich in imagery. It is mostly descriptive verbs, such as "snuggle," "scramble," "shoulder," or "dart" (a few examples from just one page, Yee, 2002, 12) that enrich the apparent simplicity of his language and render dynamic action picturesque. The language used by protagonists is more straightforward than the narrator's diction, thus faithfully recreating mutual relations among Chinese farmers and immigrant workers. Just as significant as the quality of the spoken language is the age and gender identity of the speakers. In many of Yee's stories, it is mostly male characters who speak. This is true about "Dead Man's Gold," in which the first female voice to be heard is that of Fong's old mother inquiring

about her son toward the end of the narrative (Yee, 2002, 17). “Digging Deep,” a story of a son tied to his mother’s apron-strings, is an exception that proves the rule. In this story, the mother is more eloquent than her son. Urged by his mother to grow up and behave like a man (i.e. to protect his property and to get married), the protagonist takes flight to the New World, where he becomes a courageous miner. Not all of Yee’s protagonists live by bread alone; some of them read or even write poetry. Employed as a logger, the sensitive, poetry-reading Shu in “Sky-High” hears the wailing of the felled trees, resolves to destroy all the axes in the camp, and becomes one with the towering tree called Sky-High. While Shu’s reading of poetry leads him to effect poetic justice, Jee-yun’s suffering in “Seawall Sightings” leads her to write poetry on the walls of her prison cell.

Much of the communication between the protagonists and their families at home is carried on through letters, which dramatizes the widening gap between relatives, as their plans and intentions increasingly diverge. Unlike face-to-face exchanges, letters merely announce decisions, disregarding the addressee’s desires. Their serenity is often ironically out of step with the current situation of the sender or the receiver. For example, in “Digging Deep,” a letter from Chung’s mother arrives when he is already dead. In *Ghost Train*, Choon-yi receives her father’s invitation to the New World, travels there only to find out that he has already died. Temporal and spatial distance turns letters sent from and to China into ghosts not only in the sense that they stand for dead people, but also in the sense of secrecy and lack of substance. For example, Willow sends letters to Ox, but despite his earlier promises, “he replie[s] infrequently, complaining about how hard it [is] to find work” (Yee, 2002, 43). His reticence becomes a message. When the songbird he gave Willow on his departure takes flight, she knows what that means.

With the arrival of the age of telegrams, some of these difficulties seem overcome, but it is precisely then that the immigration policy in Canada becomes particularly restrictive toward the Chinese (Yee, 2002, 54). Although the majority of Yee’s narratives focus on the conditions of life in the New World that affect relations within the Chinese community, two stories in the volume, “Seawall Sightings” and “The Peddler,” are a direct accusation of the New World government and average people for their unfair treatment of the Chinese. In “Seawall Sightings,” Yee offers both a ghost story of two Chinese lovers and a historical account of a certain infamous Immigration Building, known to the Chinese as Pig Pen. Two young lovers resolve to flee from China to the New World to avoid charges of misalliance. The man arrives first and seeks to devise a strategy to bring his beloved to the New World, but he finds out that “the government decided to keep the population white by banning their [Chinese] immigration altogether” (Yee 2002, 54). He nevertheless sends his sweetheart a false birth certificate. However, when she is interrogated by Immigration officers on arrival, the truth comes out, and she is sent to prison. The two are finally reunited on the ship going back to China, which sinks, as if illustrating the well-known

dictum in the postcolonial discourse: "You can't go home again." The two lovers are later sighted in the vicinity of the former Immigration Building, but in the final paragraph of the ghost story, the narrator assures the reader that there is no need to fear them: "They are neither angry nor vengeful, for they are content to be in one another's company, and the view of ocean, trees, and mountains remains magnificent" (Yee, 2002, 59).

A brief remark on the habits of immigration officers appears in "The Memory Stone," when the narrator describes Willow, tired after a long sea voyage, "spending hours with immigration officials and translators," pleading that she is "just a visitor and not a settler" (Yee, 2002, 44). By contrast, excruciating hearings of an illegal Chinese immigrant are described in detail in "Seawall Sightings." The immigration officers' conscientiousness was a mere nuisance in Willow's case, but it has grown to be a threat to Jee-yun:

[...] when Jee-yun's ship docked, she was escorted into Pig Pen and told that her documents would be examined there. Guards marched her to a room containing only a table, with four chairs behind it and one in front. Iron bars guarded the windows.

Three officials and an interpreter trooped in and motioned her to sit. Jee-yun trembled and submitted the false papers, but they ignored her documents and stared rudely across the table. Her gaze faltered. (Yee, 2002, 55)

The following pages of the story recount the hearing. The officials ask Jee-yun several hundred apparently harmless questions about the town she claims to have come from. She then discovers the devilish simplicity of their scheme: "In a few days, they would repeat their questions. It would be impossible for her to recall all her false replies" (Yee, 2002, 56). Wah-lung, her sweetheart, is likewise heard in court, where a "stern-looking judge" orders him "deported to China immediately" (Yee, 2002, 58). The two scenes of hearing of each lover separately expose the bitter mockery of the justice meted out to the Chinese by the white society. Apparently giving the immigrants the right to speak in their own defence, the stern judges have already condemned them before the illegal immigrants as much as open their mouths. The only voice that reaches a wider and sympathetic audience is that of Jee-yun's poetry cut into the prison walls with her jade pendant, copied by a prison doctor, and published by the editor of one of Chinatown's newspapers. Like Jee-yun in the story, Paul Yee sublimates the sufferings of his compatriots in verbal artistry; both aim to create beautiful objects of art, and not to retaliate. Even though hearings take up much of the narrative space, in the title and in the frame story, Yee stresses the sense of sight in the plural noun "sightings." Thus the two lovers, wronged by the enmity and ambition of their families, as well as the racial discrimination in the New World, emerge as powerful symbols of voicelessness and meek submissiveness to the decrees of fate.

Not all ghosts are so mild; the eponymous protagonist of the next story, "The Peddler" accepts humiliation for a long time, but eventually takes revenge on the family of the white boy Tommy, who has played tricks on him and ruined his existence by killing his horse. The peddler comes to haunt the house where Tommy's family used to live. At the beginning of the story, Little Lo, the peddler of the title is literally inarticulate. The narrator recounts funny stories told about him, but the protagonist speaks very little. The first words he stammers out express his disbelief at the generous gift of a horse which he has received from a wealthy compatriot (Yee, 2002, 62). The story of Little Lo is unusual in the collection in the sense that it devotes more space than others to the interaction between a Chinese man and his white customers. The peddler, regarded as an idiot by his own people as well as the white community, is always the underdog, and his inferiority is reflected in his speech impediment; he stammers and he seems incapable of uttering complete sentences. Good-natured and generous, he is repeatedly victimized by white children and their mothers. The treatment he receives is no different from the lot of other Chinese peddlers, but whereas others share their stories, he is the only one who never complains (Yee, 2002, 66). After the accident in which his horse was killed and the only source of his livelihood destroyed, he calls on the boy's mother "with another peddler who spoke better English" to demand financial compensation, but the woman "snort[s] and slam[s] the door in their faces" (Yee, 2002, 69). This is a significant reaction in view of the woman's linguistic superiority to the Chinese peddlers. The message of Yee's stories seems to be that mutual understanding is possible only if verbal exchange exists. Hence the resolution of conflicts within the Chinese community, on the one hand, and between the Chinese immigrants and white citizens, on the other, is entirely different. Wrongs are always redressed in the former case, but not in the latter.

Paul Yee is far from idealizing the Chinese community. The majority of his stories deal with conflicts in Chinese families. Enmities are not necessarily connected with emigration, but it is in the New World that they usually have a tragic finale. North America, with its promise of new life and release from old constraints, is the place where acts of betrayal proliferate; close family members or friends are murdered (men) or else deserted (women). However, in some stories, a return to China and admission of guilt helps the victimizer regain peace of mind.

A few stories juxtapose different male character types within the Chinese community; a frequent pattern is that of the rich independent and the poor submissive man, as in "Dead Man's Gold," or the hard-working and the lazy man, as in "The Brothers" and "Reunited." In all three stories the poor or the lazy man literally or metaphorically kills the rich or the hard-working man, who is a close friend or a family member. The victim remains in the narrative space as a ghost. Yee's talent consists in experimenting with the pattern, the mood, and the ghost in each story. "Dead Man's Gold" is a gloomy tale in which the murderer has to pay with his own life, and does so consciously for the benefit of his family in China. Otherwise, the gold he has stolen from his

dead friend would be a curse, rather than a blessing to them. In "The Brothers" the ghost of the killed brother comes to his murderer's rescue, demanding nothing in return. The final story of the volume, "Reunited," tells the story of a hard-working father and his spoiled teenage son, summoned to the New World and disappointed at the modest and joyless life of his father. The boy insists on buying a car, but the father is reluctant to spend money. When the father is killed in a hold-up, his son buys a car with the sum inherited. He soon realizes that the ghost is always with him, protecting the car and enjoying a ride.

Although addressing a juvenile audience, Yee does not limit his explorations in the lives of Chinese Canadians by adhering to the perspective of a child. This gives him an opportunity to address adult problems, especially marital conflicts within the Chinese community. A frequent pattern is that of infidelity; in such stories as "The Memory Stone," "Alone No Longer," and "First Wife," Chinese men leave their wives behind to begin a new life in the New World, often with a new wife. In all three stories, the first sweetheart or wife arrives in the New World. Willow in "The Memory Stone" eventually gives her blessing to her former lover's daughter to break the spell that disfigured the child's face. The wives in "Alone No Longer" and "First Wife" cope in two different ways with the difficulty of assimilating in the New World. Mrs. Ko, the former character, undergoes a symbolic death to be reborn in the ghost of a cheerful Canadian waitress who has been haunting her husband's coffee shop. So-ying, the "first wife" of the title of the other story, disappears one day with the ghost of an old Chinese man, with whom she kept company when she was snubbed by her family, including her own son. The old man explains where she can hide: "There is a third place [apart from the New World and China] for people like us, people trapped by space and time, by events bigger than us. In the third place, our memories become real worlds, and there we live happily until it is time to die" (Yee, 2002, 100).

Mrs. Ko's and So-ying's inability to learn English alienates them not only from the white society, but even from their own families, which have adapted easily to the New World, its language and the values transmitted through that language. Mrs. Ko is entirely dependent on her husband because she can neither communicate with the customers nor read newspapers. Her own state of mind – especially her lack of self-respect – is evident in the following account by the narrator: "She tried to learn English, but her tongue stiffened no matter how she tugged and stretched it. And her brain stewed in a lazy fog, unable to recall new words no matter how often she repeated them" (Yee 2002, 87). So-ying travels with her son to Canada by plane, but the relative comfort of the travel cannot compensate for the twenty-five years of estrangement. The scene of reunion is described in just one sentence that tells the whole story: "The family shook hands and smiled nervously" (Yee 2002, 94). Like Mrs. Ko, So-ying cannot speak English. She is left behind when the others go to the movies because she would not be able to understand (Yee, 2002, 97), and eventually her son asks his father's second wife to meet his

teacher for the same reason (Yee, 2002, 99). Whereas Mrs. Ko is reborn and blossoms out in active life, So-ying withdraws and disappears, becoming a happy ghost to her acculturated family. In stories of both male-male and male-female relations, a frequent motif is that of offering one's body to someone else's soul or spirit. To some protagonists, this act of transubstantiation is a relief (e.g. "Dead Man's Gold," "The Memory Stone," or "Alone No Longer"), but rebirth in a new form is not available to all. In "Digging Deep," the ghost of dead miners, who has rendered Chung fearless and successful, eventually claims his life. In "First Wife," So-ying's ghostly compatriot, with whom she finds a common language and shared experience, suggests withdrawal from active life as a solution to the pain of useless existence.

In the genre of ghost story, Paul Yee has found a literary form best suited to the task of describing the experience of immigration. It is an immigrant's destiny to live with the ghosts of the past, and to become a new person by embodying someone else. In a subtle and highly artistic fashion, Yee captures the essence of the immigrant experience, while at the same time satisfying the most basic needs of young readers for suspense and mystery. The aims of his artistic and ideological project become quite clear if one compares his short fiction with the tales published by Sui Sin Far, a pioneer of Chinese writing in the New World. According to Amy Ling and Annette White-Parks, Sui Sin Far's work was "the first expression of the Chinese experience in the United States and Canada and the first fiction in English by any Asian North American" (Ling and White-Parks, 2). Although Sui Sin Far was not, strictly speaking, a children's writer – perhaps because the book market strategies of her times did not require such relentless product targeting – "children's stories played a central role in [her] work [...]. She began writing her own children's column as early as 1897 in Kingston, Jamaica, and continued writing for children throughout her career" (Ferens, 121). Whether or not Paul Yee is aware of his predecessor, it is worth viewing his achievement at the background of her endeavour.

Sui Sin Far's family situation seems to have been entirely different from that of Paul Yee. He was born in Canada of Chinese parents, whereas Sui Sin Far (also known as Edith Maude Eaton) was born in England of mixed parentage (her father was British and her mother Chinese), and migrated to Canada in the early 1870s (Ling and White-Parks, 2; Sui Sin Far, 289). And yet, similarities between the two authors are striking. The two cultures claiming both of them were clearly gendered; the Anglophone culture was that of the father (in Sui Sin Far's case) or that of powerful male-dominated institutions such as school (in Yee's case), whereas the Chinese voice was that of a woman: Sui Sin Far's story-telling mother and Paul Yee's likewise gifted Aunt Lillian. Both authors found their preferable mode of expression in short stories whose protagonists are often young people. Like Paul Yee in his *Dead Man's Gold and Other Stories*, Sui Sin Far sought to piece together the stories collected in her only published volume *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (1912), employing for this purpose – among other unifying strategies – the figure of a

rebellious Chinese girl Ku Yum, who appears in several stories. Ku Yum is a poor peasant companion to a lonely princess in China ("The Heart's Desire"), an apparently envious older sister in Santa Barbara ("Misunderstood"), or a strange androgynous being in Los Angeles ("A Chinese Boy-Girl").

The most obvious difference between Paul Yee's and Sui Sin Far's fiction is visible in the very titles of the two collections. *Dead Man's Gold* suggests gloomy mystery as well as masculine economic endeavours in the public sphere, whereas *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* connotes hope, movement, rebirth as well as artistic feminine pursuits. Amy Ling and Annette White-Parks are well aware of possible objections to Sui Sin Far's prose, which apply to the title, too: "[s]ome present-day readers may consider the somewhat flowery style of these stories dated. Others may take issue with a certain 'orientalism' in the author's tone and with the feeling that she is as much outsider as insider to the Chinese North American community" (Ling and White-Parks, 5). Indeed, especially in the tales set in China (e.g. "The Banishment of Ming and Mai," "What about the Cat?"), Sui Sin Far tries to capitalize on the North American audience's interest in the exotic, orientalist fiction, which was – as Dominika Ferens succinctly puts it – "entertaining but of no consequence to [the readers'] own lives" (Ferens, 130). In fact, even at Sui Sin Far's hands, stories of this kind often reinforced popular stereotypes of the Chinese (Ferens, 129). This is also true about her fairy tales, "marketed as authentic Chinese tales 'transcribed' or 'translated' by Sui Sin Far" (Ferens, 125).

Eager to reach "the predominantly white middle-class magazine readers," Sui Sin Far employed popular genres and conventions, and yet she often addressed "unpopular causes, subjects and themes, especially regarding interracial relations" (Ferens, 118). Bringing in the woman's perspective and the perspective of a Eurasian child, Sui Sin Far's prose offers a wider range of racial dilemmas than Paul Yee's ghost stories, which feature mostly male characters. In the early stories ("Dead Man's Gold," "Digging Deep," "Sky-High," as well as in "The Peddler," "The Brothers") and, in a sense, also in the final story of the volume ("Reunited"), these male characters often form a bachelor community. Chinese women who arrive in the New World are not, or do not feel, welcome either in the country ("Seawall Sightings," "Alone No Longer") or in their former husbands' families ("The Memory Stone," "First Wife"). It is the Chinese tradition of family life, Yee seems to be saying, that counteracts the abnormal conditions of male immigrants' life, but adherence to this tradition may symbolically or even literally, kill the male protagonist. The young dauntless miner in "Digging Deep" dies exactly on the day when his parents conduct a marriage ceremony for him in China. Marriage by proxy, whose aim was to coerce the hard-working son to return and settle down in China, is also a variation on the theme of ghostly presence and embodiment as part of an immigrant's experience.

Although in *Dead Man's Gold* male perspective dominates, in two of his tales published as separate books, *Roses Sing on New Snow* (1991) and *Ghost*

*Train* (1996), Yee, very much like Sui Sin Far “give[s] voice and protagonist roles to Chinese and Chinese North American women and children, thus breaking the stereotypes of silence, invisibility, and ‘bachelor societies’ that have ignored small but present female populations” (Ling and White-Parks, 6). Dominika Ferens corroborates Ling and White-Parks’s claim concerning Sui Sin Far, and comments on her “campaign to present white readers with images other than that of the Chinatown bachelor communities artificially created by discriminatory immigration laws.” Ferens hints at the vicious circle of “anomalies” in bachelor communities, prejudice against them, and their discrimination: “Since the establishment used the anomalies it had itself helped to create as justification for further restricting Chinese immigration, Sui Sin Far took it upon herself to supply the sorely lacking positive portrayals” (Ferens, 139).

Perhaps the most feminist of Yee’s texts, *Roses Sing on New Snow* tells the story of a young Chinese woman, Maylin, who cooks in her father’s restaurant in Chinatown. She is exploited as cheap workforce by her unscrupulous father and brothers. She is even denied the credit for her accomplishment as a cook. Unlike her father and brothers, who are “fat and lazy from eating” (Yee 1991, n.p.), Maylin loves food because cooking is to her a form of social mission; she cooks for the “lonely and cold and bone-tired” men who come to Chinatown. Her meals always make them smile (Yee 1991, n.p.). When the governor of South China visits Chinatown and announces a competition for the best dish in the New World, Maylin’s dish – with the fancy name that is the title of the tale – wins. Threatened by the governor, the father finally reveals that the dish was prepared by Maylin, who, with astounding courage tells the governor that the dish cannot be taken to China because it is part of the New World.

In *Ghost Train*, Yee assigns the female protagonist a different role. She arrives in the New World too late to see her father, who died in an accident while constructing the railroad, but her special artistic gift – she can paint beautifully with her only arm – allows her to perform a ritual for the dead Chinese workers. Following the instructions she receives from her father in a dream, she paints a train which comes alive. She steps on the train and shares a ride with the ghosts of Chinese workers, observing them and listening to their voices. It is the image that tells a story of their work and pastimes as none of the dialogues or anxiously muttered monologues are quoted. The final part of the ritual is thus described in the imperative mood: “Now roll up the painting and take it home to China. Then climb the highest hill in the region and burn it. Let our ashes sail on the four winds. That way our souls will finally find their way home” (Yee 1996, n.p.). In this and in many other of his stories, Yee shows what Sui Sin Far excluded from her fiction because “the daily drudgery and humiliations endured by Chinese labourers – even if Sui Sin Far fully grasped them – were not viable fictional subjects at the time” (Ferens, 140). In contrast to Yee’s characters, who invariably perform lower-class jobs, the professions of Sui Sin Far’s protagonists situate them within the middle class (e.g. Lum Yuk in “Pat and Pan” is a jeweller).



As a British-Chinese at the time when the idea of an interracial marriage itself was "a taboo in both cultures" (Ling and White-Parks, 2), and miscegenation was punishable by the California law (Ferens, 135–136), Sui Sin Far was better equipped than Yee to deal with the painful issues of love and hate between representatives of different races, and with the problems faced by children of mixed parentage. Her story "Pat and Pan" unfolds the vicissitudes of such an intimate relation. Two children, a Chinese girl Pan and a Chinese American boy Pat, grow up together in the girl's family. The adoptive son speaks no English and evinces no desire to learn it. He is, however, repeatedly claimed by the white society; he is eventually adopted by a white family, and – although inseparable from Pan in his early childhood – he comes to snub her at the end of the story. While both Sui Sin Far and Paul Yee have insights into Chinese and Anglophone cultures, Sui Sin Far was working against more massive prejudice, hence perhaps her effort to fashion her Chinese characters as decent middle-class people; pious and respectable (as in "Pat and Pan") and differing from the readers only in their use of flowery diction (as in "Children of Peace"). Her insistence on shared humanity over racial difference may also be the reason why she encoded in her fairy tales and realistic vignettes alike a whole range of humanist messages (of family solidarity in "The Story of a Little Chinese Seabird," or uselessness of daydreaming in "The Dreams That Failed") applicable to readers irrespective of their racial background.

The title of one of the subchapters in Dennis Walder's book *Post-colonial Literatures in English* brings together three closely connected concepts: language, audience, and genre. A comparison of Sui Sin Far's and Paul Yee's short fiction helps to trace changing relations between these three factors in the literary careers of Chinese authors in the New World. As Dominika Ferens points out, it was "the common practice well into the 1940s" to render "Chinese speech by means of an archaic or courtly English." In Sui Sin Far's tales the adherence to this convention often "produces a mildly comic effect," especially in such texts as "The Banishment of Ming and Mai," in which high-flown diction is used by children (Ferens, 124). And yet, Sui Sin Far, very much like Yee in "The Peddler," sometimes attributed broken English to her Chinese immigrant characters to expose their inadaptability. The linguistic inability – tragicomic in both Sui Sin Far's and Paul Yee's fiction – has its roots in attachment to the old ways. Her story "A Chinese Boy-Girl" is a case in point. Unlike Sui Sin Far, whose strategies of enticing the sympathy of the white middle-class reader range from evoking admiration (for the characters' exotic high-flown English) to compassion (for their linguistic inability in the New World), Paul Yee is not to such an extent constrained by the expectations of white middle-class readership. Sui Sin Far may have sought "to effect a change of racial attitudes in the domestic sphere" (Ferens, 121), but it seems that Paul Yee's agenda is different. Rather than addressing the Anglophone community and explaining the Chinese quirks, he seeks to give his Chinese Canadian readers – and by extension other minority

groups – a sense of history and distinct identity within the cultural mosaic glued together by the use of a common language. In the case of both Sui Sin Far and Paul Yee, the concept of children’s literature is particularly problematic. The often employed criterion of the reader’s age does not really apply. Sui Sin Far’s fiction published in *Good Housekeeping* was addressed to both children and their mothers (Ferens, 122). Resorting to an allegorical treatment of interracial tensions – as Dominika Ferens cogently argues in her analysis of stories such as “Tangled Kites” (Ferens, 126–127) – Sui Sin Far clearly spoke over her juvenile readers’ heads. This observation may also apply to the highly artistic prose of Paul Yee, whose stories – rich in dramatic action and suspense – do much more than merely entertain.

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## ALTERITE ET LES QUATRE VISAGES DANS LE PAYSAGE CULTUREL DU CANADA

Le regard sur l'Altérité, qui est proposé ici, a pour objectif de fournir une contribution au domaine des relations ethniques, axé sur la configuration historique et contemporaine des quatre visages emblématiques représentant différents groupes ethniques, deux majoritaires et deux minoritaires, ainsi que leur réalité humaine dans le paysage culturel du Canada et particulièrement au Québec.

C'est en partant des deux visages majoritaires, deux groupes principaux qui se partagent le territoire: les anglophones et les francophones, chacun cherchant à accéder au pouvoir et imposer sa propre individualité culturelle qu'il sera possible de découvrir le premier visage du Canada celui de l'Amérindien; étant le noyau le plus intérieur de l'identité canadienne. Et c'est toujours en partant de ces deux groupes majoritaires qu'on dévoilera enfin le quatrième visage: l'Immigré, le visage d'ici et maintenant.

La polyphonie et la rencontre des quatre visages dans le contexte canadien oriente à son tour mon propos et le lie à l'importance de la reconnaissance de l'Autre dans sa manifestation singulière, dans sa présence, dans son altérité culturelle qui se manifeste par le dialogue, une communication face à face. Il s'avère nécessaire donc de mettre en relief, en quelques lignes, les éléments préliminaires ou les instances qui se manifestent dans les processus morphologiques d'une rencontre.

Le visage d'autrui est significatif en soi car c'est lui qui instaure une proximité avec l'Autre à travers lequel, par le langage, les symboles véhiculés, se forme un contact. D'après Emmanuel Levinas, la proximité c'est la peau et le visage d'autrui:

En réalité, dans le contact, ne se réveille la caresse du sensible et dans le touché - la tendresse c'est à dire la proximité - qu'à partir d'une peau humaine, d'un visage, à l'approche du prochain. La proximité des choses est poésie: en elles-mêmes, les choses se révèlent avant d'être approchées. Dans l'effleurement de l'animal déjà le cuir durcit dans la peau. Mais les mains qui ont touché les choses, les lieux foulés par les choses,... les inflexions de voix et les mots qui s'articulent en elles, les vestiges, les reliques - sur toutes les choses, à partir du visage et la peau humaine, s'étend la tendresse; la connaissance retourne à la proximité, ou sensible pur. (Levinas, 228)

Maintenant, on saisit peut-être mieux le concept du visage derrière lequel surgit un être qui pense et qui parle. En adressant la parole à autrui, on abolit la distance par rapport à l'autre; le langage nous met en présence d'un *interlocuteur*. Par le langage, on se rapproche, on se côtoie. Dans un présent où rétrécissent les distances, autrui s'identifie ou rejette les paroles dévoilées sans résistance, acceptant ou réfutant la Différence. Les interlocuteurs étant conscients d'une non coïncidence avec leur identité propre.

Il est d'ailleurs signifiant que la rencontre de deux visages comme rapport de communication introduise une modification de leurs composants élémentaires. Les transformations des visages sont les signes d'une relation de proximité, l'évidence d'un échange en cours. Par conséquent, le dialogue définit le rapport d'altérité, le dépassement de soi, l'ampleur de la résistance, vis à vis autrui ou soi-même, à se laisser métamorphoser par les projets de l'autre.

On s'aperçoit que le terme *visage* prend une extension assez particulière, au regard de la situation canadienne. Avec son quatuor autant égalitaire que différent, on s'attachera ici à la dialectique animant les deux groupes majeurs et leurs rapports avec les groupes minoritaires. Historiquement, dans un contexte collectif et pluriel, les quatre visages du paysage canadien ont formé des relations étroites et fortes animant et influençant les réseaux sociaux et culturels.

Il n'est pas besoin de rappeler que les peuples autochtones occupaient le territoire canadien des siècles avant le début de la colonisation par les deux groupes majoritaires; deux cultures opposées: une latine, l'autre anglo-saxonne. Dans cette perspective, il est également important de se souvenir des conditions dans lesquelles se déroulèrent les premiers contacts entre les groupes dominants et le groupe dominé.

Remarquons que l'arrivée des Anglais et des Français participait au phénomène de *migrations* massives suivant la découverte du continent et sa conquête tandis que, deux siècles plus tard, l'installation des premières minorités ethniques, le quatrième visage du Canada, coïncidera avec les vagues d'*immigration* du début du XIXe siècle. Ces distinctions entre conquérants conquis et immigrants sont à la base de la définition des groupes et influenceront leurs rapports. D'une part donc, deux groupes, d'origine française et anglaise, s'imposent sur un troisième groupe subordonné - les autochtones.

La mention de la figure emblématique de l'Amérindien, en insérant une distance par rapport aux «deux solitudes»<sup>1</sup> canadiennes, renvoie aussi inévitablement à l'histoire et à la mémoire. L'histoire et la mémoire ne sont

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<sup>1</sup> Ce terme vient de *Two Solitudes* de Hugh MacLennan. C'est le titre d'un roman qui décrit des membres des deux communautés, française et anglaise qui s'ignorent l'une l'autre.

pas les sujets de ce propos, mais elles sont nécessaires pour une mise en perspective globale des éléments essentiels du rapport à l'Autre.

Il nous faut revenir sur les éléments constitutifs du pays afin de préciser la cartographie culturelle du Canada à l'aube de la première vague d'immigration importante. Deux héritages linguistiques et culturels dominants donc, deux grandes traditions, la taille des forces en présence, la dimension de leurs conquêtes, l'ampleur des conflits. D'un côté, les Anglais venus de l'Angleterre ainsi que les Loyalistes ayant quitté les Etats-Unis après la Révolution américaine de 1776 et de l'autre, les Français venus de France à la conquête du nouveau monde.

Incité par le commerce de fourrures et le désir de trouver un passage vers l'Asie, la France s'implante en Amérique en conquérant l'immensité des terres canadiennes.. Voici la description de son expansion géographique dont témoigne le sieur Boucault, en 1754:

1. L'Ile Royale qui est à l'entrée du golfe du Canada, avec toutes les îles qui se trouvent dans cette baie.
2. La terre ferme de l'Acadie jusqu'à la Nouvelle-Angleterre.
3. La terre ferme de Labrador, et toutes les côtes maritimes qui se terminent et s'étendent du Détroit de Belle-Isle jusqu'à la Baie d'Hudson.
4. Toutes les terres aboutissant au fleuve du Saint-Laurent depuis son embouchure jusqu'à sa source, et celle de toutes les rivières qui s'y déchargent.

En s'établissant dans cette immensité territoriale des terres canadiennes, les Français, pour des raisons d'abord commerciales, et plus tard politiques entrent en contact permanent avec les Amérindiens et forment des réseaux d'alliances avec les Hurons et autres groupes des Premières nations. En effet, au 18<sup>e</sup> siècle la Nouvelle-France contrôle et domine la plus grande partie des territoires canadiens ainsi que ses habitants. On peut noter ici que pour décrire cette époque on emploie pour la première fois la notion de diversité dans la conférence de septembre 1700 à Montréal quand l'Arbre de la Paix fut planté sur la plus haute montagne célébrant le traité de paix entre les Français et les Amérindiens:

Montréal, pendant plus de deux semaines vit et vibre au rythme des cultures Amérindiennes. L'arrivée de 1300 délégués autochtones renforce la diversité culturelle de la population montréalaise qui regroupe alors environ 2600 colons et 1000 autochtones domiciliés. (Havard, 31)

Le plus ancien des visages, celui des peuples autochtones, a triomphé de l'oubli et il est reconnu à l'origine de l'identité canadienne. Premier visage, un temps submergé par la multitude des visages des colons français, puis anglais, maintenu à arrière-plan du décor historique canadien. La différence

n'est pas uniquement un phénomène d'ici et de maintenant. Premières nations et premiers colons furent les premiers confrontés au dépassement de soi, au premier pas vers l'Autre. Un Autre *domicilié*, condamné à une relation qui allait à jamais transformer son univers extérieur et intérieur: une relation qui allait le convertir à cause de ses contingences culturelles. Sans doute, l'histoire le démontre, cette première rencontre majeure dans la construction de l'identité canadienne imposa aux autochtones la prédominance des visions européennes sur leur mode de vie et leurs cultures. Il n'y avait rien là de nouveau. Il en était ainsi depuis des siècles et des siècles en terrain conquis.

Mais ce processus réducteur vis-à-vis des Amérindiens, lors du contact entre les colons français et les peuples autochtones, influença à son tour la culture majoritaire et dominante à partir de l'âge d'or du Régime français jusqu'à aujourd'hui. Avec le temps et une perspective historique contemporaine, les autochtones ne furent plus mentionnés sous la formule abstraite d'«Indiens» et finirent par être reconnus comme des personnes ayant contribué à la construction du pays. Ils ont du intégrer une partie de la culture française en commençant par la langue et en se servant d'elle d'une manière prothétique, comme une sorte de pont symbolique entre soi et l'Autre. Plus tout à fait eux-mêmes et pas encore les autres. Car c'est le lot de l'homme réduit à un « quelque chose entre les deux » qui cesse de penser comme un moi pour se vivre comme un être impersonnel avec d'autres êtres impersonnels, hors de soi et en soi.

Ainsi dans le roman *Volkswagen blues* de Jacques Poulin, nous entendons la voix angoissée de la Grande Sauterelle, avec sa grande prédilection pour les voyages, confier: «qu'elle n'était ni une Indienne ni une Blanche, qu'elle était quelque chose entre les deux et que, finalement, elle n'était rien du tout» (Poulin, 256).

«Elle n'était rien du tout» exprime une séparation de l'être, de la vérité, de la conscience, le sens propre de soi-même. Un être anonyme, une présence de l'Autre dans sa propre peau. Un otage. Un état d'anéantissement, un effacement de soi.

Une altérité jumelle se creuse au cœur d'un seul esprit. Il s'agit évidemment d'une altérité indissociable de la passivité qu'elle suscite et du désespoir d'un être qui subit passivement le poids de l'Autre. Un être qui souffre en silence avec une résignation profonde. Un être dépossédé qui devient insaisissable sous le regard d'autrui. Ou jusqu'au moment où nous entendons la voix de son interlocuteur nous offrir une vision plus salutaire du métissage dans la littérature canadienne et québécoise, et peut-être occidentale.

Vous dites que vous êtes « quelque chose entre les deux »...Eh bien, je ne suis pas du tout de votre avis. Je trouve que vous êtes quelque chose de neuf, quelque chose qui commence. Vous êtes quelque chose qui ne s'est encore jamais vu. Voilà c'est tout. (Poulin, 247)

Cette phrase si simple mais si réfléchie adressée à la Grande Sauterelle sur sa double identité: «Vous êtes quelque chose qui ne s'est encore jamais vu» est

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un premier pas vers la reconnaissance de la rencontre fructueuse de deux peuples, deux destins qui ont donné naissance à « quelque chose de neuf »; une identité métissée, inexprimable et transcendante. C'est aussi l'éveil d'un sujet métamorphosé devenu «quelque chose de neuf». Une renaissance qui lui donne sa coloration, sa continuité et l'étincelle d'espoir lui permettant de se découvrir et de trouver en elle la force de briser la clôture d'un environnement intérieur voué au solipsisme pour émerger dans un monde nouveau.

Mais l'Angleterre et la France trouvèrent le moyen d'exporter leurs conflits ancestraux sur le nouveau continent. Sur le plan démographique et linguistique les rencontres et les échanges se multiplient à une vitesse folle. Sur les immenses territoires de la Nouvelle France, l'affrontement avec la coalition anglo-américaine sonne pour les Français le commencement de la fin. La France cède à l'Angleterre le Canada. Les Anglais dominent la plus grande superficie des terres, les espaces réputés vierges de l'Amérique du Nord. Les conquérants démembrèrent la Nouvelle-France et forment un nouveau gouvernement, une administration, et instaure des institutions politiques conformes à la tradition britannique. Désormais les Français sont confinés au Québec.

Le groupe maintenant dominant se répand au Québec à partir de la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle reproduisant dans sa composition la population britannique d'Angleterre. Cette population, l'une des deux solitudes du Canada, est formée de trois groupes distincts: Anglais, Ecossais et Irlandais. Avant la révolution tranquille jusqu'au milieu du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, les habitants d'origine britannique sont la majorité de l'ensemble du Canada. Cependant au Québec ils sont minoritaires. Dans la belle Province, malgré une majorité francophone, grâce à l'industrialisation et au capitalisme britannique, la minorité anglaise est dominante sur le plan social et économique. Le rapport de Lord Durham, le plus connu des rapports de cette époque, témoigne: « La majorité des ouvriers est d'origine française, mais elle est au service du capitalisme anglais. »

Dans le prolongement de ce fait, il n'est pas surprenant que les recherches de l'historiographie québécoise sur la force socio-politique du groupe anglophone au Québec mettent l'accent sur la puissance politique et économique exercée par ses élites anglo-écossaises jusqu'au milieu du vingtième siècle. Le déclin et l'affaiblissement de la classe dirigeante surviendra à la suite de revendication et participation au pouvoir de la communauté francophone aux alentours des années soixante, soixante-dix. En réalité, jusqu'au fameux *Coup de Libreville*. En parallèle, on assiste durant la même période au déclin du pouvoir de l'église catholique, comme si des préoccupations laïques prenaient le pas sur des préoccupations jusqu'alors essentiellement religieuses. C'est à partir de ces moments que les velléités autonomistes du Québec eu égard à sa vulnérabilité culturelle vis-à-vis des communautés anglophones, ainsi que le sentiment d'être constamment

menacé sur un continent entièrement anglo-saxon se sont opposés au projet de l'unité culturelle canadienne. Par la suite, les mesures prises dans le cadre de loi 101 ont affaibli encore plus le concept d'une communauté franco-canadienne.

Inévitablement, l'unilinguisme francophone renverse le rapport de forces linguistiques et politiques dans la Belle Province.

Nous porterons donc une attention particulière à cette relation visage à visage, langue à langue dans un contexte de confrontation culturelle intense. La langue, en tant que source de conflit, définit la manière dont deux protagonistes engagés dans une lutte de pouvoir vivent leur relation de proximité contraignable.

«La langue est la maison de l'être» écrit Heidegger dans sa *Lettre sur l'Humanisme*. Ici, les deux visages solitaires s'identifient à deux différentes langues, deux différentes maisons, deux différentes orientations sociales politiques refusant de devenir « quelque chose de neuf, quelque chose qui commence » (Heidegger, 24).

Quant à l'anglais, l'autre langue officielle au Québec, il faut dire qu'elle était au départ perçue, par les Canadiens français, comme une domination étrangère et la perte de leur propre continuum culturel. La langue anglaise: ce n'était pas leur maison. Dans cette logique, le visage du cofondateur du pays projetait une trop grande ombre sur la maison de leur être national. Le peuple Canadien français a refusé de souscrire aux mêmes aspirations que l'ensemble de la communauté anglo-saxonne. Et comme nous le savons déjà, peuple jusqu'alors majoritaire dans leur province mais minoritaire au niveau de la langue en dehors du Québec, se sentant menacés d'assimilation; ils ont mis en avant leur identité culturelle.

Au sujet des revendications identitaires au Canada et au Québec, si on voulait tenir un discours en termes sortis d'un glossaire officiel, on pourrait aller jusqu'au dire que dans tous les conflits de groupes, il s'agit d'un investissement ethnique. Car tous les groupes ethniques opèrent comme des communautés d'investissement dont les pratiques sociales et activités politiques cherchent à assurer leur survivance biologique. Mais dans le prolongement de sa ligne biologique, un groupe ethnique a besoin de pratique et d'activités symboliques particulières au sein de sa société. C'est à dire une préservation de la langue maternelle par "la répétition de l'homme par l'homme" pour reprendre l'expression de Peter Sloterdijk. La question de la survivance d'un groupe ethnique n'échappe pas au fait qu'il est nécessaire qu'un continuum biologique s'accompagne d'un continuum symbolique.

En ce qui concerne la relation difficile des deux groupes ethniques dominants du Canada et cette notion d'investissement biologique et symbolique, soulignons un fait démographique propre au Québec. Pour faire contrepoids à la domination linguistique, à l'immigration anglaise et à l'ordre social établi (d'après eux, un ordre social hiérarchisé) les Canadiens français se sont efforcés de préserver et d'augmenter leur réservoir biologique par un



accroissement de la natalité sans précédent dans l'histoire de l'Amérique du Nord. La survivance biologique du peuple Canadien français, assurée, il convenait de mobiliser tous les membres au sein de leur société pour une lutte linguistique assurant un continuum symbolique. Cependant, malgré la fécondité, la revanche des berceaux, sur le terrain strict de la langue, l'anglais continuait de dominer fortement dans tous les champs sociaux politiques et culturels. Ainsi le conflit sociolinguistique provoqua une crise identitaire. La défense de son identité, l'identité défensive devint le refrain incessant du Québec. La montée du nationalisme, nouveau creuset d'identité collective, a montré une communauté solidifiée par son appartenance à une langue. Un héritage symbolique, ayant déjà subi une altérité, une langue plus ou moins maîtrisée, a permis de cimenter des frontières identitaires et de définir et protéger la communauté francophone de ses concitoyens anglophones et allophones. Au Québec et dans le Canada dans son ensemble, cette confrontation a pris un double aspect inquiétant. Pour les francophones, elle agit comme une libération s'exprimant dans des protections législatives; chez les anglophones elle a souvent fait naître le sentiment d'avoir une épée de Damoclès prête à trancher l'unité nationale.

La rencontre de deux peuples dits fondateurs a produit des secousses bouleversantes souvent vécues de part et d'autre comme des persécutions, des dépossessions et toutes sortes d'abus. Il est évident que les deux peuples solitaires en oscillant, dans le champs d'une proximité maximale, entre l'identité et l'héritage symbolique ont contribué chacun à la déchirure nationale. Leur dialogue a tourné à un conflit insurmontable exacerbant leur différence et conduisant à un isolement forcé pour garder leurs propres formes ethnolinguistiques ainsi qu'à une affirmation de valeurs passées dans le but de conserver un statu quo reconnu comme identitaire.

Mais quelques soient les transgressions au niveau de la responsabilité commune pour l'unité du pays, les obsessions linguistiques, les régressions socioculturelles qui ont mené à une telle impasse, il faut reconnaître que leurs oppositions sont presque toujours restées au niveau de la parole et ont rarement excédées les débats politiques et législatifs.

Il reste que le contact et la proximité des deux peuples dominants sont des événements majeurs dans l'histoire du Québec et du Canada malgré les effets inquiétants de leur tension discursive. Surtout du côté anglophone à la fin des années 80 et au cours des années 90, décennie de grandes adaptations à la nouvelle réalité du positionnement identitaire des Canadiens français. Sur un continent où la langue anglaise domine, la politique linguistique menée au Québec était directement liée au fait que la langue véhiculaire devenait minoritaire dans la province. Du côté des Canadiens français, l'intérêt pour leur propre histoire et les études sur les relations anglo-québécoises n'ont pas depuis cessé de croître. Volontairement ou non, elles ont avivé la nostalgie nationale de l'immense pays décrit deux siècles plus tôt, du sieur Boucault. La différence entre la taille du Québec d'aujourd'hui et la grandeur de la

Nouvelle-France au 18<sup>e</sup> siècle est à la mesure de la perte ressentie par la population d'alors, sentiment qui n'a pas été sans impact sur les générations suivantes du Québec.

Nous le savons, à partir de 1760, sur le plan de la psyché collective du Québec, l'histoire a été vécue comme un encerclement voire un étouffement. Hanté par le souvenir d'un paradis perdu, les Canadiens français ont affronté seuls le poids de la conquête. Les revendications nationales d'une partie de la population du Québec ont secoué le Canada jusqu'à aujourd'hui. Elles portent comme un écho le souvenir de leur lointain passé français et des tourments historiques d'un peuple abandonné et déshérité. Un peuple forcé de cohabiter avec leur ennemi ancestral, à l'ombre de leur culture, au côté de leur religion sans jamais fusionner avec la population dominante du reste du Canada.

L'histoire de la société canadienne présente une situation peut-être unique en occident: un seul pays, une nation composée de deux peuples fondateurs et d'une minorité autochtone, sur lesquels vont se greffer d'autres groupes ethniques venus des quatre coins du monde. Deux continuums biologiques et symboliques différents auxquels s'ajouteront des îlots ethniques minoritaires sensés se rapprocher les uns des autres pour devenir une société multiculturelle à la suite d'un processus d'édification long, lent et douloureux d'identité canadienne. En avance sur son époque, ce pays composé déjà de trois visages, distincts dans leurs traditions et origines, est devenu un fabuleux foisonnement de nouvelles possibilités. Non sans tension ni douleur ni aliénation.

En ce qui concerne la vie d'un individu, grandir est douloureux. Le conflit et la tension se révèlent à la source de toute croissance. Mais le conflit et la tension demandent une résolution. Très souvent, la résolution trouvée à travers un combat mène à un épanouissement personnel, un mouvement vers une altérité corporelle et spirituelle radicale. C'est par la résolution de son conflit qu'un individu arrive au stade ultime de l'évolution personnelle. Une renaissance de soi et de toutes les représentations du soi. En évoluant l'individu se forge une histoire, une identité, un Moi qui subsume les diverses pratiques socioculturelles. Il prend un bac qui le mène du passé à l'avenir. Dans sa mémoire comme sur un palimpseste sont inscrits toutes les traces du son devenir depuis que sa chair est devenue la langue. Une sorte de consubstantialité du symbole et du corps.

Les pays également sont sujets à un processus évolutif. Un pays est une collectivité de moi disposant d'un territoire délimité, formant et participant à un milieu social où littéralement tout est à sa disposition et à sa possession. Jusqu'au moment où il rencontre l'Autre. Le moment où «Nous» se trouve en présence d'un «je». Le moment de la grande découverte, qui en entraîne une seconde d'égale importance: la cohésion symbolique d'une communauté confrontée au «je» de l'Autre. Le choc initial force «Nous» à un positionnement identitaire qui autant que «je» lui permettra avec le temps d'accéder à un statut d'altérité.

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On s'est toutefois vite rendu compte que si les différences culturelles subissaient des pressions travaillant à un rapprochement dans une relation concrète entre « Nous » et « je »; d'autres forces tentaient à l'inverse de restaurer une soit disant pureté originelle. Sous cette optique la question se pose: les néo-Canadiens ou les néo-Québécois doivent-ils abandonner toutes leurs singularités dans leurs pratiques culturelles et religieuses pour être admis dans une société post-moderne?

Reste que l'apparition, la venue de l'autre et son éventuelle assimilation se paye en douleur et remise en question de valeurs sociales jusque là établies et considérées comme permanentes. Le multiculturalisme a un prix qui hante l'histoire canadienne et québécoise et l'immigration en général.

Je m'approche du quatrième visage du Canada: le visage emblématique de l'Immigré et l'apport substantiel des flux d'immigrants massifs au Canada, le pays qui, au sein des Nations Unis, a institué le multiculturalisme comme politique d'insertion des immigrants. Bien que l'immigration constitue en soi un évènement vu comme un stimulant sous l'angle économique, une insertion des groupes minoritaires dans les sociétés majoritaires suscite néanmoins des réactions et des débats concernant leur inclusion dans le corps social de la société d'accueil. La polémique est étroitement liée à la dynamique et la puissance des forces migratoires en présence, dans le pays, en l'occurrence le Canada, avant et après la Deuxième Guerre mondiale.

Au tournant du XXe siècle, comme aux Etats-Unis, à la suite de l'exode provoqué par des guerres atroces ou pour des raisons économiques ou politiques, le Canada s'est ouvert à un flot d'immigrants venus des quatre coins du monde à la recherche d'une terre d'accueil, d'un sanctuaire.

L'arrivée d'un grand nombre d'immigrants ne fut pas sans conséquence sur la répartition géographique et ethnique existante au Canada. Ensemble, le Canada et le Québec venaient de traverser une période d'intenses mutations. Les nouveaux arrivants transfiguraient le paysage culturel issu d'une longue gestation des deux peuples fondateurs, les deux cultures dominantes.

En quelques décennies, les nouveaux venus ont modifié le paysage géopolitique, principalement dans les villes et banlieues canadiennes et donc québécoises. Parfois de manière alarmante pour l'un ou l'autre des peuples fondateurs. Les deux solitudes canadiennes, se sont retrouvées avec des spectateurs peu concernés par leur écartèlement traditionnel, linguistique et culturel.

Jusqu'au milieu du XXe siècle, un grand nombre d'immigrants se sont établis dans toutes les provinces canadiennes ainsi que les régions du Québec. Aujourd'hui, la majorité d'entre eux demeurent installés dans les grandes villes. Les mutations socioculturelles ont conduit la société d'accueil vers les chemins du pluralisme culturel et une nouvelle réalité socio-politique. Les deux solitudes ont été forcées de reconnaître l'influence et la dimension de diverses communautés ethniques. Cette nouvelle réalité exigeait un contact

avec les immigrants basé sur une égalité civique et une intégration économique.

L'incorporation des immigrants a donc conduit à la mise en place d'une politique multiculturelle en développement constant au niveau des valeurs à retenir.

Mais, malgré une identité nationale édifiée, au cours des dernières années, autour d'une politique multiculturelle, de nombreuses études ont souligné de nouveaux problèmes d'ordre démographique, culturelle et scolaire. L'espace manque pour les aborder tous. Cependant, certaines statistiques seront utiles pour le propos de ce texte. Par exemple:

Déjà, en 1971, près de 20% de la population de Montréal était d'origine autre que française ou britannique. Aujourd'hui, cette proportion dépasse les 30%. Lors du même recensement la population du Toronto métropolitain était à 43 % non britannique: aujourd'hui, plus de la moitié des habitants de la ville de Toronto sont d'origine autre que britannique et française. (Moisan, 23)

D'autre part un défi se présente dans le même texte concernant les statistiques "qui sont par nature ennuyeuses mais aussi révélatrices" pour les auteurs du livre à cause de l'effet démographique alarmant de l'immigrant sur la population du Canada et du Québec.

Au recensement de 1991, la proportion de non-Britanniques et non-Français était de près de 40%. En raison de la natalité plus importante des immigrants et de la dénatalité des Québécois, on prévoyait en 1997 que vers l'an 2000, 50% des élèves de la Commission scolaire de Montréal ne seront pas de descendance française. Mais déjà, dans certaines écoles de Montréal, la grande majorité des élèves, allant parfois jusqu'à 90% et plus, ne sont pas des Québécois de souche. (Moisan, 24)

Pour rendre la situation encore plus complexe, des revendications identitaires surgissent sporadiquement de la part de groupes Amérindiens et Nationalistes du Canada. Or, au même moment tous les pays, provinces, cultures et ethnies dans le monde font face à une menace grave de mondialisation.

Une période de tourisme mondial dans lequel Peter Sloterdijk remarque que "les acteurs du nouveau jeu mondial ne se définissent plus par rapport au sol et la patrie, mais par les accès aux gares, aux terminaux et à toutes sortes de possibilités de raccordement" (*Dans le même bateau*).

Dans ce décor de mondialisation, que l'on connaît, au Canada, sur le plan socioculturel d'aujourd'hui et à travers le paysage multiculturel, les trois groupes, anglophones, francophones et allophones, participent à la construction de l'identité nationale canadienne. Chacune exprimant à son tour, un doute ou une remise en question du fonctionnement de la Tour de Babel. Parfois avec simplifications et distorsions et souvent sans proposer de vision unifiante.

Mais ce qui constitue les caractéristiques d'un groupe, sa spécificité dans l'ensemble, elle aussi a besoin d'être accueillie. Autrement dit, elle nécessite que les caractéristiques de son visage soit reconnue. Ce qui implique de facto la présence de l'Autre.

On sait d'ailleurs que cette présence joue un rôle crucial dès le départ pour la construction de l'identité. Le côtoiement culturel d'une des majorités canadiennes, anglophones ou francophones, selon la langue officielle parlée dans la province domiciliaire, oblige les nouveaux arrivants à s'identifier à une ou l'autre des cultures. C'est précisément dans les contacts avec une culture différente que se manifesterà la dynamique de l'identité canadienne par un processus de métamorphoses réciproques.

C'est en citant quelques faits plus récents que je choisis d'ajouter un autre élément important pour définir un point principal qui s'impose au processus de métamorphoses réciproques. Le premier se porte sur la notion de visibilité spatiale de la langue majoritaire; un territoire marqué par un groupe établi sur ses espaces et défini par sa différenciation avec l'héritage symbolique des immigrés extérieurs à sa zone géographique (française ou anglaise).

D'après Richard Y Bourhis, professeur et Directeur de la Chaise Concordia - UQAM en études ethniques, la visibilité de la majorité linguistique au Canada est une réalité incontournable pour les nouveaux arrivants qui cherchent à établir un dialogue avec une société qui affirme une identité sociale, une dominance non seulement territoriale mais linguistique d'une façon immédiate.

Dans son article intitulé "*La Loi 101 et l'aménagement du paysage linguistique*" il avance la notion de *visibilité* qui peut s'appliquer dans le concret du quotidien des grandes villes canadiennes.

Le paysage linguistique d'un territoire donné renvoie à la visibilité et au caractère plus ou moins prédominant des différentes langues qui figurent sur les panneaux de signalisation des voies publiques, sur les panneaux indicateurs de noms de rues, dans les noms de lieux, l'affichage commercial, les panneaux publicitaires et les véhicules privés. (Bourhis, 107)

Voilà l'habitat déjà marqué. Un habitat organisé et modelé par les signes de la société d'accueil. Il est facile d'imaginer l'arrivée d'un Immigré dans un espace socioculturel correctement défini par l'image d'un groupe linguistique majoritaire qui maîtrise le lieu en approfondissant sa propre identité dans un territoire organisé et modelé par sa langue et sa culture. Donc, l'Immigré, le quatrième visage du paysage culturel canadien arrive pour s'installer dans l'espace d'une majorité, un espace marqué, un espace qui porte des traces linguistiques, les signes d'appartenance à une langue d'usage.

La langue possède une territorialité, écrit Naïm Kattan dans son essai sur la langue (Kattan, 75). Et si nous reprenons encore une fois l'expression de Heidegger: "La langue est la maison de l'Être", il s'avère nécessaire d'en

ajouter la suite. A l'intérieur de sa maison, l'homme existe en tant que partie de la vérité de l'être et en la gardant en propre (Heidegger, 24).

Partant de ces deux citations, on peut dire qu'à la notion de visibilité de la langue d'un groupe majoritaire qui vit sur un espace délimité, s'ajoutent les notions de territorialité et de frontières.

En s'installant sur un territoire marqué, le nouvel arrivant, doit franchir ces frontières pour communiquer et pour trouver un terrain d'échange avec les gardiens du territoire socioculturel de la société d'accueil. Mais pour faciliter le dialogue avec la société d'accueil, le nouveau venu a besoin d'apprendre et d'acquérir la langue d'usage.

Ce faisant, l'Immigré entre en contact avec les deux groupes dominants en réduisant le décalage culturel par la médiation de la langue apprise. Dans le dialogue et la proximité avec le groupe majoritaire, français ou anglais, l'Immigré, le quatrième visage canadien avec ses variations de représentations diverses apporte avec lui tout un univers et l'offre en échange pour établir un équilibre interactionnel. La société d'accueil, de son côté, lui ouvre le passage dans son intérieur et la participation active dans sa vie culturelle. De cette manière, cet échange favorise la construction d'une vision du monde élargi par les deux participants au dialogue multidimensionnel. En conséquence, le visage de l'Immigré perd son opacité. Devient visible, déchiffrable.

Certes, il s'agit d'une évolution dans plusieurs aspects de la société canadienne. Expérience pour le moment unique et différente de celle de nos voisins du Sud et de l'espace culturel européen. Une évolution culturelle tributaire de l'ouverture et de la reconnaissance de la contribution des différents groupes ethniques installés au Canada.

Pourtant, leur portrait d'ensemble n'est pas facile à interpréter. Et certainement les choses se compliquent quand il s'agit de plusieurs communautés dont l'altérité s'avère particulièrement vulnérable. En vérité, sur le plan mondial, le Canada n'échappe pas à la problématique résultant de l'isolement de certains groupes minoritaires qui, dans le même espace que les peuples majoritaires, ne réussissent pas à abolir les distances socioculturelles qui les séparent. En revanche, malgré ce qu'on appelle la problématique canadienne, le Canada, avec sa vocation de pays proposant des formes conviviales d'habitation, a réussi à créer un des meilleurs mondes possibles.

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**IMAGES OF CANADA IN THE CONTEMPORARY  
SERBIAN NOVEL: DAVID ALBAHARI'S *THE MAN OF  
SNOW* AND VLADIMIR TASIĆ'S *FAREWELL GIFT***

It is well known that Canada's multicultural character is the result of numerous waves of immigration from different countries and continents. It is said that Canada remains "a nation of many loyalties". More than two hundred different ethnic origins were reported in the 2001 Census question on ethnic ancestry. Among these immigrants, there are writers of Serbian origin who write in English or French, but also writers who write in Serbian like David Albahari, who at the time when he came to Canada was already a prominent Serbian writer, and Vladimir Tasić who has made his literary career as a Serbian writer after his arrival in Canada in the late 1980s.

I begin with one extreme example. It comes from the work of the French installation artist Christian Boltanski. His 1988 installation (at the Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation in Toronto) is simply entitled *Canada*. Of course, on one level, the title is based on the euphemistic name the Nazis gave to the warehouses where the personal belongings of those killed in gas chambers or interned in labour camps were stored. In this series of works, the artist displayed piles of second-hand clothing. Brightly coloured clothes are nailed on all four walls, covering every inch of the room. The sheer number of six thousand garments used in the installation evoked clearly the incredible number of people who died in the camps and whose possessions were stored in *Canada*. (Alphen, 112-3) But surely this is not the level of meaning I would like to address. On another level, which is more important for my purpose, *Canada* here also stands for a multicultural country of wealth and exuberance where one wants to emigrate because it can offer a living to everybody. This is the usual stereotype of Canada in Serbia; it is the image of Canada frequently encountered across Europe.

This two-folded artistic game gives rhetorical and literal meaning simultaneously: Canada is a country that can be a kind of refuge for immigrants of widely diverse backgrounds, which every different piece of clothes could symbolize. I think that the installation *Canada* gives a provocative image of the ambivalences involved in being an immigrant; ambivalences similar to those found in the novels of Serbian writers and Canadian citizens David Albahari and Vladimir Tasić. Before I start my analysis of their novels, I would like briefly to introduce each of these writers.

David Albahari (1948) is widely regarded as one of the best contemporary Serbian novelists. He has published eight collections of short stories and eight novels in Serbian. His book *Opis smrti* (Description of Death) won the Ivo Andrić Award for the best collection of short stories in Yugoslavia in 1982, and his novel *Bait* (Mamac), won the NIN Award for the best novel in Yugoslavia in 1996 and Award of Serbian National Library. His books have been translated into fourteen languages. A selection of his stories in English translation, entitled *Words Are Something Else* (selected by Tomislav Longinovic and translated by Ellen Elias Bursa) was published in 1996 by Northwestern University Press, Evanston, USA. Bayeux Arts, Calgary, published the English translation of *Zinc* in 1997, and the novel *Bait* was published in 2001 also by Northwestern University Press (tr. Peter Agnone). His novel *Gec i Majer* has also been translated into English and it is going to be published in February 2004 by Harvill Press, London (translated by E. E. Bursac; here I will use her translation of passages from novel *The Man of Snow*). Albahari himself is also an accomplished translator of English and American literature and has translated into Serbian the works of Saul Bellow, Robert Coover, Thomas Pynchon among others. In 1994 Albahari moved to Canada.

Vladimir Tasić (1965) is an outstanding young prose writer in Serbian. He has published two collections of short-stories and one novel, as well as the study *Mathematics and the Roots of Postmodern Thought* (originally published by Oxford University Press in English and translated into Spanish and Serbian). His novel *Farewell Gift* won the Radio Belgrade award for the best book in 2001 and the award for the best book of fiction in 2001 from the Writers' Association of Vojvodina. Tasić is a Professor of Mathematics at the University of New Brunswick, Fredericton. Ralph Bogert translated and published a fragment of *Farewell Gift* in *Toronto Slavic Quarterly* (November 2002); Broken Jew Press, Fredericton, published the second book of Tasić's short stories *Herbarium of Souls* in Canada 1998; *Farewell Gift* will appear in French translation (by Gojko Lukić and Gabriel Iaculli) in April 2004, published by Les Allusifs, Montreal, as *Cadeau d'adieu*. He moved to Canada in 1989.

After these introductory remarks, I would like to give a short review of the novels. In the first half of the paper, I will try to describe the poetic features of Albahari's *Bait* and *The Man of Snow*; and of Tasić's *Farewell Gift*. In the second part of the paper, my aim is to show how certain poetic principles give shape to and enter into the image of Canada, in those novels.

All three works are highly subjective stories and first-person narratives. Narrators tell us about their lives, thoughts, decisions. They are presented as close to their authors, although clearly adapted to the roles they are designed to play in those works. Nevertheless, sometimes we feel invited to attribute the voice we hear, and the sentiments it utters, to the writer in his own person. The tone of all three novels is directed to the reader (or listener) as ally or witness. The stories are set in the 1990s in Canada, but the narrators

frequently recollect past events connected with their lives in Serbia and Yugoslavia. The narrator of *Farewell Gift* often goes back to his childhood and presents memories of his brother when they lived together in Novi Sad, Serbia; in Albahari's *Bait*, memories of the narrator and memories of the narrator's mother on the Second World War and the period after the war merge all the time; *The Man of Snow* is a kind of impossible looking back in the personal and collective past. Also, in all three novels the narrator is at the same time the main character, though the narrator of *Farewell Gift* is almost always in an imagined dialogue with his dead brother, and both narrators in *Bait* and *The Man of Snow* spend lots of time discussing life and history with two Canadian intellectuals, an editor and a professor of political science.

These novels also have certain formal similarities: continuous narration without passage breaks, only *Farewell Gift* is divided into three chapters: *Allegro*, *Largo cantabile* and *Allegro non molto*. There is also a kind of lyrical repetition of certain sentences. In *The Man of Snow*, the narrator often repeats: «I'll get old here»; in *Farewell Gift*, esoteric discussions about the philosophy of the «heart» occur regularly. In all three cases the narrative is conveyed by an exchange of voices, because the narrators give voice to family members, or inhabitants of their new homeland, yet the reader has the impression that he or she is the only one who could be the real witness and ally of the narrator.

We could say that all three novels are novels about defeat. In each case we can apply Albahari's words taken from Author's Note at the end of *The Man of Snow*:

*The Man of Snow* is a book about defeat. What kind of defeat, that I cannot say, for whoever reads it must come up with his own version of defeat, heedless of any of the plausible interpretations offered by critics or even the writer himself. (Albahari 2000, 99; tr. Ellen-Elias Bursa)

All three narrators were born and spent their childhood and youth in Serbia, but later emigrated to Canada. All of them live solitary lives in isolated anonymous Canadian cities. On the one hand, they came to Canada trying to escape from History; on the other hand, they tried to find better professional conditions: the narrator of Albahari's novel came to write; the narrator of Tasić's novel came to work as a software engineer. As narrator of *Farewell Gift* says:

Meanwhile, I work as a senior technical consultant at a firm which designs educational software for medical students. Not much to brag about, but my position enables me to live comfortably in an obscure Canadian town. (Tasić 2001a, 8; tr. by Bogdan Rakić and John Jeffreys)

But at the end of novel it happens that the same consultant also becomes a writer, and the reader finally understands what was the meaning of the phrase «meanwhile».

As a legacy of Central-European novels by Kafka, Broch, Kundera or Danilo Kis, narrators do not have names, as well as their family members and Canadian cities in which they live. Nevertheless, it is obvious that they live in Canada. Only in *The Man of Snow* are the readers invited to follow scanty textual signals to grasp by themselves what is the country described in novel. It should be underlined that the dialogue with Canadian culture is one of the main subjects of Albahari's *Bait*, while in *The Man of Snow* we could find only para-textual references to Canada, there is the author's acknowledgement to the Markin-Flanagan programme for outstanding writers, University of Calgary; and the Author's Note at the end of the book which mentions the date and place of writing: «Calgary, January 1996». The narrators of these novels have suffered a great loss. In Tasić's novel «farewell gift» is not actually a gift but an urn filled with the ashes of the narrator's dead brother; the narrator of *Bait* has lost all his family members and all the time he reviews the testimony of his mother's life which he had recorded in Belgrade before her death; the pessimistic narrator of *The Man of Snow* has lost everything and, being unable to make his life in the new country and new circumstances, dies in snow and ice. It is also very important to stress that the possibility of irony is opened because of the multicultural ancestry of these narrators: Albahari's narrator is of Jewish-Serbian origin; Tasić's is of Serbian-Slovakian-Cincar origin.<sup>1</sup>

The narrative art of both writers is characterized by the play of resonance, coincidence, anchored in the Serbian and European novelistic tradition. In their works, narrative unity depends more on thematic connections than on linear dramatic progression. These thematic connections follow different directions, but they are dominated both by narrators' memories of their family members and by references to their own inadequate actual lives that necessarily absorb past illusions. In fact, it could be said that these novels want to challenge the linear progression of the historical novel or, it is better to say, of the novel burdened by history. These novels witness the loss of ground, evasion of referent, indecidability of truth: "the very notion of world is but a trick of language, a deception behind which there is little more than a carnival of words and the eternally silent noumenon", writes Tasić. (Tasić 2001a, 92; tr. V. Tasić) When we read stories like these offered by Tasić and Albahari, we have an experience of a existential split or flaw, and we ask ourselves: is this flaw perfect or not? On the one hand, we have the pleasure to go beyond ideologies that surround us, to rule over decoration and grimace of History; to go beyond the things which usually go without saying, beyond the values in which we believe and simple notions which we have about ourselves and others. On the other hand, when we read these novels about defeat, the effects and success of deceptions they want to deconstruct fascinate us.

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<sup>1</sup> *Cincari* -- the name of Greek immigrants in Serbia who came during the Ottoman reign in the Balkans.

Albahari and Tasić effectively reconcile the traumatic theme of emigration with a radical absence of *pathos*; they manage to face serious and alarming questions and simultaneously to avoid any simple stereotypical answer and any attempt to produce a final and overwhelming grand narrative. They try to avoid the production of grand narratives that easily transform individual stories into universal notions of «patriotism», «West», «freedom», «exile», «success», «knowledge», «writing»... Therefore, they produce art which gives a contorted view of History. All three novels convey a secret 'political' message: they point at the changing status of fixed, well-formed truth, they suggest that every text which asserts that it alone brings the real sense of what is true and what is false is nothing but a new story, a language arrangement, a set of devices, not a vehicle that can convey universal notions, «theories» and «interpretations». (Cf. Scarpetta, 39) One signal which points to the author's willing suspension of (dis)belief is suspicion of language itself, which is connected with emigration, separation from native-language and (un)successful searching for identity in the other culture, on the one hand; and with a fatal (im)possibility of writing that is never read as highly individual and personal writing, but almost always as a story which belongs to codes and grand themes and existential situation, on the other hand.

All three novels attempt to blur the boundaries between testimony and fiction, or at least to put both of these possibilities of human expression at the core of the story. It could even be said that this novelistic play is twofold. The novelistic discourse and narrator's voice lose all arrogance by introducing the voice of an opponent: in Tasić's novel the opponent is the narrator's younger brother, a complex and mystical person (it could be a kind of dialogical substitution of the «real» brother); in Albahari's novels, opponents are usually members of the society in which the narrator recently arrived (editor Donald in *Bait*, Professor of Political Science in *The Man of Snow*). Moreover, the narcissism of the narrator is contested by his regular claims about his own ignorance, an alleged absence of erudition (Tasić) or by losing control over his own narrative, decisions and actions (Albahari). Rigid representation is constantly disputed by the play of knowledge and ignorance, of control over life and story, and a necessary but unwilling transfer of the story, or rather of the right to tell a story, to others.

Thus, these novels testify to a specific interpretative insecurity, but nevertheless simultaneously side with the «cognitive function» with which Herman Broch credited the novelistic genre. This is a kind of necessity: to merge the modernity of writing, denaturalization of narrative technique and devices, explicit anti-illusionism, and attempt to expand carefully and slowly our understanding of the world. The first nature of these novels remains private: *Bait* and *Farewell Gift* contain the elements of a family story, while *The Man of Snow* is a saga of almost unimaginable solitude. However, the necessary nature of writing as inscription transforms it into something which is inevitably public and which functions as a kind of testimony, like photos of pilots taken during the Second World War that when they are magnified show other targets beyond any military plan, as it is well shown in Haim Feroki's

1988 provocative documentary *Images of War and Inscriptions of Death*. This inscription always entails reproduction of one world and production of one text. These novels are also about the ways of meaning-production in fiction and history. The image of writing transformed from single testimonial chain (audio recording of the life story of the narrator's mother in the novel *Bait*, the brother's diary in *Farewell Gift*, the unusual play with quotation marks in *The Man of Snow*) into the image of parallel writing, repetition, intervention. Discursive positions, which merge spatially and temporally, represent – through narrators and their imagined or «real» opponents – different kinds of economical, ethical, ethnical, political, sexual determinants that rather break than establish monolithic narrative order.

Albahari's novels challenge accepted notions of language and historical reality. Actually, it could be said that this is one of the main subjects of his *The Man of Snow*:

All I had known until then to be whole, now was no more than a collection of fragments, so if everything had come undone, I could conclude with a reasonable certainty that I, too, had come undone, that I was a collection of details held together by nothing more than doubt and indecision. (Albahari 2000, 26)

In a tense game of language and history the subject of discourse is dissolved, becomes a discontinuous web of different fields, never a transcendental master – that is the reason why he always attacks academic life which considers mastery as a main aim of education. *Bait* and *The Man of Snow* express the tragic fact that history is not continuous, that there is no guarantee of coherence and unity, which is best exemplified in the character of narrator's mother in *Bait*. The most striking example for this is *The Man of Snow* as a novel about defeat, about the impossibility of the subject to make a coherent system to frame his experience—the narrator of the novel announces flaws of every totalization of experience. Desires to produce and to destroy meaning are juxtaposed with the desire to mix creativity with self-destruction.

The depiction of Canada in these novels should be considered in the light of these poetical and ideological presuppositions. Instead of linear and stereotypical representations of Canada as a vast and wealthy country which gives a lot of good opportunities to immigrants, we will rather find attempts to challenge this image. We could even say that Albahari's novels depict the impossibility of communication between the narrator and culture to which he came,<sup>2</sup> while in Tasić's novel this impossibility serves as motive of irony and bitter humour. It seems that both authors want to avoid transforming individual destinies into collective, universal concepts. How to be an individual, not just an abstract entry «immigrant». This desire is complicated

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<sup>2</sup> The latest two of Albahari's books *Svetski putnik (World-Traveller)* and *Drugi jezik (Other Language)* further develop this notion of impossibility of the real communication between different cultures.

by the notion about writing or literature itself, which is usually perceived as a kind of *exemplum*, as writing about the individual for the sake of the collective. The tension between individual experience and historical generalizations was an interesting subject of Albahari's earlier novels like *Zinc*. Tasić shares that view, and it is especially clear in a quotation from an interview he gave to a Belgrade magazine:

[In the 90s], a relatively sizeable group of young or at least youngish people emigrated and dispersed. That's a significant social phenomenon and as such it legitimately enters literature. Some of these people have gone through a phase of "culture shock". But one cannot write about it as if they had been sent off to the dark side of the Moon. These are young, educated people whom I have met at screenings of, say, Hal Hartley's films. The "shock" my character goes through does not occur because of a sense that the new cultural environment is utterly alien to him, but precisely the opposite, because he knows something about it. So, his reaction is not a pure Exile's Blues; it has a touch of humour and irony. Life in the sterile suburbia is just as strange to him as the earlier generation of immigrants who maintain their contact with the Old Country through Lepa Lukic. No reason to dwell on that, though. It is only one of the issues the novel addresses. (Tasić, 2001b; tr. V. Tasić)

As the French theorist Paul Ricoeur says, when we analyse "l'imaginaire social" [imagery of a society] we are always confronted with the fact that it is based "sur la tension entre un pôle idéologique et un pôle utopique", a pole of ideology and a pole of utopia. (Ricoeur, 391; see Moura, 283) The ideological images confirm schemes that already exist in the author's group or in the group which he tries to depict; utopian images give a reading of foreign countries from new perspectives or, in the words of the French literary scholar Jean-Marc Moura:

ALTER est intégré dans une conception du monde dont le centre est le groupe; ALIUS est éloigné, excentrique, et atteint au prix d'une errance hors de ce groupe. ALTER est un reflet de la culture du groupe; ALIUS un refus radical. (Moura, 285)

In Albahari's and Tasić's novels, the image of Canada is certainly more utopian than ideological. The authors use neither the usual Serbian images of Canada nor Canadian self-images. We typically belong to different contexts and have different identities or faces in different circumstances, but the narrators of these novels try to put in question any notion of belonging. In the image of the other appears not only the other that is represented, but also always "I" who speak. Assumptions of stable subjectivity are replaced by the subject of utterance who can identify himself with different groups and "identities"-- from regional, national, to "European", which allows the play of ideology and utopia on different levels of meaning.

It has already been said that these novels are highly subjective. Experience of loss and defeat overshadows every narrator's perspective. However, at the same time, these novels tell about the way from ideology to Utopia, from noble aims to real ends. The pole of ideology was the real condition of emigration, as we read in *The Man of Snow*:

I had come (...) because I believed that once I looked back from someplace else, I would see where I had been in a way I never could have seen while I was there, and that freed from prejudice and the ache of possession, I would be able to see that everything could have transpired differently, that reality is, indeed, contained in the act of choosing, counter to any imperative. (Albahari 2000, 88; tr. Ellen Elias. Bursa)

And Vladimir Tasić writes in *Farewell Gift*:

I wanted to believe in stories of new beginnings, stories of the New World, New Amsterdam, New England, New France, New Braunschweig, America, Canada, no matter. America: that was my first thought when I entered Canada. I gaped at four lane highways; limousines so big that in the space each took up a modest family house could have been built in Old Amsterdam; cobalt-clear sky under which a nation hurriedly went about wearing sunglasses, necessary because even light is different here, sharper, as in a movie. Without understanding, like a camera, I recorded tall business centres made of glass and concrete, neon signs advertising lube and body shops, grocery stores, laundromats, restaurants. (Tasić 2001, 60-61)

However, these ideological images swiftly transform into personal Utopia. Narrators only believe in *alius*, in wandering out of any group and telling a highly individual unique story about defeat. But, how do their stories end? It is very interesting that both *Bait* and *Farewell Gift* give the same answer: writing itself is the only way to preserve the individual story, to rescue the story from any conceptualisation in this or that notion from the arsenal of usual non-literary grand narratives about war, immigration, love, truth, politics. However, the answer of *The Man of Snow* goes further – the novel is a kind of testimony about a slow but certain disappearance of the subject from history, about a loss of identity and final death in the rhythm of Canadian nature in which the narrator becomes just one more snow-flake that goes beyond any ideology or Utopia. At the end, I would like to remind you of Christian Boltanski's ambivalent work *Canada*, which I mentioned at the beginning. It appears that the pessimistic narrator of *The Man of Snow* is like a real piece of second-hand cloth, thrown into the dustbin of History.

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## THEMATIQUE ET POETIQUE DE L'ECRITURE MIGRANTE AU QUEBEC

Lorsque le concept de l'écriture migrante a connu son impact proverbial au sein du système littéraire québécois, celui-ci était mal préparé à l'intégrer. Au milieu des années 90, les premiers textes migrants commencèrent à rafler les prix littéraires de la province, les prix implantés en principe pour stabiliser l'institution consacrée de la culture québécoise et pour établir une discoursivité nette de l'être francophone. La littérature était donc censée reprendre et véhiculer les vecteurs culturels de la culture fragile, afin de contribuer à sa manière au développement spécifique de la « québécity ».

Mais le système littéraire ne se plaisait pas à suivre les structures préétablies, ce qui a causé des remous au sein de la communauté culturelle, sa logique argumentative suivant le complexe discursif de la québécity des années 60, donc d'une structure privilégiant la défense de la cause francophone en Amérique et l'implantation d'un système spécifique stable qui pourrait fournir – un jour – la plateforme pour une nation québécoise indépendante. Au moment où les prix littéraires se dirigeaient du côté des écrivains immigrés, quelques voix surgirent selon lesquelles il fallait bien faire attention de ne pas attribuer des récompenses à des textes qui ne partageaient pas le passé commun des Québécois et qui ne reconnaissaient plus les symboles consacrés d'une cause commune. La littérature avait la mission de stabiliser et de perpétuer un système culturel, en particulier lorsque les assises n'étaient pas bien fondées.

L'argumentation charpentée pour construire une défense contre le domaine culturel anglophone fut reprise pour être dirigée contre les représentations de l'écriture migrante dont la présence était loin d'être nouvelle dans le contexte francophone mais dont l'impact était trop visible en ce milieu des années 90.

Qui étaient ces écrivains dont les textes causaient une révolte dans le quotidien des Québécois défenseurs de leur spécificité culturelle? Et quelle était la poétique de ces textes? Suivaient-ils un modèle particulier, qui différait des poétiques courantes?

Les textes de Sergio Kokis, de Ying Chen et de Marco Micone publiés entre 1992 et 1994 offrent une mise en scène particulière. Tous leurs textes opèrent selon une structure binaire qui se réfère au processus de l'émigration et à la tension entre une culture d'origine et une culture d'accueil.

Le roman de Ying Chen, *Les Lettres chinoises*, abondamment commenté par la critique, représente l'un des meilleurs exemples d'une bifurcation narrative de deux mondes. C'est l'histoire de deux amants de Shanghai, celle de Yuan et celle de Sassa. Yuan représente le personnage d'un émigré/immigré par excellence: son monde abandonné – la Chine – et son monde d'adoption – le Canada – y sont encore nettement séparés, avec tout ce que cela comporte en distanciation double, par rapport à deux volets de l'expérience humaine. Construite selon le modèle des *Lettres persanes* de Montesquieu, la configuration du texte met en valeur non seulement le voyageur en difficulté face à sa propre culture, mais aussi face à la culture nouvelle, où il commence pourtant à évoluer avec de plus en plus de facilité.

La perception en est doublée par la perspective de sa compagne Sassa qui préfère rester en Chine et dont la perspective met en valeur les impressions de Yuan. Les lettres des deux amants constituent donc cette première étape de l'écriture migrante, où la transition d'un monde à l'autre est fictionnalisée sans que le gouffre entre les deux sphères culturelles soit franchi. La faille reste en quelque sorte ouverte, et le personnage en devient une victime qui essaie de s'en libérer par l'écriture.

Le roman *Le Pavillon des miroirs* de Sergio Kokis est le produit d'un narrateur brésilien exilé au Québec. Le protagoniste, d'une part, cherche à interpréter le développement de sa propre identité et, d'autre part, s'efforce de traduire les expériences et les sensations de son enfance, ce qu'il réalise non seulement à travers le langage de la culture d'adoption, le français, mais aussi à travers un jeu subtil de tableaux chronologiques et topologiques.

Divisé en vingt-sept chapitres, le récit se développe principalement sur deux paliers, dont l'un est constamment dynamité par l'autre, tandis que l'autre maintient les fils conducteurs du premier. Un premier palier concerne deux décennies formatrices du protagoniste au Brésil, son enfance dans une famille nombreuse carioca au temps du président Getulio Vargas. Le père, de descendance lettone et allemande, aime à se consacrer à la peinture et à l'invention de gadgets techniques et reste – de par son caractère individualiste – assez éloigné de la famille nombreuse. Son protestantisme aiguise en quelque sorte cette tendance séparatiste et égotiste, et ne cesse de provoquer la mère, dont la mentalité correspond à une tout autre dynamique culturelle. Elle est noire et spirite, ce qui explique son mode de vie beaucoup plus sociable et beaucoup plus communicatif. Par une emprise distinctive, elle domine sa sphère d'influence à elle, marquée par une forte sensualité. Mais une harmonie entre deux époux apparaît dès le départ inconcevable. C'est pourquoi le jeune protagoniste, déchiré entre deux mondes diamétralement opposés, a beaucoup de problèmes à se constituer un ancrage social, et par conséquent, se fraie un chemin qui aboutit à la liberté et – en dernière instance – à l'exil. Cette histoire est racontée au premier degré par le narrateur enfant et adolescent, qui présente l'évolution de sa personnalité et de sa conscience, et dont les capacités de mémoire sont mises à jour.

Le deuxième palier offre une perspective plus récente du narrateur-personnage. Au moment de l'énonciation, il se trouve depuis plus d'un quart de siècle dans les parages boréaux de l'Amérique d'où il s'exprime en langue française avec de légers particularismes québécois et brésiliens. Dès le départ, il se place dans une situation d'exilé hanté par les impressions fortes et souvent désagréables de son enfance et de sa jeunesse. Ces images à différents niveaux synesthétiques ne cessent de le poursuivre et de l'importuner à tel point qu'il se voit obligé de s'en débarrasser par des pratiques artistiques, en l'occurrence par la peinture. Dans ce deuxième palier, où le présent domine, mais où le passé occupe de plus en plus d'espace, le narrateur se crée une plate-forme à partir de laquelle il peut non seulement commenter le narré au premier degré, mais – ce qui semble être plus important encore – à partir de laquelle il peut réfléchir et mettre à jour la poétique de son œuvre picturale et littéraire. Par ce procédé, le roman réalise une sorte de mise en abyme de sa propre genèse, ce qui l'inscrit dans la mouvance théorique du constructivisme et du systémisme.

En ce qui concerne la structure binaire sous-tendant *Le Figuier enchanté* de Marco Micone, qui est à mi-chemin entre la fiction et la mémoire, elle va dans le même sens bien qu'il y ait une ouverture vers une troisième voie, vers le réseau anglophone.

Le narrateur thématise la différence qui existe entre les paysans de l'Italie méridionale, de Molise, et le mirage américain. Dans toutes les phases de son existence, il vit cette distance comme une tension dont il sera, lui aussi, un protagoniste. Il raconte le départ de tout un village vers l'autre rive de l'Atlantique, d'un peuple en manque de nourriture et en quête d'aventure. Ainsi a-t-il vécu, dans sa jeunesse italienne, les perspectives de l'avenir transmises par les récits de voyage des habitants, de sorte qu'au bout de son propre exil il vivra, plus tard, la force de la mémoire et le pouvoir de la nostalgie. Deux champs énergétiques se nourrissant l'un l'autre semblent se constituer pour tout émigrant et rejeter celui-ci – des deux côtés – vers une existence extérieure, vers une existence en porte-à-faux.

Ni la culture d'accueil, qui peut être française ou anglaise, ni la culture de source ne lui fournissent un ancrage satisfaisant. Bien que l'effet transculturel commence à se dessiner en filigrane dans le texte de Marco Micone, le binarisme de départ domine la discursivité jusqu'à la fin. Ainsi la culture-source est vécue comme un monde mythique et paradisiaque dont les vecteurs positifs se maintiennent au fin fond de l'exil et qui semble être la condition de l'exilé. Au niveau du paratexte, le message prend toute sa dimension dénotative. À part le titre *Le Figuier enchanté* qui constitue la métaphore par excellence de la mémoire du stéréotype méditerranéen, l'épigraphe offre une formule allant dans le même sens: « Aussi longtemps que les mots de mon enfance évoqueront un monde que les mots d'ici ne pourront saisir, je resterai un immigré » (Micone, 5).

L'immigré est dans la phase de transition dans la mesure où la structure symbolique de la culture-source fait partie intégrante de son identité et où – justement pour la même cause – il n'arrive pas à s'intégrer dans le « Nouveau monde ». La mémoire fonctionne donc en tant que ressource d'identité et simultanément en tant que spectre barrant la route à l'intégration entière du monde d'accueil. Suivant cette logique, l'émigrant apparaît comme un phénomène martial, détruisant – de par son absence – la culture de source tel un guerrier dont l'hécatombe anéantit les populations entières. Le narrateur construit le raisonnement de l'exil-fléau avec tout ce que cela comporte de tragique et de patriotique.

Mon enfance échoua sur une de ces collines dénudées du Mezzogiorno, enclavé entre le dénuement et le mépris, où, régulièrement, les hommes étaient recrutés pour les guerres et l'émigration. Très tôt, je fus captivé autant par les récits de grand-père, relatant ses traversées transatlantiques du début du siècle, que par les exploits des martyrs de la patrie dont nous parlait le maître d'école jour après jour. Je n'acceptais pas cependant que, à côté du monolithe érigé à la mémoire des victimes du champ d'honneur, il n'y eût pas un monument, dix fois plus grand, en souvenir des disparus de l'émigration. (Micone, 11)

Dès le départ, le texte offre une série de vecteurs isotopiques qui rejoignent la binarisation des cultures, dont l'une fonctionne comme ressource positive, l'autre comme danger, comme un monstre qui avale les hommes appartenant à un même contexte. L'incipit trahit ce caractère binaire dont l'écriture migrante se nourrit sans cesse et auquel elle s'appuie par principe. Retenons le fait que, par le récit de son grand-père, le jeune narrateur est sensibilisé du phénomène de la perte. La mémoire lui sert de ressource principale. La binarité retrouve un caractère concret se jouant au niveau de deux champs, de la culture italienne et de la culture américaine dans sa version québécoise. L'émigration prend la forme d'une blessure originelle, biblique, dont les cicatrices restent au niveau de la culture-source et qui est vécue comme une défaite. En ce qui concerne l'espace et le temps, la situation produit une mémoire aux référents précis. Les chiffres d'émigrants italiens au Canada et au Québec appuient la narration-mémoire:

En 1902, pas moins de 6000 Italiens s'échinaient à la construction des chemins de fer, partageant cette géhenne avec des Slaves et des Ukranien, afin de greffer une colonne vertébrale à un pachyderme déjà poussif et disloqué s'étirant du Pacifique à l'Atlantique. (Micone, 13)

La binarisation qui sous-tend des textes de la première moitié de la décennie se défait au fur et à mesure que « l'écriture migrante » se développe: Dans le roman *Immobile* de Ying Chen, cette relation entre les deux mondes se voit profondément changée dans la mesure où le pacte autobiographique est moins coloré par l'expérience de la déterritorialisation et par le fait que la distance entre deux cultures est presque rendue invisible. Ying Chen a donc créé un texte qui procède par entrelacement en liant deux espaces culturels et historiques par des sutures en filigrane et à peine visibles. Elle est arrivée à

construire un récit en douze chapitres dont la trame chinoise se constitue moins par le territoire et le lieu que par la mémoire et la conception du temps de la protagoniste. Ainsi *Immuable* fonctionne comme un roman de l'exil, certes, mais avec des paramètres différents et inconvencionnels. Qu'est-ce à dire?

La protagoniste, dont le lecteur n'apprend pas le nom, vit une sorte de réincarnation d'une époque révolue à laquelle elle n'arrive pas à s'arracher. Son mari, l'archéologue A..., essaie de la retenir dans le présent du monde moderne, mais la mémoire de sa jeune femme prend constamment le dessus. Ainsi la situation est de plus en plus difficile à supporter pour le couple dont les relations souffrent de ces retours en arrière invétérés et intempestifs de la jeune femme. Du fait qu'elle se voit coincée entre deux conceptions du temps, elle ne rejoint jamais entièrement le monde d'A...

Ici, l'expérience de l'exil se trouve transformée en distanciation temporelle, et non pas en distanciation spatiale. A cause de sa mémoire obsessionnelle, la protagoniste n'arrive pas vraiment à participer au monde moderne proprement dit, dans lequel elle est jetée par une naissance malheureuse qui la laisse orpheline. Un jour, alors qu'elle se rendait en train sur la côte ouest, elle a rencontré l'archéologue A... qui deviendra son mari et qui essaiera de la sauver de sa mémoire trop chargée d'expériences tragiques.

Ses souvenirs obsessionnels qui datent de quelques siècles ne rejoignent pas le monde dans lequel l'histoire semble avoir lieu. À cette époque-là, la protagoniste a vécu elle aussi comme une orpheline avant qu'elle ne fût récupérée par une troupe de chanteurs d'opéra. Le prince du lieu s'éprend d'elle et l'achète pour l'avoir comme troisième femme au palais. Mais l'amour n'arrive pas vraiment à naître entre le prince et sa nouvelle compagne qui, un jour, enjoint à son serviteur de lui prêter ses vêtements afin de pouvoir fuir les lieux de la solitude. Le général du palais la retrouvera parmi les chanteurs de la troupe en ville et la ramènera au bercail. La relation entre la jeune femme malheureuse et son serviteur S... s'avère de plus en plus intime et aboutit finalement à un grand amour. Lorsque leur histoire sera découverte, S... mourra sur l'échafaud et, quelques années plus tard, elle avalera de la soupe empoisonnée.

Au cours des douze chapitres du roman, le lecteur suit les événements sur deux axes temporels. La lutte de la protagoniste contre sa mémoire devient exemplaire dans la mesure où elle essaie de suivre les injonctions de son mari qui, bien implanté dans son temps et dans la société, l'aide à se défaire des monstres des temps révolus. Une partie de l'incipit du roman est marquée par la venue au monde de la jeune femme qui se voit poursuivie par la mémoire:

Mon amant d'autrefois, le serviteur S..., n'avait qu'une oreille. Il avait sans doute un nom mais je ne m'en souviens pas, je veux dire qu'il est encore sur mes lèvres mais je ne sais pas le prononcer. C'était une appellation abstraite, sans signification, inclassable, s'accrochant mal

aux murs de la mémoire. Je décide quand même de le nommer S..., car mon mari de maintenant, l'archéologue A..., dont le nom m'échappe pour la même raison, a besoin de données précises pour comprendre mon histoire et pour y croire. Il me manquait une certaine intelligence, d'après S..., une sorte de sensibilité, justement parce que j'avais un corps trop complet, presque dépourvu de défauts. Depuis, j'avais acquis un penchant pour tout ce qui était demi, imparfait, irréparable. D'ailleurs, à ce moment-là, à l'intérieur de la maison du prince, mon espèce valait moins que les domestiques, avait moins d'influence sur le maître, méritait moins de bonheur. Maintenant comme autrefois, j'aurais voulu devenir quelqu'un d'autre, sinon quelque chose d'autre. Mais A... trouve que cela ne doit pas me servir de prétexte pour vivre aujourd'hui d'une manière irresponsable, pour refuser d'être ce que je suis. Ce serait trop bête de compromettre la vie présente au nom d'une prétendue vie antérieure. Il faut que je me débrouille autrement. (Chen, 1998, 7-8)

La situation qu'occupe la jeune femme dans les deux mondes superposés ne se réfère plus au clivage entre « pays d'origine » et « pays d'accueil ». La structure narrative est bien plus complexe puisqu'il s'agit d'un chevauchement temporel dans une même culture, mais à des époques différentes. Le trauma de l'exil se voit donc intégré en tant que trauma au niveau de la mémoire, la jeune femme souffre d'avoir vécu une existence malheureuse dans la maison du prince. Sa métépsychose est une forme plus subtile de transmigration qui la poursuit jusqu'à l'existence de femme moderne. Dans ce jeu de distanciation, elle est privée de tous les repères d'une existence ordinaire, car elle devient l'ancêtre d'elle-même, de telle façon que la boucle autoréférentielle se referme sur elle-même. Où est sa réalité? Qui est-elle? Elle n'arrive surtout pas à se retrouver dans une ambiance de lieu sans mémoire tel que le représente le milieu du monde moderne.

Sa mémoire se révèle être plus forte et plus dominante que les événements du réel ambiant. Le désarroi devient donc comparable à celui de la condition d'une personne émigrée/immigrée:

Je suis un navire troué, je dois accoster à tout prix, sans dignité, en hâte. J'aurais aimé m'asseoir dans un petit coin, lasse et immobile, passer mes jours à contempler ce monde qui n'intéresse que les étrangers, et avec le paysage duquel je n'ai pas à me confondre. Mais A... ne me laisse pas tranquille. (Chen, 1998, 12-13).

Face à la vie quotidienne avec A..., la protagoniste souffre d'une trop grande absence spirituelle due à un passé trop présent: « Ma tête est donc mon enfer, et ma mémoire, mon ennemi. » (Chen, 1998, 14). Ne serait-ce pas une manière tout à fait subtile d'exprimer la condition de la personne émigrée/immigrée, qui chercherait à s'adapter au quotidien de la nouvelle réalité et du nouvel entourage, mais qui se verrait poursuivie par les fantasmes d'une époque révolue? Tradition vs. modernité est la dichotomie



qui traverse le texte, tout en se confondant dans le personnage de la protagoniste souffrante.

Sur le plan formel, le texte construit son aura avec les ingrédients des mondes opposés: dans les premiers chapitres alternent les événements appartenant aux deux courants temporels de la protagoniste. Si le deuxième chapitre contient l'histoire dans le palais du prince et la présence de S..., le troisième chapitre est marqué par le mari du monde moderne, A.... Le mari considère les histoires de sa femme comme des élucubrations dont il faudrait la libérer le plus tôt possible. Pour elle, par contre, ses souvenirs se confondent avec le présent de telle façon que A... commence à faire partie du jeu de mémoire: « Mes humeurs varient selon le résultat de ces comparaisons, et mon amour pour lui est inégal. A... tour à tour devient le prince, le général, et quelquefois S... Il peut aussi être les trois en même temps. » (Chen, 1998, 40). Elle vit les chevauchements au fur et à mesure de son état psychique, en quelque sorte dans une complexité à peine contrôlable, qui ne peut plus s'organiser à partir de la différence *sujet/objet*. Dès que les paliers temporels s'interpénètrent, la protagoniste est considérée comme malade, d'autant plus que le monde moderne refuse toute sorte de métempsychose et d'existence non tangible. « Les médecins disent que ma maladie s'aggrave, car je ressens maintenant une tendresse nouvelle envers A..., que j'essaie de situer quelque part dans mon ancienne vie. [...] Je ne suis qu'un pantin dont une vie ancienne tire les fils. » (Chen, 1998, 117). Voilà l'une des constatations-clefs, qui ne sont pas – cette fois – sans rappeler les présupposés de la littérature d'exil. Auteur, narrateur et personnage de la littérature migrante sont en quelque sorte pris dans l'engrenage de leurs expériences respectives avant que leur transfert dans la culture d'adoption ait eu lieu.

Le roman de Ying Chen se trouve loin d'être un texte typé par le genre de la littérature migrante, certes, mais subrepticement il intègre les présupposés en question dans l'enchaînement narratif. Chez la protagoniste, il ne s'agit nullement d'une émigrée/immigrée conventionnelle qui a laissé sa culture pour en retrouver une autre. Non, au contraire. Elle est restée dans son propre pays. Mais un voyage a néanmoins eu lieu, c'est le voyage à travers le temps, un voyage du monde archaïque et oriental vers un monde moderne et occidental, qui a laissé des traces profondes dans le personnage principal de la narration. Le monde moderne ne fonctionne plus sur les modèles de l'histoire mais sur celui de la présence de la totalité des événements. C'est la raison pour laquelle A..., l'archéologue moderne, se voit privé de sens historique: « Il déteste donc la mémoire qui lui complique la vie, qu'il croit à l'origine de tous les maux. » (Chen, 1998, 129).

Lorsque la protagoniste, accompagnée de son mari archéologue, entreprend un voyage vers l'ouest, vers cette ville où elle a vécu son histoire avec le prince et le serviteur, les deux conceptions de juger la réalité se manifestent sans équivoque. Lui part d'une connaissance livresque des lieux et s'occupe plus de la mer et de son loisir que de sa recherche scientifique; elle vit le

passé par d'autres filtres et réussit à refigurer la réalité de façon plus vitale et plus directe. Mais aura-t-elle une place dans le monde moderne ? Voilà la question posée par le texte.

Certes, le roman de Ying Chen reste toujours un roman en porte-à-faux par rapport à la culture québécoise de souche et s'inscrit en quelque sorte dans cette littérature migrante qui révolutionne les écritures américaines. Mais l'auteure entreprend de nouvelles formes du récit. Nous avons bien vu que le gouffre entre sa culture-souche et sa culture-accueil n'existe plus de la même façon: les instances narratives semblent fusionner dans une complexité plus prononcée, la topologie est moins développée pour laisser la place à des lieux plus généralisés, ce qui fait naître un genre de textes plus universels.

La constellation des voix narratives atteint un niveau bien plus complexe dans le roman *Le Maître de jeu* de Sergio Kokis où la thématique de l'exil ne reste visible qu'en filigrane et où la grande faille de l'émigré/immigré avec ses deux rives n'est plus au centre de l'attention. Comme dans l'œuvre de Ying Chen, les textes de Kokis connaissent un développement semblable dans la mesure où la recherche narrative s'intensifie au détriment de la mise en confrontation de deux cultures. Il ne s'agit donc plus de décrire, au premier niveau, l'expérience de l'exil d'un narrateur ou des personnages, mais plutôt de fournir une radiographie de leur mémoire dont les différentes couches d'expérience et de choc ont mis en route un processus psychique décentré. Ainsi l'expérience de l'exil se voit entièrement intégrée dans un ensemble de réalités vécues où la frontière entre le pays d'origine et le pays d'adoption s'estompe au fur et à mesure que d'autres formes d'expression prennent place.

Le roman *Le Maître de jeu* représente un exemple concluant de ce développement récent puisqu'il thématise la problématique en question et fournit une sorte de fictionnalisation de la théorie du complexe. Les signes métatextuels du roman mènent le lecteur averti dans cette direction: d'abord, il y a le titre qui n'est pas sans évoquer une condition humaine, installée au sein du bruit de la totalité, où les différents participants peuvent se demander à juste titre s'il y a une position d'*ultima ratio* ou d'une divinité toute-puissante dans ce monde-ci. Ensuite il y a une citation en épigraphe, prise dans les *Principia Mathematica* de Bertrand Russell, qui soulève le problème de la totalité englobée par le côté de la perspective analytique:

L'analyse des paradoxes à éviter montre qu'ils résultent tous d'une certaine espèce de cercle vicieux. Ces cercles vicieux surgissent de la supposition qu'une collection d'objets peut contenir des membres qui ne peuvent être définis qu'au moyen de la collection prise comme tout. (Kokis, 1999, épigraphe)

Le texte posera donc la question à quel degré tout maître de jeu – et aussi maître chanteur – n'est pas lui-même exposé au hasard des événements, dans quelle mesure le narrateur ne se voit pas subjugué par ses propres personnages, ou Dieu subjugué par la complexité ambiante.

Dans les douze chapitres du roman plurifocalisé, Ivan Serov se pose comme narrateur principal, sans qu'il échappe au fait d'être raconté à son tour par un narrateur métadiégétique. Mais Ivan ne raconte pas seulement sa propre histoire: il s'entretient régulièrement avec un compagnon latino-américain, Tiago Cruz, qui a survécu à un régime tortionnaire dans les geôles du régime militaire de son pays et qui lui confie le récit de ses expériences atroces. Avec patience, Ivan écoute son compagnon et le délivre en quelque sorte de ses souvenirs, avant de rédiger à son tour le récit et ses focalisations: « Je l'écoutais avec soin et je crois lui avoir rendu un certain service dans la mise en ordre de la narration de son martyre. » (Kokis, 1999, 14). Ce récit de Tiago se trouve réparti à travers l'ensemble du roman, où il est facilement repérable par des caractères italiques.

Ivan vient de terminer une thèse en théologie sur le sujet de l'origine du mal et les paradoxes russelliens dans les écrits de la patristique et de la scholastique qui, d'une part, l'a fait réfléchir sur le problème de la théodicée et, d'autre part, lui a donné l'impression d'être une fois de plus le maître du jeu de la narration (Kokis, 1999, 31). La constellation narrative se complique au moment où une personne omnisciente s'installe à ses côtés et l'interroge sur les sujets du mal ici-bas, de l'omnipotence de Dieu, de la présence du diable et sur toutes sortes de questions philosophiques et théologiques. Le nouveau compagnon dont le nom est Lucien (Lucifer ?) déstabilise le narrateur en tant que maître de jeu, puisqu'il lui démontre son infériorité diégétique. Par-dessus le marché, il semble incarner Dieu et le diable en même temps. Ainsi le problème de la théodicée, le problème du mal dans ce monde, est focalisé en une personne déifiée (ou diabolisée) en quelque sorte, qui pourtant, de son côté, se voit non seulement subjuguée par la totalité des événements, mais aussi par la propre narration d'Ivan dont il n'est finalement qu'une création. Lorsque Tiago Cruz se suicide à la fin de l'histoire, la question se pose de savoir qui l'a poussé vers cette décision: Lucien, ou même tout simplement Ivan par l'intermédiaire de Lucien, ou bien Ivan en tant que créateur de cet univers ? À la fin de la narration d'Ivan, celui-ci se rend compte de la situation complexe dans laquelle il se trouve: « Oui, Lucien, Dieu le père ou le démon, qui que vous soyez; et si vous n'existez pas, si tout cela n'a été qu'une illusion, je suis alors devenu la fiction de moi-même. » (Kokis, 1999, 251). Le roman se termine par le cahier de Tiago Cruz, que celui-ci a laissé à son ami Ivan avant de s'ôter la vie. Dans ce cahier, son ami latino-américain lui confie le secret d'avoir connu, lui aussi, le personnage intrigant de Dieu ou de démon. « Ce n'est qu'après mon arrivée ici, lorsqu'il s'est désintéressé de moi, que j'ai repris contact avec les souvenirs de l'ancien Tiago Cruz. » (Kokis, 1999, 259). Cela démontre que même cette voix a été une fiction d'Ivan, qui, lui, est à son tour aussi une fiction.

C'est ainsi que le roman de Sergio Kokis vient de relever le défi de fictionnaliser les jeux complexes de nos réseaux de communication et de nos perceptions, ce qui l'inscrit dans la nouvelle version de l'écriture de l'exil ou

de la migration. Si *Le Pavillon des miroirs* met encore en valeur le clivage culturel entre la « brasilianité » et la « québécoisité », *Le Maître de jeu* fusionne ces deux volets dans la complexité d'une réalité plus large qui semble tout englober. Certes, dans le texte, la narration des expériences de Tiago Cruz sous la dictature militaire en Amérique latine se voit relevée par un texte imprimé en italique, mais le récit est intégré dans un ensemble narratif qui ne permet presque plus ce genre de dérives. Au contraire, le mérite du roman en question est plutôt d'avoir actualisé une approche des deux cultures, des deux histoires, et d'avoir présenté la mémoire de l'exilé/émigré/immigré sous forme d'entrelacement narratif<sup>1</sup>.

De par sa facture complexe, par la fictionnalisation des personnages et du narrateur et par la réflexion sur le processus de la « poïésis », *Le Maître de jeu* acquiert donc un haut degré d'accessibilité pour d'autres cultures.

Par conséquent, les « écritures migrantes » des années 90 offrent une évolution de leur système poétique et thématique. Elles se réfèrent de moins en moins au binarisme sous-tendu par la question existentielle concernant la différence entre la culture de souche et la culture d'accueil. La narration est plus concernée par l'hybridisation et le métissage des cultures que par leur séparation nette. Les romans enlèvent la ligne de démarcation entre les champs énergétiques de symbolisation afin de construire un « entre-les-deux », un lieu entre les cultures et leurs vecteurs opposés. Ainsi les « écritures migrantes » se sont libérées de leur facture stéréotypée pour se retrouver dans une phase de création qui promet une « nouvelle écriture ».

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<sup>1</sup>La représentation du personnage-fantôme telle qu'elle se voit pratiquée en filigrane dans le texte est l'un des signes distinctifs de cette tendance, dont les cultures latino-américaines, en particulier la culture brésilienne, sont extrêmement riches.

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**RAPPORTS ENTRE LA MERE ET LA FILLE DANS  
*L'INGRATITUDE* DE YING CHEN, LE DEFI DU  
TRANSCULTUREL ET L'ENRICHISSEMENT DE LA  
LITTERATURE QUEBECOISE CONTEMPORAINE**

Depuis quelques années, les cultures migrantes ont profondément changé le système littéraire au Canada, en particulier celui du Québec. Par le trésor culturel millénaire rapporté dans leurs bagages mentaux des pays dont ils sont originaires, les œuvres des écrivains migrants – souvent venus de loin – représentent un défi considérable pour l'axiologie de la canadienité ou de la québecité. Elles véhiculent des repères culturels qui n'ont aucun rapport avec la genèse parfois difficile de l'espace francophone au Nord de l'Amérique, ce qui offre un chemin tout aussi sinueux que mystérieux dans de nouvelles connaissances au niveau du discours de l'Histoire littéraire. À partir des rapports de trois générations de femmes dans une famille chinoise du roman *L'ingratitude* de Ying Chen, de la "Dame de Shanghai" montréalaise, nous observons le travail de ce rapprochement culturel particulièrement délicat et en même temps enrichissant, passant par la tradition millénaire orientale, par l'influence littéraire occidentale en guise d'enrichissement de la littérature contemporaine du Nouveau Monde francophone, voire de la littérature québécoise actuelle.

Dès les premières lignes du roman, on s'aperçoit que la romancière connaît bien la littérature française. La scène où l'héroïne de son roman *L'ingratitude* est passé dans le monde des spectres et où elle observe ce qui se passe autour de son cadavre, cette coquille qui autrefois contenait son âme renvoie aux *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* de Chateaubriand. Mais, des tons ironiques rappellent bien la philosophie millénaire du peuple dont Ying Chen est issue. Elle nous apprend que le suicide est considéré comme un acte criminel, en quoi la foi bouddhiste rejoint la foi chrétienne. La phrase: "Quand maman n'est pas là, ils ne dissimulent pas leur dégoût." (Chen, 1995, 9) ne révèle pas seulement l'attitude des gens envers l'acte de prendre sa destinée en ses propres mains. Elle nous suggère déjà que le rapport entre la fille et sa mère sera au cœur de l'intérêt de la romancière.

L'héroïne souligne qu'on respectait davantage les déjà-morts que les encore-vivants "car, devenus moins humains et surtout moins fragiles, les premiers peuvent acquérir, du jour au lendemain, plus d'intelligence, plus de talent,

plus de vertu, donc plus de valeur" (9). Ce sont exactement des traits de caractère que la mère aimerait voir éclore dans l'esprit de sa fille, mais celle-ci est rebelle et refuse de se plier aux exigences. Dès son enfance, Yan-Zi, l'héroïne au prénom d'un oiseau, se sentait coupable, puisque déjà par sa naissance, elle a fait du mal à sa mère: née par césarienne, toute sa vie durant, elle devait regarder la cicatrice sur le ventre maternelle comme un reproche muet:

Maman avait encore oublié mon anniversaire, elle qui avait une bonne mémoire. La peine que je lui causée en venant au monde ne l'avait pas aidée à se remémorer cette date. Elle avait sur son ventre une ligne foncée en forme de serpent. Quelquefois, dans les bains publics, nous nous épiions en silence. Je ne posais pas de questions et elle faisait mine de ne pas remarquer mon embarras. J'étais donc sortie de là ! De ce ventre mou, sale et gonflée de gras. J'aurais préféré naître d'une pierre ou d'une plante sans nom. Mais la ligne foncée sur ce ventre étranger me criait en pleine figure: Tu ne peux pas m'échapper, c'est moi qui t'ai formée, ton corps et ton esprit, avec ma chair et mon sang – tu es à moi, entièrement à moi! (20)

Se sentant mal-aimée, pendant des années, elle s'efforçait d'être brillante à l'école, laborieuse à la maison, habile dans les ouvrages à l'aiguille, complaisante envers les jeunes hommes qui seraient prêts à l'épouser. Par cette longue liste de devoirs de la jeune fille envers sa mère, en particulier et envers toute sa famille en général, Ying Chen se rappelle l'organisation et les mœurs de toute famille chinoise. Ce besoin de la soumission n'est pas inscrit dans la culture de sa nouvelle patrie.

Je cherchais en vain à lui [à la mère] plaire. J'essayais de me bien comporter. Je faisais le ménage. Je mangeais modérément. Je consacrais huit heures par semaine à l'apprentissage de la couture. Je sortais peu. Je fermais les yeux sur les hommes et les oreilles sur leurs affaires. Je me joignais doucement aux bavardages de mes tantes et de mes voisines. Et, avec un sourire prolongé, j'approuvais tout. Je n'avais presque pas de défauts. Une fille parfaite. Une fille digne de sa mère. Mais on ne pouvait pas vraiment plaire à une mère après lui avoir fait mal en venant au monde. On ne pouvait pas réparer cette blessure trop violente du corps qui ensuite devenait celle de cœur. Maman récompensait tous mes efforts en me qualifiant de petite hypocrite. Elle croyait, et ce avec raison, que j'étais au fond exaspérée par les ouvrages féminins, gourmande, sensible aux hommes et d'esprit très critique. Déçue par toutes ces bassesses, elle me trouvait pitoyable. (21)

La figure maternelle est le centre d'attraction de la maisonnée, mais elle souligne aussi la faiblesse du rôle paternel, tellement différent de son image traditionnelle en Occident, où l'œil du Père contrôle toutes les actions des membres femelles de sa famille. Au dire de Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska, déçu par le fait que la nature ne lui permettra pas de "faire des petits", enviant

les femmes, leur ventre et leurs accouchements, le Père se décide de faire des discours. La distribution des rôles et le découpage lexical s'effectuent en même temps, le choix du vocabulaire cristallisant l'ordonnance pratique des gestes et des conduites. Dès lors, la femme n'échappera à l'autorité patriarcale qu'en se rangeant dans le clan des rebelles. C'est pourquoi, dans son essai pertinent intitulé *L'Échappée des Discours de l'œil* (327), elle se pose pour tâche de jeter de la lumière sur le rôle mythique de la femme, où les relations familiales et celles concernant l'amour occupent une place primordiale. La romancière y part du mythe primitif et continue par l'étude du mythe barbare, dans les deux cas la femme étant l'héroïne principale. En concluant que l'œil est l'instrument de la communication le plus apte à comprendre les relations entre les hommes et les femmes, l'écrivaine montre qu'elle a bien compris le mécanisme inventé par le Père pour faire marcher le monde dans son sens: "L'Occident a de la suite dans les idées. C'est toujours par l'œil qu'il effectue le transfert du naturel au culturel." (218). Chez Ying Chen, formée par la philosophie orientale, la mère est restée la figure principale, celle qui épie et qui contrôle. Mais, ce n'est pas par hasard que la jeune femme dans *L'ingratitude* appelle celle qui l'a mise au monde "ma mère", tandis que toute sa sympathie se découvre lorsqu'elle parle de "son papa".

Comme dans les romans précédents de Ying Chen, la grand-mère est celle qui s'entend bien avec sa petite-fille et qui n'arrive pas à accepter cette femme entrée dans sa famille pour lui voler le fils chéri. Celle-ci est considérée comme intrus et sang ennemi qui ne cause que des problèmes aux membres de la famille dans laquelle elle est entrée par le mariage.

Épouse insatisfaite et belle-fille rejetée, elle se convertit en démon malfaiteur, désirant réaliser ses propres rêves au dépens de sa fille unique. Son seul but dans la vie, c'est de trouver un gendre plus adroit à faire une bonne carrière dans la société. La romancière nous présente toute une galerie de gendres *in spe*, tous au-dessous de l'idéal que s'est créée leur futur belle-mère. Hong-Qi, le collègue de l'université de sa fille et son premier amour, celui qu'on découvre lorsqu'on a dix-huit ans, aux yeux de la mère "était un nouveau-venu dans [leur] ville, un ridicule étranger malgré le glorieux passé de son père, un provincial dont les pieds sentaient encore la terre" (43), mais la jeune fille était consciente que la vraie raison de la fureur de la mère était ailleurs. Chun, l'autre prétendent à la main de la jeune fille, "possédait juste assez de qualités et de défauts pour devenir un mari ordinaire" (51), mais la jeune rebelle lui en veut pour avoir insisté de demander sa main en mariage à sa mère, sachant que chez eux "les jugements de maman équivalaient à des décisions" (49). La fille, qui s'efforçait pendant une longue période de satisfaire les désirs de sa mère, finit par se rebeller contre son autorité et commence à ruminer des projets pour s'en venger. Elle finit par conclure que le meilleur moyen en est de disparaître de la surface et de punir sa mère par cet acte en la privant du privilège d'avoir une fille à marier.

Je brûlais d'envie de voir maman souffrir à la vue de mon cadavre. Souffrir jusqu'à vomir son sang. Une douleur inconsolable. La vie coulerait entre ses doigts et sa descendance lui échapperait. Mon corps commençant à pourrir par ces journées chaudes, ses gènes cesseraient de circuler dans mes veines, se perdraient au fond de la terre uniforme. Elle n'aurait plus d'enfant. Sa fille unique s'envolerait loin d'elle ainsi qu'un coup de vent mortel croise un arbre en le secouant, mais sans s'arrêter, impitoyable. (18)

La jeune fille décide d'avaler une quantité énorme de somnifères, mais, pour mener sa vengeance à terme, elle s'offre le luxe de goûter au fruit défendu: elle connaîtra l'amour charnel avec le fiancé de sa meilleure amie. Par cet acte elle s'est déshonorée non seulement aux yeux de la famille traditionnelle chinoise qu'est la sienne, mais aussi par rapport aux normes de la famille patriarcale d'après les préjugés traditionalistes. Malgré le fait que le récit de l'événement est fait à la première personne, on sent que c'est Ying Chen qui parle au nom de la femme chinoise, raisonnable et intelligente, celle qui est décidée de prendre sa destinée en mains et qui est prête à payer le prix nécessaire pour accomplir son but. De même, on sent que la décision de se risquer à ce pas décisif dans les buissons du parc public à la tombée de la nuit a été faite par la jeune femme et non pas par l'homme, plus enclin à emprisonner l'âme de la bien-aimée que de posséder son corps avant la cérémonie nuptiale. Lui, "il pouvait attendre. Il suivrait les étapes avec patience" (79) car toute sa vie était à sa disposition. Par contre, pour la jeune femme, c'est profiter de cette occasion ou jamais, puisqu'elle voulait mourir. Mais, avant de se suicider, elle devait régler ses comptes avec sa mère tyrannique et insensible aux souffrances de sa fille timide et peu attractive. Incapable de lui cracher la vérité au visage et voulant la faire souffrir, la fille se décide finalement à agir contrairement aux conseils que devrait suivre une fille de bonne famille. Et cet acte prémédité, cette rencontre brève et unique de deux chairs, n'est qu'une déception de plus dans la vie de l'héroïne. Au lieu de se sentir transportée aux cieux par l'extase de tous temps, elle peut seulement jouir du plaisir d'avoir violé les règles non prescrites.

Nous assistons au dédoublement du personnage, où son côté rationnel analyse point par point les étapes de son acte et ses conséquences. Elle étale minutieusement des raisons de sa déception:

J'éprouvai un grand soulagement en sortant des buissons. Bi se tenait près de moi. La chose était faite. Je m'étais fait déchirer le corps. Maman avait donc pondu un corps qui ne valait plus rien. Ce corps devenu impur se confondrait désormais plus facilement avec la boue. Tranquillement, j'arrangeais mes cheveux et le col de ma chemise. C'était la première fois. J'avais vingt-cinq ans et c'était la première fois. Je croyais m'être vengée de tout le monde pour mes premiers jours perdus. Je m'étais vengée de maman qui m'avait mise au monde sans m'avoir dit toutes les vérités sur la vie. Elle qui s'était mariée à dix-huit ans me voulait vierge le plus longtemps possible et se jetterait



à la rivière en apprenant l'événement de ce soir. Je m'étais vengée de Chun qui, soucieux de ne pas compromettre la bonne fille que j'étais, n'avait jamais osé me toucher. [...] Il était comme mon père, c'est-à-dire mon père professeur d'avant l'accident: sa raison était plus forte que son corps. (80-81)

La vengeance, ce plat qui se mange froid, dont le but fut de braver l'opinion public et l'éducation traditionnelle enseignée par des parents tellement différents aussi bien par leur caractère que par leur tempérament, finit par se tourner contre la jeune fille rebelle: malheureuse parce que malhonnête envers le jeune homme prêt à l'épouser pour sauver son honneur et aux prises de sa conscience pour avoir trahi son amie du bureau, l'héroïne est aussi déçue par cet acte qui ne lui a apporté qu'un mal physique.

Par bravade, elle avoue tout à sa mère dans l'intention de lui faire mal, mais, giflée pour la première fois dans sa vie par son père adoré, elle finit par quitter la maison paternelle, consciente qu'elle a tout perdu sans rien gagner en revanche. Elle croit que sa seule issue est le départ, mais, comme dans les tragédies raciniennes, il n'y a pas d'issue dans l'espace tragique dans lequel évolue l'héroïne: arrivée à la gare, sa valise à la main, au lieu de partir ailleurs, elle décide de rentrer au restaurant au nom ironique: "Bonheur". C'était le seul bonheur qui lui restait, celui de bien manger pour la dernière fois dans sa vie, elle qu'on avait nourri de légumes bon marché pendant de longues années pour faire des économies et aussi pour la façonner par des épreuves. La mère venait de lui dire qu'elle était presque fière du produit de son éducation sévère: la fille ne se plaignait jamais, elle se contentait de la nourriture simple et des habits usés, elle étudiait bien et tout d'un coup cette mère tyrannique se convertit en victime de sa fille insignifiante, qui mijotait bien sa vengeance en silence. Une fille qui n'est plus vierge ne pouvait jamais espérer trouver un homme digne prêt à l'épouser et c'est grâce à son impatience qu'elle a perdu tout espoir d'avoir un mari, des enfants, une famille, bref, toute une destinée tant désirée dont elle rêvait toute sa vie durant. Et la mère impitoyable le lui dit en peu de mots:

Ton bonheur à chuté avec ta morale. [...] Devant toi, et aussi devant moi, les chemins sont coupés, l'abîme s'est creusé, le vide s'est installé, et tu reviens me dire en souriant: Ça y est, la chose est faite ! Oui, la chose est faite. Ta mort est faite, ma pauvre. Tu vivra comme une morte. Mon cœur aussi est mort...C'est un peu de ma faute. Si j'avais fait plus attention à ces hypocrites autour de toi, si j'avais surveillé de plus près tes sorties. J'aurais dû deviner tes tendances malheureuses depuis longtemps... (88)

La perte de la fille, c'est l'échec total de la mère. Tous ses efforts n'ont pas porté leurs fruits, la famille déshonorée deviendra la risée de tous ses voisins et tout le monde crachera sur son dos. Par son acte indécent, la fille s'est déjà suicidée sur le plan social, mais elle a aussi tué sa mère et souillée le nom de toute sa famille. Ying Chen y insiste longuement et on dirait qu'on

assiste à l'explication entre Don Diègue et Don Rodrigue dans *Le Cid* sur l'affront et sur l'honneur de la famille, mais vue dans un miroir ou à rebours. Dans la tradition orientale, c'est à la mère d'apprendre à sa fille ses obligations envers les aïeux et c'est à la jeune fille de consacrer ses propres désirs au profit du bien commun. Se perdre avec des hommes signifiait l'autodestruction et la destruction d'autrui du même coup. Et la fille perdue ne pouvait plus vivre en famille, elle était seule, elle n'appartenait à personne et personne ne voulait plus d'elle. De telle manière, elle était devenue une déjà-morte, tout en étant encore vivante. N'avoir plus de parents, cela voulait dire être libre comme le vent, venir de nulle part et aller nulle part; circuler dans l'espace et hors de l'espace, dans le temps et hors du temps; côtoyer l'Histoire, mais ne pas avoir d'histoire. La romancière y insiste tellement pour démontrer la gravité de la position de la jeune fille perdue, qui chantait la victoire dans les heures qui suivaient son acte de rébellion, mais qui finit vite par comprendre le haut prix qu'elle venait de payer pour sa vengeance contre sa mère: elle voulait quitter ses parents, mais non pas le confort de leur foyer. L'héroïne pense qu'il serait merveilleux de ne pas avoir de parents, de vivre loin des obligations imposées par les liens de sang, mais elle est saisie de panique à l'idée de mourir dans la rue. Sans oublier son objectif de se libérer de la tutelle maternelle, elle se permet le luxe de méditer sur le pas à prendre et sur des conséquences inévitables de sa "souillure": libre, elle était pourtant incapable de récupérer sa vie déjà épuisée dans d'innombrables efforts de complaisances envers maman; elle devait se résigner à devenir le sujet préféré de mauvaises langues. Elle n'avait plus envie de vivre cette vie, pourtant, elle ne pouvait pour autant compter avec la compréhension de sa mère:

D'ailleurs, maman me laisserait-elle encore rester à la maison même si je l'en suppliais ? Auparavant, chaque fois que je lui avais demandé de me libérer, elle avait menacé de se perdre. Mais ce serait différent cette fois-ci. Je n'étais plus vierge maintenant. La situation devenait grave quand on n'était plus vierge. Avec mon corps, ma vie entière semblait endommagée. Et une vie détruite était pire que le néant. Mon existence valait moins que zéro puisque maman aurait toujours honte de moi. Et on courrait un risque en me gardant à la maison car, si j'avais osé agir aussi imprudemment avant le mariage, je serais sans doute capable de bien d'autres bêtises. J'étais le cancer de cette famille. (91)

Ying Chen, originaire de Shanghai, appelle son héroïne "le cancer" de sa famille, de même qu'André Malraux, ce grand connaisseur de la Chine, dans son roman *La Condition humaine* parle des habitants de cet immense pays „le peuple de l'ulcère, de la scoliose, de la famine“. La famine était une plaie saignante, pour ne pas répéter le mot cancer, de cette population qui n'avait emporté la victoire sur ce fléau qu'en 1978, la première année où il n'y ait pas eu de morts de faim parmi les Chinois. C'est pourquoi dans *L'ingratitude* nous trouvons des scènes au restaurant "Bonheur", où l'héroïne se gave de la nourriture, comme un condamné à mort lors de son dernier repas:

Je demandai deux rouleaux de printemps. On me les servit encore ruisselants d'huile. J'avalai ces rouleaux de printemps dans mon ventre d'automne. J'avais un peu mal à l'estomac. J'étais néanmoins contente de ne plus avoir à manger à la maison. Je serai libre de manger beaucoup. Ou pas du tout. Je m'épargnerais le riz ce soir ! À la maison, on laisse tomber le riz seulement pour les grandes occasions: les mariages, les funérailles, ou la fête du printemps. Je pourrais donc, à partir de maintenant, me donner l'illusion de vivre en tout temps de grandes occasions. (114)

Pour la jeune femme, le restaurant "Bonheur" est le Paradis terrestre dont le nom "dit à la fois le réconfort qu'elle y trouve et la cruelle dérision de l'existence. Elle y note ce qu'elle vit et ressent, comme un militaire dans son journal de campagne; elle réfléchit longuement à une offensive qui lui permettrait d'atteindre le plus cruellement possible sa mère: comment lui infliger une 'pure' souffrance, sans provoquer en même temps sa colère ?" (Chartrand, 13). Pendant toute la soirée, l'héroïne écrit une lettre à sa mère, une sorte de déclaration d'amour, qu'on finira par découvrir dans la poubelle après la mort de la jeune femme. Surprise au restaurant par Chun, qui s'imposait toujours là où elle ne l'attendait pas, et fuyant celui qui voulait l'empêcher d'avalier le restant des somnifères, elle perd la vie sous les pneus d'un camion, au même endroit où son père avait été blessé et par la suite devenu un homme qui végétait au lieu de poursuivre sa carrière de professeur d'université. Le hasard ou la destinée peu importe, mais nous pouvons en conclure que l'individu ne peut pas vivre isolé, qu'il continue à être la partie intégrante de sa famille et de la société dont il est issu. Fuyant la mère trop possessive, l'héroïne finit par imiter son père adoré et trouve la paix tant recherchée dans les bras du Seigneur Nilou, "un personnage imaginaire, ce tyran de l'univers *yin*, qui préside aux réincarnations: lui saurait la discipliner, peut-être" (13), en quoi sa mère sévère a échoué.

Francine Bordeleau souligne que *L'ingratitude* "est un roman à l'ironie cruelle qui met à nu – et à mal – les relations d'une jeune femme de vingt-cinq ans avec sa mère. Si le premier roman de Ying Chen, *La mémoire de l'eau*, nous dévoile les secrets d'une famille chinoise et a pour dessein de "raconter un siècle de la Chine à travers le personnage d'une grand-mère", et si son deuxième roman, *Les lettres chinoises*, est un livre sur l'exil intérieur et extérieur parlant du déracinement et de l'affrontement des cultures, *L'ingratitude* présente une éthique de la cruauté:

La narratrice de *L'ingratitude* est étouffée par l'amour envahissant de sa mère. Elle est étouffée, aussi, par des conventions sociales qu'elle trouve étriquées. Comme le Yuan des *Lettres chinoises*, en somme, elle est la proie d'un mal de vivre profond, contre lequel elle ne voit qu'une issue: la mort. En se tuant, la jeune femme cherche à punir sa mère. (Bordeleau, 10)

Au dire de la romancière elle-même, la relation mère-fille, ou parent-enfant, est une relation d'amour fondamentale. Elle constitue en outre notre premier rapport avec le monde extérieur. C'est pourquoi nous pouvons poser que Ying Chen a mis dans ses romans beaucoup de ses expériences personnelles, malgré le fait que ses souvenirs sont cristallisés par l'imagination créatrice. La première romancière d'origine chinoise, avec *L'ingratitude*, son troisième roman, est passée à un cheveu de remporter le prix du Gouverneur général et le Fémina, mais n'a pas raté le Québec-Paris. Elle a choisi d'écrire en français, cette langue difficile et étrangère, apprise en ancienne patrie du temps de Mao. Installée à Montréal et diplômée de McGill, dans sa phrase courte et sobre, volontairement dépouillée d'épithètes, la romancière continue à imiter des phrases apprises dans son enfance. Ses textes sont bien accueillis dans sa nouvelle patrie, mais elle reste une mystérieuse dame de Shanghai. Son héroïne de *L'ingratitude*, se cherchait elle aussi une nouvelle place sous le soleil et – incapable de la trouver dans la réalité – elle a inventé Le Seigneur Nilou, à qui elle parle aux moments de détresse: consciente que sa mère ne l'aimera jamais à la manière désirée par sa fille. Après sa mort, comme le spectre charmant de Ronsard, elle continue à observer ce qui se passait sur la Terre: Chun a trouvé une jeune fille qu'il aime. Quant aux membres de sa famille, "il y en a qui descendent vite la pente. Papa reste de plus en plus dans son lit. Grand-mère commence à perdre ses cheveux, sa mémoire et ses dents. [...] Et voilà que maman a acheté un jeune oiseau et l'a mis dans une cage suspendue sous la fenêtre. Elle lui parle quelquefois." (Chen, 1995, 131). C'est qu'elle continue à aimer à sa façon.

Cette façon consistant à modeler le jeune être d'après ses propres désirs a causé le malheur de sa fille et l'a chassé dans la mort. Ce n'est qu'après avoir franchi le seuil de l'éternité que la jeune fille au prénom d'oiseau a réussi à comprendre celle à qui elle devait sa vie. C'est pourquoi le roman se termine par le cri d'un nourrisson: Maman!

J'entends encore des voix méfiantes ou sympathiques qui parlent de moi, puisque dans le cimetière, la boîte qui enferme une partie des cendres de mon corps est encore à sa place, encore bien rangée, alors que certaines boîtes sont déjà en désordre ou perdues. La lumière envahit tout, ivre et triomphante. Le paysage recule, rétrécit et s'efface. Je ne vois plus rien. Je ne vois pas maman. Je n'ai plus personne, ni maman, ni Seigneur Nilou. Mon souvenir de maman se fond dans cette lumière uniforme. Ma mémoire s'évapore ainsi que le nuage qui me porte. À travers le brouillard de cette mémoire, me parvient, comme une lamentation enchantée, une dernière voix humaine, le cri d'un nourrisson peut-être; Maman ! (133)

Ying Chen a traité un des sujets intemporels, un des thèmes éternels, le thème de la relation entre les membres d'une famille et notamment de la relation entre la mère et la fille. Avec la franchise inhabituelle pour une Orientale, elle a parlé ouvertement des sujets considérés longtemps être tabous, mais connus dans toutes les civilisations: jalousie, amour, désir charnel, envie, vengeance.

Elle nous a rapproché la Chine traditionnelle, mais, grâce à son émancipation personnelle, Ying Chen nous a donné aussi le portrait d'une Chinoise moderne, désireuse d'imiter les exemples des Européennes et de leurs mœurs et usages, appris dans des livres des grands classiques français ou rencontrés dans des universités et des rues de sa nouvelle patrie. Suivant la meilleure tradition des émigrants, la romancière nous a apporté des histoires et des mythes de son ancienne patrie, ainsi que ses propres souvenirs et expériences. Ses nouveaux compatriotes, sensibles à tout ce que la littérature migrante peut leur apporter pour enrichir leur propre culture, admirent ses œuvres et respectent la romancière venue dans le Nouveau Monde de la Chine après la mort de Mao. Ying Chen parle souvent de son inspiration et de ses personnages, mais, dans ses interviews, elle ne cesse de répéter qu'elle même a d'excellents rapports avec sa mère. C'est aux critiques littéraires de la croire sur parole et aux lecteurs d'essayer de séparer les éléments autobiographiques de la réalité fictive d'une œuvre romanesque. Quoi qu'il en soit, par son art créateur et par son style aussi sobre que pittoresque, Ying Chen mérite bien la place qu'elle occupe dans la littérature québécoise contemporaine.

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**CANADIAN IDENTITY BEFORE THE CONFEDERATION:  
THE CASE OF SUSANNA MOODIE, T. C. HALIBURTON  
AND JOHN RICHARDSON**

**Introduction**

The pre-Confederation years represent an intriguing period in the history of Canadian culture and identity, as far as the Canadian self-definition is concerned. Not yet Canadians in the true sense of the word, but nonetheless finding it difficult to fully identify themselves with either Americans or British, the British North Americans were in an intermediate phase between British colonists and citizens of a new country in itself. Their self-definition was therefore dominated by a 'proto-postcolonial' sense of identity through difference, being mainly achieved in terms of Otherness. This led to the emphasis on the differences setting them apart from their neighbours in the south, but also from the spirit of the Mother Country; rather than on their common features, that would in the following years become the basis for the Nation Building ideology.

My paper will try to discuss this nascent feeling of Canadian identity, as mirrored in the works of three 19<sup>th</sup> century authors whom tradition has included in the consecrated canon of early Canadian literature: Susanna Moodie, Th. Ch. Haliburton and John Major Richardson.

The distinctiveness of their voices is paralleled by the common lines along which their colonial identity is constructed, common lines that could be said to announce further directions in the self-conscious literary assertions of Canadian identity in the post-Confederation period : the construction of a distinct Canadian indigeneity – through the construction of either place or race, a delimitation from the American Manifest Destiny, spirit and republicanism, all doubled by a staunch allegiance to British standards, hierarchies, assumptions and institutions, but also by pride in the “Canadian instinct for compromise” (Frye 1997, 147). The works of Moodie, Haliburton and Richardson can also be said to announce at least some of the recurring themes in Canadian fiction and discourse on identity: self-conflict, violation of nature, individuals uncertain of their social context, the dark double, demonizing of the Other-at-the-gates.

Although at the time when the three wrote there was no Canada, as we know it today, and despite their differences in terms of background and origin, I shall focus here on common mechanisms of their self-definition, as individuals members of a larger symbolic community - the British North American colonies. Northrop Frye's arguments in his essay "Culture as Interpenetration" in favour of the totalizing vision of creative imagination within a community will be of use in justifying this approach since these three writers are at the same time, Canadian (or pre-Canadian), but also Maritime writers, immigrant writers, Upper Canadian Métis writers, without discarding for this matter their British North American distinctiveness:

...[T]he language of the creative imagination is a language that cannot argue; it is not based on propositions that do battle with their implied opposites. What it does is to create a vision that becomes a focus for a community. This means that it has, at least at the beginning, a limited range. (...) Literature and painting do appear to depend on decentralization in a very subtle way. The artist seems to draw strength from a very limited community: American writers for instance, turn out, under closer analysis, to be southern writers, New England Writers, expatriate writers, New York writers, and so on. They need a certain cultural coherence within their community but the community itself is not their market. This is where the principle of interpenetration operates: the more intensely Faulkner concentrates on his unpronounceable county in Mississippi, the more intelligible he becomes to readers all over the world. (Frye, 1997, 145)

### **Early post-colonial identity in Canada**

The imperial-colonial dialectic controls, in Frantz Fanon's view, the very process of text-writing so that even the act of creation is affected by the political imaginative and social control involved in the relationship between colonizer and colonized. As Said puts it:

Just as the Occident itself is not just there either. We must take seriously Vico's great observation that men make their own history, that what they can know is what they have made, and extend it to geography: as both geographical and cultural entities – to say nothing of historical entities – such locales, regions, geographical sectors as 'Orient' and 'Occident' are man-made. (Said, 1978, 5)

If we were to extend Said's remark on the constructed character of the notions of Orient and Occident, as two entities that 'support and to an extent reflect each other', we can assume that the Canadian pattern of defining identity is a symptom of Canada's post-colonial status since, as is the case in all post-colonial societies, Canadians realize their identity in difference rather than in essence; apparently they are constituted by their difference from the metropolitan (British or American) and it is in this particular relationship that Canadian identity takes shape, both as a distancing from the centre and as a means of self-assertion (Ashcroft et al., 1989, 167)



On the other hand, in the foundation of Canadian cultural nationalism we can identify *one vector of difference* (the difference between colonizing subject and colonized subject: pre-Canadian settler versus Indigene) *being replaced by another* (the difference between the colonizing subject and imperial/neo-imperial centre: pre-Canadian settler versus Imperium, either British or American) in a strategic denial of the colonizing act. The national – hence the Canadian – replaces the indigenous (and alternative counter-discourses of French Canadians, Irish, Natives etc), and in doing so conceals its participation in the process of colonization by nominating a new colonized subject, which is the colonizer him/herself, victim of the Imperial oppression. One manifestation of this tendency in Richardson’s frontier tales, as is the case with Moodie and Haliburton, is their relegation of the territory’s original possessor to the role of auxiliaries whose cause history pays no heed to.

The British North American settler, his connection to the land and his allegiance to the Empire become the focus of attention, albeit threatened by the revolutionary effervescence south the border. For Moodie, it is the settler’s struggle to recreate civilization on the new continent that replaces concerns about indigenous inhabitants, (who are dealt with at a rather superficial level), while the native issue is completely lacking in Haliburton’s works but is replaced with a longing for a hybrid version of the British North American colonist, that would become “contaminated” with the Yankee vigour, dynamism and energy, while at the same time maintaining the paternalistic ties connecting the colony to the imperial centre.

Thus, by emphasizing the difference between themselves and the Empire, and dislocating the process of colonization from the *invading* level to the *settler* level, namely from the oppression of the First Nations to the rejection of cultural imposition from the Empire, Canada, as a settler colony managed to forge an identity that rejected the culpability of the racial discrimination, relegating it to the level of folklore and replacing it by the myth of hybridity. This is rendered possible through the existence of an ambivalent settler subject, rooted in the ambivalence of colonial discourse itself. It is the discursive manifestation of this settler-subject that my paper will follow, dealing with the works of Moodie, Richardson and Haliburton, along two main lines – that of the avowed difference from Imperial and neo-imperial assumptions, and that of the way in which each author constructed their Canadian specificity and indigeneity. Thus, the distinction centre/periphery is maintained, with the final authority in questions of taste and value being granted to Metropolitan literature.

The manner in which Richardson, Moodie and Haliburton depict Canada is clearly affected by a primary allegiance to the Empire, to the values of the Metropolis, which made it that their image of the colonies was shaped in accordance to what they thought the expectations of their audience will be. Therefore, the stereotypical images of Canada – in fact auto stereotypes, since they are describing their own group and territory – are influenced by the perceptions of the Metropolitan audiences of the North American space.

Moodie, Richardson and Haliburton wanted their works to interpret the colony for the metropolis, to translate its assumptions and realities in order to make it better understood by the uninitiated European public.

Richardson did that translation from the position of the colonist, validating and legitimizing the cultural dominance of the metropolis over the colonial frontier. The Canadas of his stories represent a version of an Other that confirms the hierarchical relationship between Great Britain and its North American colony. The familiar sequences of fictional narrative are used by Richardson's *settler-subject* in order to mould his personal experiences and make them palatable to the reading public, historicity being overt in the text's origins, within the context of metropolitan literary genesis and production, so that, like is also the case partially in Haliburton, history is re-read in order to match the colonial version of things and this re-reading of history through colonial lenses allows for a further exploration of the settler divided identity.

For Richardson, the historical matrix of the world that he knew was marked by disguise and assumed identities, as the British North America of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century was merely a construct that resulted in the wake of the American Revolution. Consequently, every boundary line on the maps of British America marked a new, somewhat frail identity that had succeeded the loss of another, more inclusive one – that of the British colonist/settler. The ambiguous nature of this new identity is visible from the very title of Richardson's most famous novel, "*Wacousta – a tale of the Canadas*".

Richardson considered himself neither *Canadien* (the French Canadian word), nor Canadian, in today's acceptation; neither British, nor American. It was all further complicated by his cosmopolitan upbringing and, most importantly, by his Amerindian roots. He was a product of the repressed cultural *metis* that is part of the settler's mechanism of identity building in order to oppose larger colonial identifications, yet he followed in his writings the European colonial grain. After all, prose fiction came from the metropolis, not from the hinterland, and the audience he was trying to seduce was in the metropolis also. Nonetheless, at a closer look, the longing for indigeneity (racial or cultural) is perceivable in his work, despite the superficial propriety that the colonial discourse imposed on him.

His characters mirror this nostalgia for indigeneity, while transgression of racial boundaries in search of authenticity and disguise is a common device. Thus, characters in *Wacousta* disguise themselves variously. Circumstances force the nephew of Wacousta (himself formerly known as Morton) to rename himself Frank Halloway. Oucanasta, the Indian woman in love with Frederick de Haldimar, appears as often in male clothes as in female. The threatening figure of Desborough in *The Canadian Brothers* proven to have a descendant of Wacousta himself, turns native in an animal-like fashion, finding shelter in the woods and resorting to cannibalism, as a symbolical way of purging his hatred for the Indians whose behaviour he seems to adopt at a very superficial level. Reginald Morton, alias Wacousta appears throughout the novel in two guises, as violent, savage Indian and as narrator, and he haunts the forest as a

figure of shifting identities and disguises, while metamorphosis gives him strength and endurance beyond the limits of the human/civilized. He represents a dimension of humanity that the garrison – embodiment of the inherited elements, paragon of colonial authority and propriety, cannot contain, a sexually vital element, opposed to the cool, sensible reality that the metropolis and its representatives have to offer.

As Dennis Duffy formulates it, “[t]he disguises in Richardson’s costume ball of a novel add up to more than the tricks that a writer uses to advance his story or surprise his readers. They reflect the blended world that the novelist knew” (Duffy, 1996,78). The official myth of stability matched up little with the writer’s own experience of reality and a closer look at the texts themselves allows for a deconstruction of this myth. The surface of the fiction mirrors the official views – whites renounce sexual alliances with Indians, while the (pre-eminently British) values of the garrison/civilized world supersede the frontier code of conduct. While it could not admit to the racial mixing that represented a fact of frontier life, the structure of the novel chooses to employ the romantic narratives of disguise and mistaken identity in a manner that indirectly portrays the essence of this depicted world.

Thus, Richardson, as a Métis colonial subject, using the colonial cultural code of the metropolitan public he is trying to attract, withholds from his readers the historically determined context and delivers instead the very romantic stereotypes of the natives and inhabitants of the British North American frontier – forest demons, whites turned native in a Kurtzian fashion and noble British officers, an evasive approach to the *inhabitants* and Amerindians alike, which underlines the ambiguity of his position.

Richardson’s selected material involve both sides of his own racial legacy, at war with the Americans. Therefore, presenting the alliance that the British made with the Amerindians against the Americans had to be done from the perspective of the colonial audience, hence condemning the violence and barbarism of the Indians, Natives, the Other, who are, nonetheless less overtly demonized than the Americans, whose violence allegedly triggered the conflict.

The clash between the imported and the indigenous, the Old World elements brought by the settlers and the new unexpected elements characteristic of the new land and culture, colonizing and colonized at the same time in Richardson’s work, are rendered through the constant interplay of the foreground (garrison) and backdrop (forest, Indian-inhabited wilderness) which is employed over and over again in *Wacousta*, *The Canadian Brothers* or in *The War of 1812*. Here Richardson’s dealing with the resulting dual “settler identity” is transparent in his delivering of another sort of myth in the novel, that of warring national identities. He casts his characters as embodiments of social and cultural issues, with the *Canadian Brothers* presenting the second half of the revenge tragedy begun in *Wacousta*. Both stories are underpinned by reflections on the implications of the foundations of the nation-states in North America. As Duffy formulates it, “Richardson

twins the Canadian psyche and assigns half of it to a humiliating, self-destructive fascination with things American” (Duffy, 1996, 114). In the colonial context, (i.e. where the social mythology encouraged a reading of colonial relationship as relationship between “the mother country” and her offsprings,) paternalist family relations legitimate and are the model for political allegiance. This emphasis on paternalistic relations is a constant in the works of the three writers – a token of their British loyalties but also of the colonial patterns structuring their imaginary.

As stated earlier, the insertion of the settler’s self into the physical and discursive space of the indigene is simultaneously characterized by desire and disavowal (Ashcroft et al., 1989). To Richardson, the British “humane” treatment of the natives and their alliance with the Amerindians, despite the distinctiveness that insured from the more violent and blood-thirsty Kentuckians, is viewed with disapproval and justified by circumstances. The alluring appeal of the native spirit of the land is played down too, as Richardson depicts the inhabitants of the forest as acting out of murderous impulse and thus being denied the excuse of the understandable response to circumstances. Similarly the forest itself is haunted, demonic, presented in a passive and contextless way; it is at the same time passive backdrop and determining foreground (Duffy 1996), and shares with its inhabitants the same inscrutability, violence and lack of predictability. No historical explanation is possible for either of them, but they have in common the basic ingredients of the Romantic sublime – awe and terror, yet lacking the idealized images or the Rousseau-like considerations of savagery vs. civilization.

In his account of the wars – in *Wacousta, The War of 1812* and *the Canadian Brothers* Richardson distances himself from the wild, forest-dwellers Amerindians, thus repressing his own racial allegiance in favour of a more European/colonial stance. Thus, in his reading of history, the ‘humane’ British are forced by the disparity of forces with the Americans to resort to the support of their ‘savage’ allies (once again the distinction civilisation/barbarity), whom Richardson demonizes, reducing them to the status of irrational beings, driven by mysterious forces. This stance places Richardson at a distance from his subject greater than would be the case with a European novelist of his time, a distance that accounts for the identity split that Richardson as a colonist/settler writer experiences, and from the lack of romanticization of the native or of the natural background that would be Moodie’s trademark.

Moodie’s metamorphosis from a imperial colonial voice into a “native”, settler voice follows the same postcolonial pattern of rejection and denial dealt with earlier, doubled by the internalization of nature as key element in her construction of indigenous identity. When applied to post-colonial Canada, the customary self-definition of early Canadians as non-British and non-Americans seems to fit the profile of her post-colonial search for identity.

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Thus, Moodie's social outlook is marked by the dominant conservatism characteristic of her society. Her voice is middle class, conscious of its respectability and orthodox in its moral and religious beliefs. Consequently, from the social point of view, her writings record the clash between the radical democracy –of North American model – and the conventional social system of pre-Reform Bill England to which Moodie belongs, between the old world values (among which a hierarchically ordered society), and the New World realities. This leads to an almost racial validation of those hierarchical assumptions: the 'gentleman' is ascribed certain physical refinements that make him instantly recognizable; class is also connected with profession as well as birth and a strong feeling of social separation is all-pervasive in her books and short-stories.

As member of the English middle class, who rejects democracy and believes in the class system, it is this code that shapes her perception of the new world she enters and tries to adapt. The need for authority – hence for the unmediated colonial authority that would validate an un-split identity, is perceivable throughout the narrative Moodie constructs. In this process of appropriation, the contrast between the genteel world of her middle-class British upbringing and the coarse world of the settlers (North Americans, either Yankees or Canadians) is dwelt on from the point of view of the corresponding sets of values, all legitimized by the author's (colonial) assumptions.

Indigeneity for Moodie is a different issue than for Richardson. If the way of compromise between the Old World and the New World does not tread on the democratic, republican path, it is through an acute feeling of nature that Canadianness can be best understood in her view. For Richardson, the Canadian distinctiveness stemmed from the acceptance of (and alliance with) a racially-alien Other – the Amerindian, as opposed to the more violent and exclusive patterns of interracial behaviour employed south the border. For Moodie it is the internalization of the native "spirit" of the land that insures the immigrant/settler a starting point in his/her search for a new cultural identity that would fit the new set of allegiances.

Despite her avowed Toryism and colonial allegiance, the need for 'indigeneity', here to be read as a cultural specific still exist in Moodie's work, as part of the process of asserting the difference of her new home from the motherland and of emphasizing this distinctiveness from the continuing sense of European inheritance. This is done by discovering, the original relation of the Canadians with the universe; nonetheless this original relation is not an open return to (British/European) origins; it is a Romantic adaptation of the gentleman-like attitude to nature and its human inhabitants – the Amerindians, who are for Moodie just exotic elements in the Canadian landscape. Nature is God's creation and in Canada, it can be found as God had made it. Therefore, the struggle for a perfect community in the new territories is going on in an Eden-like background, nevertheless, this Edenic

quality only applies to the uncontaminated, pure spirit of Canadian nature, not to the people inhabiting it.

The unpeopled wastes of Canada must present the same aspect to the new settler that the world did to our first parents after their expulsion from the Garden of Eden; all the sin which could defile the spot, or haunt it with the association of departed persons concentrated in their own persons. (Moodie, 1997)

For Moodie the natives remain decorative figures, outside the realm of the rational, of the explainable. Instead of being demonized, in the fashion adopted by Richardson, they are idealized. The result is nonetheless the same – the creation of figures that meet the stereotypical figures a metropolitan audience might expect – either blood-thirsty demons (Richardson), or meek, noble savages in the Rousseauist tradition (Moodie).

If Moodie's Yankees are consistently demonized and viewed as ruthless exploiters, manipulators and arrogant, it can equally be noted that this negative description of the American other (the "savage", rude, uncouth, violent etc.) goes in parallel with the romanticized depiction of the Indians, about whom, in the best continental, Rousseauist and Romantic tradition, in the opening of *Roughing it...*, Moodie creates a stereotype which is played on throughout the Canadian literary tradition:

I had heard and read much of savages, and have since seen, during my long residence in the bush, somewhat of uncivilized life, but the Indian is one of nature's gentlemen – he never does a rude or vulgar thing. The vicious, uneducated barbarians, who form the surplus of over populous European countries, are far behind the wild man in delicacy of feeling or natural courtesy" (Moodie, 1997, 10).

In her search for this distinctively Other, Canadian identity, Moodie (the settler) automatically exercises authority over the Indigene and the acceptance of the land, which stands for the desire for Native authenticity, but also for the above mentioned reluctance toward any racial/cultural metissage. Like for Richardson, yet in a different fashion, Moodie replaces the opposition between the pre-Canadian settler vs. the Natives (who, as seen above, are quickly dismissed as "nature's gentlemen" and left with this decorative, stereotypical status, neglecting their potential in the defining of a pre-Canadian indigeneity). This distinction is instead replaced by the opposition between the British settler and the members of the new Empire threatening the toddling Canadian self-definition, the US.

In *Roughing it...*, like in Richardson's *The Canadian Brothers*, the American individualist exists as a metaphor of destruction. If the paternalistic set of values both Moodie and Richardson uphold is based on the ideas of community, hierarchy, loyalty and parental relations, the Yankee individualist fighting the very ideas of tradition and history is dealt with as the enemy of civil community in Canada.

For Moodie the alternative to “going native” in the American sense, namely in an active rejection of authority, internalized violence and individualism and the subordination of nature to men, is the superimposition of the old world on the new, which should be achieved through the making of a new synthesis that does not reject the continental, paternalistic network of loyalties and identifications structuring Moodie’s self-definition, but maintains at the same time the feeling of local uniqueness.

To sum it up, Moodie’s patterns of identification follow a limited set of options available to the settler: *going native* (as Wacousta does or as, in a different fashion the Yankees do) or, the above mentioned alternative – that of trying and grafting the terms of the previous culture on the new one (as Moodie, the good Tory does). The first option supposes the internalization of an indigenous element that is alien and external to the British settler, hence a rejection of the colonial identity in favour of an indigenous identity that can only be partial. Moreover, “going native” in the American way involves a different process than the Canadian ‘reading’ of the same process, the American way involving “a return to prelapsarian conditions which possess neither history, tradition past nor community” in an essentially individualistic fashion (Mathews, 1975, 7). The second – a superficial hybridization – maintains the hierarchical assumptions of the colonial code, adapting them to the local environment. The first path to “national” identity is read as a descent into savagery, a descent that romantically purges all patriarchal ties, history, ancestry, family and custom in favour of the myth of the “new man”, a frontier Adam emancipated from history. This new frontier man is described in *Roughing it...* in Biblical terms, as the first Yankees Moodie meets are called Old Satan and Emily Satan, his daughter. The second, on the other hand, ensures a successful adaptation to the new environment, which is translated/interpreted to the loyalist settler (and, implicitly, to the metropolitan audience) without upsetting his/her worldview and basic set of values, thus reducing the feeling of alienation of the individual trapped between two worlds.

Thomas Chandler Haliburton is a special case. Though he belongs to a particular cultural environment – that of the Maritimes – he can be said to meet the general requirements of early postcolonial authors in his patterns of identification and differentiation that allow us to inscribe him into the same category as Moodie and Richardson.

Throughout the *Clockmaker* sketches, in the shift of focus from histrionics to social criticism, the new colonial identity Haliburton is trying to create is relying heavily but not exclusively on negative self-definitions, following the pattern of what Alan Lawson calls the “Second World postcolonial subject” (Lawson, 1995, 2-ff) – i.e. the subject of settler cultures, whose discourse does not simply resist a discursive power imposed from outside, but also opposes those dual elements, (East/West, colonized/colonizer, Europe/ the World etc.). This is achieved by writing back against the representations of experience of the place that is his/her, a process whereby the auto image is

opposed to an neo-imperial heteroimage, that of the Yankees, even if Haliburton sometimes exaggerated it for comical reasons.

Haliburton's literary *persona*, Sam Slick, is proof of his author's ambiguous relationship with the American centre, south the border, as opposed to the British allegiance. In Sam, New England and South-western stories are transformed and given a fresh perspective in a process of hybridization essentially based on a reinterpretation of the picaresque tradition.

Haliburton's choice of character enabled him to voice his opinions for and against his countrymen, and his neighbours, at the same time. As V. L. O. Chittick put it, the creation of Slick "combined the advantages of allowing Haliburton to express himself through a character that in many respects it was natural for him to assume, owing to his descent from New England stock (...)", as it was the endless flow of Sam Slick's conversation, with its succession of sharp comment, apt illustration and grotesquely didactic tales that was relied upon to emphasize the contrast between American dynamism and Nova Scotian indolence (Chittick, 1924, 180-181). Nonetheless, the ridicule of the Clockmaker was directed at the Americans as well, as Haliburton's mouthpiece draws attention – directly or indirectly – to the natural advantages of the colonists, the superiority and even desirability of British institutions, despite occasional dysfunctional parts of the system.

Haliburton's writings, as well as those of other high-profile personalities, such as the Anglican bishop John Stracey, are imbued with the tension existing at the time between monarchy and its institutions and the threatening republican turmoil south the border. Haliburton seems to combine these two antagonistic tendencies in an unusual fashion: he is an avowed admirer of the economic accomplishments of the United States and of the Yankee dynamism and vitality, while, on the other hand, he remains a fervent supporter of the British political system.

As was the case with Richardson and Moodie, Haliburton's work too can be said to be marked by a change in the vector of distinctiveness between colonizing subject and colonized subject (pre-Canadian settler versus Indigene). The Native issue does not concern the judge, nor is his view of the colony overtly dealing with the dislocation of the Natives by the settlers. The opposition never involves racial distinctions between Amerindiens and settlers, and is almost entirely focused on the difference between the colonizing subject and imperial/neo-imperial centre: pre-Canadian settler versus Imperium, either British or American. Even if it is no longer a strategic denial of the colonizing act, this relationship unconsciously underpins the whole set of assumptions that pattern his writings. The national – hence the pre-Canadian colonial – still replaces the indigenous discourse (and alternative counter-discourses of French Canadians, Irish, Natives etc), and, in doing so, it conceals its participation in the process of colonization by nominating a new colonized subject.



This process of colonization can be viewed from a twofold perspective: on the one hand, it is the British/imperial mismanagement of the colonies that hampers their development, on the other it is the threat of the other cultural and economic empire south the border that reinforces British allegiances. Haliburton's settler-subject is therefore split between the need of an intrinsically colonial dynamism that would help shake the British imperial dominance over Nova Scotia, and the longing for British-style institutions and values, when confronted with the egalitarian democracy south the border.

But this search for a path to a Canadian/Nova Scotian specific is done without bringing into discussion an indigeneity either expressed through Nature worshipping or through racial or cultural metissage (Moodie's *going native* or Richardson's *Metis*. The Native issue does not seem to concern Haliburton, as his entire focus of attention becomes Sam Slick and through him, his own fellow citizens – the Nova Scotians which are constantly juxtaposed to the heteroimages of the Americans and British. This is done by a vigorous rejection of all democratic, republican values – associated with the US – and by reinforcement of the paternalistic ties with Britain, an element which can be found in the works of all of the three authors under discussion here.

The most striking difference between the British North Americans and the Yankees is, as in the case of Moodie and Richardson, the association between the latter and a rampant democracy and republicanism Haliburton cannot condone, seeing that it would upset the hierarchical aristocratic Nova Scotian society of British descent. The image created of the Americans only mirrors the author's growing distrust of democracy and is consistent with previous representations in the public discourse. Their positive features – shrewdness, frugality, keenness – are emphasized for the sake of drawing an instructive contrast with his own people, but his admiration for the Americans did not extend to their system of government, which is presented with the reserve of a true monarchist. The Americans had "their head a trifle too much, sometimes, particularly in Elections, both in freedom of Speech and freedom of Press" (Haliburton, 1995:189) while the greatest threat of all to a continuance of a stable popular government lay in the doctrine of states rights

If we are to apply to Haliburton the same grid of interpretation as we have done to both Richardson and Moodie, as far as the American heteroimage is concerned, this is less marked by negative features. Far from the threatening disruptive and destructive presence that haunts Richardson's novels, rooted in a period when the collective imaginary was still haunted by the War of 1812, Haliburton's Americans are self-confident, inventive, vigorous and industrious. Nonetheless, their avowed chauvinism, political and legal corruption, boastfulness, crudeness and love of violence are also integrated into the picture, bringing them closer to savagery than to a different-but-equal opponents of the British empire.

Interestingly enough, this hybrid version of the British North American colonist Haliburton seems to propose, is one that would internalize the Yankee dynamism and effectiveness, grafting them on the British forms of

organization. This would allow us to view the American colonists relegated to the role of natives, in the writer's colonial equation; corresponding attributes of savagery, lack of manners, boorishness are indeed frequent in Sam Slick's direct or indirect descriptions of his countrymen., on which the British-style colonists would mark their institutions and customs.

Sam Slick– as the archetypal Yankee – is viewed as an energetic, yet ruthless entrepreneur, who grasps business opportunities where Bluenoses fail to see any at all, and shows no repugnance when it comes to cheating, lying and forging. He is a metamorphic hero, constructed by associating the comic mask with a pluri-vocal discourse, and it is this embodiment of positive and negative features that lies behind the author's two-mindedness when it comes to his hero. The ethnocentric reference point in the Sam Slick books is represented by the Squire, whose role in the economy of *The Clockmaker* seems to be the one of Gulliver in Swift's novel – a mask, a persona with no clear outline, a ethnocentric reference point against which the oddity of the Other is measured.

All in all, Haliburton's representations of the Nova-Scotian colonists as opposed to the Yankees south the border are more balanced than similar comparisons between Canadian colonists and Americans, as seen in Richardson's and Moodie's works. The demonizing of the Other, so frequent in the works of the two authors mentioned above is replaced by a stereotypical inventory of foibles that can be found in both the heteroimage – the Americans, but also in self-reflexive fashion, in the auto images indirectly created by the main character.

Thus, as the second series of *The Clockmaker* focuses on a comparison between British and American institutions, the latter, constantly associated with their form of government, are seen to be converting into potential chaos the same energy they were praised for in the first series. Haliburton's exposition of the English system of constitutional checks, King, Lords, Established Church, and Commons, in favourable contrast with what he describes as the unregulated "populace" of the United States are proof of the importance that the British streak plays in the cultural self-definition of Canadians/Nova Scotians. Moreover, the opinions which Haliburton puts forward in the second series of *The Clockmaker* are constructed along the same symbolic pattern of the organic, filial relation between Metropolis and colonies, upheld by the same patriarchal relationships that structure the works of Moodie and Richardson. "Cuttin' off the colonies is like cuttin' of the roots of a tree". (Haliburton,1995, 294)

Significantly enough, Canadian, or more precisely, Nova Scotian identity and indigeneity are not realized through the cultural assimilation of native elements, nor through a miraculous communion with the nature of the new continent. For Nova-Scotian-born Haliburton, the colony's distinctiveness stems from those features that distinguishes his fellow citizens from the boorish Yankees, connecting them with the aristocratic British lineage, while at the same time, yearning for a hybrid variety that would combine the best of

the two worlds – the energy and dynamism of the Americans with the sophistication and refinement of the Bluenoses, while at the same time making sure that the richness of the colony are well used. Also, the settler/author identity dilemma seems less of a problem than it was the case with either Richardson or Moodie. Far from being solely defined negatively, as un-American and un-British, his Nova-Scotians are depicted in Haliburton's work as a fully coherently and cohesively constituted group, with stereotypes consistently applying, unlike the motley public of settlers populating Moodie's books, or the un-American, pro-British officers fighting exotic Indian warriors in Richardson's.

Haliburton's characters, functioning in an urban environment and, more importantly, rooted in the civilization of the province, are constructed in a more self-assured manner from the identity point of view. Thus, the three narrators functioning in parallel in *The Old Judge* reveal each a complex, ironic subjectivity of which Sam Slick was utterly incapable, while at the same time deliberately recognizing points of view, creating perspectives from which a double set of images emerge: the auto images referring to the Novascotians are subtly deconstructed by the implied assumption that the centre consciousness of the settler/author himself, behind his narrative personae, can be challenged since he views things from one particular cultural perspective.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, we can say that the ambivalent character of the settler author stems from the double design of the Second World narrative – suppression and/or effacement of the Indigene, doubled by a concomitant, albeit superficial indigenisation of the settler, the whole paralleled by the rejection mechanism that in a first phase partially delimits the new culture from its imperial roots. The authors analysed here evince in the process of constitution of their settler identity similar mechanisms of differentiation from the Americans, although this is achieved by use of different elements. In Richardson's case it is the natives and the cooperation between natives and the British North American army that ensure the basis for a possible (racially) hybrid identity.

Like many other Canadian writers Moodie focuses on the construction of an almost organic link between mankind and the external world, a possible Romantic legacy of her continental literary past. Her quasi-religious feeling for nature, in which she finds the path to the construction of an indigeneity unthreatening from the cultural or racial point of view is opposed to the American pragmatic approach, while Haliburton envisages a culturally hybrid North American stock of British lineage that would combine the vitality of the American republic with the sophistication and tradition ensured by the British legacy.

Another strategy of identity construction that the three authors share is their support of the paternalistic ties with the metropolis. Thus, their mechanisms

of self-identification are constructed from a double perspective and hierarchical assumption: on the one hand the assumption of the superiority of the British stock over the colonists – viewed in Richardson, Moodie and Haliburton in unfavourable terms organized along the dichotomy barbarism/civilization; on the other, the cultural and even moral superiority of the British North American settlers over their Yankee counterpart, yet this superiority of the former is only due to those features that represent in fact the colonists' British legacy.

Consequently, it can be said that this phase in the development of a coherent Canadian auto-image in the pre-Confederation years, and despite early attempts at finding a Canadian specific – achieved in different ways by each of the three authors – is characterized by the maintaining of the traditionally colonial centre-periphery pattern, with a valorization of the British features in the nascent conglomerate that was to constitute Canadianness, doubled by a constant rejection of most American values. And we can equally note that, in the self-conscious assertion of the Canadian identity that was to become official policy in the Nation-building years, when this auto image was promoted and circulated by society, elements of the so-called proto-postcolonial self definitions of Moodier, Richardson and Halliburton can still be found and are still recognizable today, under the discourse of multiculturalism of recent years.

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## THE NATIVE AMERICAN AND/AS THE *OTHER*: PRESENTATION, REPRESENTATION, AVOIDANCE

Presenting, describing, interpreting, understanding the *other* is never a neutral action. Human interactions are determined by the personality and culture of the persons involved. In order to understand the *other's* behaviour we must analyze the process of intercultural communication on a person to person level, but we also need to contextualize it. Doing so we have to make a distinction between the variety of intercultural relations -- from personal to international --, the context in which they happened, and the aims.

Although European social and cultural traits became dominant in North America, some Indian cultural traits were not destroyed. Many ancient traits continue to be revitalized in contemporary Indian communities (Jennings, 13).

A great amount of assimilation occurred, especially in material culture, and demographic changes took place as well. Ecological balance was crucially changed mainly by human alteration. Cultural conflict induced episodic efforts for the extermination of one population by the other, and finally the dominant groups in both societies, independent of each other in conception though not in reality, emphasized their differences in nativistic or nationalistic movements. These movements influenced the development of mythologies in both cultures, antipodal in form but springing from the same historical womb.

Examples that help to understand the patterns of intercultural communication between American Indians<sup>1</sup> and non-Indians can be found in old visual and written records, as well as in present day mediatic documents.

### **As past is present**

In the past almost all the judgments concerning Native Americans come from *our* side, that is the people of European origin.

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\* I would like to thank Delores J Huff, Sally B. Streeter and John Strong for reading and discussing this paper with me.

<sup>1</sup> I will use interchangeably Native Americans, American Indians, First Americans, Indigenous Peoples, First Nations Peoples.

From the first encounter on, it is almost impossible to get an image of a *true Indian*, in fact such an Indian exists only in the ways he/she is constructed by an observer and described in oral, written or visual form (Washburn, 1975; Berkhofer). The well known engravings done by the Flemish Théodore de Bry in the 16th century can be a good example of a long story of artistic depictions of the Indians [Figure 1]. Descriptions of events and judgments were done to justify the actions of the people involved and their aims.



**Figure 1**

Even if today Indians have ways to get their voices heard (Clerici, 2004, 2002a, 2002b, 1999, 1998a, 1998b), they lament that "The continued trivialization of Indian culture and values is the same as ever" (Smith, 54).

All the accounts are filtered by the culture of the person writing, and often by his aspirations and desire, both personal and national.

Columbus' writings are a good example of how his belief influenced his interpretations. He does not look for truth, but wants to confirm his preconceived notions (Todorov, 20, 50). In various letters he states that gold must be plenty and there are plants of great value even if that was not the reality (Todorov, 24).

Many of the first explorers try to find *scientific* evidence to support their hopes and to justify their beliefs. Dyonise Settle (278), who was part of Frobisher's expedition looking for the north west passage writes:



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Nevertheless, I am assured, that below the force of the frost [...] the earth within is kept the warmer, and springs have their recourse, which is the only nutriment of Gold and Minerals within the same.

The reasons for interacting are various, and usually it is the person coming from a distance who is looking for something; it could be exchanging goods or acquiring possessions for himself, for a company, or for a nation.

Trade is possibly a more balanced encounter, because there is an interest on both sides and it does not necessarily imply intrusion.

If the basic motivation is starting a settlement and occupying and exploiting a territory, the interaction is a lot more complex, because it becomes a political matter.

Europeans were often more interested in possessing the land and its richness than in getting to know the people. In the 16th century, a Papal Bull, *Inter cetera* (1493), addressed to the Spanish Kings, stated that lands non inhabited by Christians were to be considered *terra nullius*. The Pope also expressed the hope that the Christian faith would be taken everywhere and all the barbarians would be converted. The First Nations were considered an attribute of the land to be conquered or used, and this goes on even today. I could list many cases that show this view held by many non-Indians, who still consider the North of Canada an empty land waiting for development:

... this [Cree country] is the equivalent of the terra nullius ... in the political sense: terra nullius ... these people were not there, and, even if they were there, they were living like animals, they had no social organization, no government." (Epstein, 1996)

As inter-human relations in the American continent became very soon a political issue, we have to underline some of the economic and political matters that benefited from misunderstanding, aggressiveness, and warfare, and some of the ideologies elaborated to justify these kinds of actions. The role of information was determinant in intertribal affairs and even more with the arrival of Europeans.

From the beginning the Indians were treacherous or friendly towards the whites, depending on their goals. The same happened among competing Indian tribes. The Ojibwa called the Sioux *nadowe-is-iw*, meaning enemies, and many other tribal names had similar derogatory meaning. Remembrance of intertribal warfare is still alive, as it is competition and parochialism. The number of jokes circulating among Indians in South Dakota about Pine Ridge and Rosebud Reservations proves that. "Did you hear Pine Ridge Indians are getting in a shipment of septic tanks? They said as soon as they learn how to use them, they are going to attack the Rosebud Indians!" (Win, 18).

To justify aggressiveness the counterpart, of course, had to have a negative connotation.

Where was power made the difference in information and communication. Power could be due to better weapons, a larger number of people, but also to the impressiveness of technological knowledge. Intellectual power was used to elaborate adequate philosophical, historical and, later anthropological theories.

For instance, intermarriage was accepted till it favoured economic or political alliances. There are many examples of this, but the best known is the *romantic* story of the relationship between Pocahontas and John Rolfe (Gleach), that was highly publicized in the 16th century. There were also many cases of fur traders marrying Indian women during the 16th century. These were ways to be accepted into the tribes when *power* was still in balance. Military alliances with Indian *Nations* were welcomed to the end of 18th century. Learning agricultural techniques and ways of housing, canoes, snow rackets, and so on, was basic to the survival of the newcomers, but in later centuries the superiority of European knowledge was assumed.

This knowledge that served our ancestors so well emerges from time to time when modern scientists advocate a novel interpretation of data and, in order to claim some historical roots for their ideas, as new ideas are forbidden in academia, ancient or tribal people are cited as societies that once used certain practises or held certain beliefs. But the presentation of the ideas is usually accompanied by the patronizing view that although tribals and primitives did originate the idea or the practice, they could not have possibly understood its significance. (Deloria, 130)

If there was an interest in trading with the Natives people, or converting them to Christianity, or making them workers or slaves, the judgement was relatively positive: good, human being, but inferior and pagan.

In periods in which the immigration to the New World was encouraged, America was described as an idyllic virgin land, and the propaganda made in Europe described the good savage, while the red race became treacherous and bloodthirsty during the phases of conquest of the continent.

Native people protest the way they have been described for more than five centuries. In the past they were depicted mainly through writing and painting, today all the media are used; besides written sources, we have art, moving images and the internet. The opinion is that the mainstream press perpetuates racial stereotyping, misconceptions and has absolute lack of knowledge about the indigenous people. Tim Giago (264), Lakota, states:

Many articles written about Indians are so full of holes, at least to those of us with a semblance of knowledge about the Indian situation, that these stories would have been challenged in an instant had they been written about a more vocal minority.

"Indians have all been told who and what they are. We need to start telling people who we are. We can do it in the media" says Robin Powell, a native professional journalist (Hamilton, 33).

To give balance information is even more problematic in movies: "So often when we have a story that they call a Native American story, the characters become cardboard, because the focus is on the issue, not about the human beings going through that experience" states Tantoo Cardinal, a Metis actress from Alberta (Greer, 153).

Even if Delores Huff (2004), Cherokee, liked *Dances with Wolves* ("for two reasons: one was that Indians were actually portrayed by Indian actors, and the second was a clear understanding of how much freedom we lost"), she points out that "White Men cannot help but portray themselves as our saviours ... even in the most generous and well meaning cinematic portrayal of Indians."

The use and abuse of Indian languages, history, stories, designs and rituals opens an important discussion about intellectual property rights (can they be exclusively owned?), the commodification of Indian images (Greer, 142), and political correctness. Reading Vine Deloria's (1999) writings will certainly stimulate discussion.

"The portrayal of American Indians by the mainstream media is a far cry from how American Indian view themselves and their history" (Greer, 142); this statement raises the big issue of history books and the minor role the Indians had, being mainly considered the *counterpart*, the enemy in military history. Indians complain that the mainstream media not only of present day but of the past are to blame: "American history often portrays Indians inadequately or erroneously, in part because of the inaccurate portrayals circulating from the colonial years to the present." (Hamilton, 33).

In present days, art is widely used to convey the Indian message. In a presentation card of the artist Jerry Whitehead, of the James Smith Band, Saskatchewan, we read: "he expresses his culture by his work." **[Figure 2]**



**Figure 2**

Charlene Teters, a Spokane, stated in 1994:

Images of noble savages, warriors, braves, and Indian princesses are non-Indians' perceptions of what is Indian, created by authors and writers, and encouraged by the white establishment. These manufactured images are used to sell everything from butter to cars, and are powerful in their impact on non-Indian people. But this is not the American Indians' perception of themselves. (Hirschfelder, 252)

A perspective that accepts Native knowledge as legitimate is defined as *postcolonial* by many authors. In his introduction to *Postcolonial Psychology* Eduardo Duran (VII) writes: "By postcolonial we mean a social criticism that bears witness to those unequal processes of representation by which the historical experience of the once colonized comes to be framed in the west."

In the past centuries, sources of information about the Indians' perceptions of the Europeans were scanty, and requires interpretation. There are plenty of written and visual documents by explorers, conquerors, travelers, missionaries, and captives available, instead (Brown, Vibert). Only at the end of 19th century, when ethnography became a discipline, can we add the representations made by anthropologists.

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Internal (both Canada and US) and external (US and Europe) colonialism required a study of the cultures outside the western hemisphere (Young). The new discipline that came to help was anthropology. First the *others* were studied through the filter of western culture, putting them in an evolutionary scale, then the modern concept of culture was defined as everything that people do, think, and have as members of a society. The studies of ethnographers first, and ethno historians more recently, contributed a lot to inform about the differences in Indian cultures, that could "vanish forever", but those studies seldom helped Indians and non-Indians to communicate better. Especially the earlier ones, states Bea Medicine (254), Lakota:

reveal the pervasive endocentric bias of 19th century male academe. It is as if each Native American society were viewed as a "company of native men" and, as reported by male anthropologists, the female component of these societies was seriously short-changed or cast in an unfavourable light...

With his customary ironic approach Vine Deloria (122) confirms the inner difficulties in understanding the *other*:

Anthropology, from Samuel Morton and Lewis Henry Morgan to Frank Cushing and Franz Boas to very recently, was what adult white men did to fulfill their boyhood fantasies of playing Indian. [...] The anthropology literature, therefore, can hardly be regarded as a science, because it reflects the deep psychological problems of its superstars rather than an honest effort to learn something. But it is a luxury of a society so wealthy that a significant institutional support system can be placed at the disposal of members of the elite class to keep them occupied while other members of society produce useful things.

From a western perspective, anthropology became a science in the early 20th century because of Franz Boas's work. In fact, he was the first to take into account communication and pointed out that each linguistic family functions according to its own rules (Boas). Finally he developed the concept of cultural relativism (Harris; Mercer), that helped to give respects to all cultures and to use a pluralistic analytic approach. Other scholars, such as Sapir and Bloomfield, compared Indo-European languages with Amerindian and Eskimo languages, pointing out that it cannot be assumed that rules of grammar and syntax are similar everywhere. The differences in the uses of language were studied in the 1950s by Trager and Birdwhistell. They used the term "metalinguistic," stating that non-verbal behaviour influences language use and interpretation during interaction. These studies influenced the work of E. T. Hall who analyzed in depth the process of intercultural communication among individuals and groups.

### **As the other is me**

The term *intercultural communication* was first elaborated by Edward Hall (1959). He tried to underline the logic necessary to understand cultures, and

to understand the action of communication between people of different cultures. In order to explain here some of the basic aspects of intercultural communication we will draw examples from Indian-White relations that took place in historical and contemporary times.

Hall (36) observed cultural differences in the usage of space and time and in non verbal behaviour, all actions learned and used without awareness. As Ivan Star Comes Out (3), Lakota, remembers:

[...] we entered a restaurant and found the white people inside turning around and staring at us shamelessly. I thought they would get up and approach us. [...] My grandmother of long ago told me, "Don't stare at people because it is disrespectful".

Here I will describe some characteristics which are still present in many Indian cultures (Wallace, 1970, 38; McDonald, 16-17)<sup>2</sup>,

In a social context, Indian adults praised calmness, because none wanted to anger another; generally they also avoided antagonism with their associates, trying always to achieve cooperation. The group was more important than the individual and therefore they tried to avoid competition.

Today this attitude, that many children have retained, is viewed by white teachers as a problem in an interethnic class, because Indian students tend not to show off and excel (Battiste, 1995). Quoting a slogan of the Office for Economic Opportunity ("*Different scales for different whales*"), Delores Huff (23), Cherokee, states:

The American Indian is a "different whale" because Indian cultures have a distinctive history and culture. Indian culture is woven into a holistic tapestry of history, geography, religion, political science and sociology and does not lend itself to linear judgment. However, most evaluators are graduates trained within recognized academic spheres. Even armed with some knowledge about Indian culture it is often outside of their scope to draft a multidisciplinary evaluation plan.

The children were brought up without the experience of punishment, and learnt to be independent trying themselves (acquiring personal experience hunting, and doing other activities, or going in a vision quest) and not through community teaching or enforced obedience. Shame and ridicule did what coercion could do less effectively.

Indians also preferred to avoid conflict and this is the reason why there are records of their withdrawing from meetings and councils if they could not give their consensus (Washburn, 1975, 17). The concept of a democracy based on total agreement, such as that of the Iroquois, widely differed from the western trend of thought:

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<sup>2</sup> According to Hall, American Indians can be classified as a high context culture.

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The problem we have with voting is that you may have more than half the people not agreeing with the decisions of the government. Those who don't agree [...] are just going to lie back and wait their chance to get even. Under these circumstances, actions are often taken from a desire to get even, rather than on the merits of the action itself. That is why it is important to have a decision-making process whereby you avoid disagreement, and the process Indians advocate is consensus. Consensus involves long discussions, and, if agreement cannot be reached, the issue must be set aside until agreement is possible. (Lyons, 5)

Among the most praised values were friendship and faithfulness to pledged word, individual honour ranked above racial affinity (Washburn, 1975, 15-16).

The political scene of 19th century is full of such events as broken treaties and broken personal promises. Many speeches like this by Gall, Sioux, in 1868 could be quoted: "You talk of peace. If we make peace, you will not hold it" (Vanderwerth, 151).

The Indian is often described like a statue, this lack of verbal communication has been interpreted in terms of dignity or obtuseness. Silence is, instead, the response to uncertainty (Washburn, 1975, 16). Among Apaches and Navajos:

This is so whether the situation is one of meeting strangers, meeting one's children coming home after a long absence [...]. The person keeping silent [...] may spend days before speaking with a stranger. Lovers may spend months before they feel sufficiently at ease to speak with each other [...] (Basso, 215).

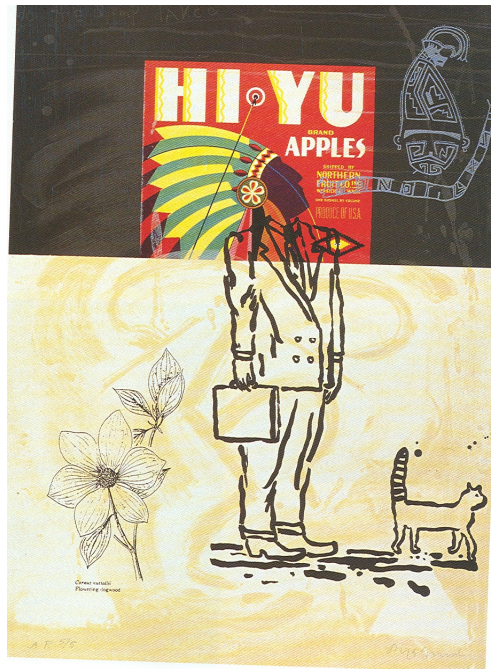
Almost all the observers of the Indian made comments on his generosity, in contrast to people living in a market economy, regulated by monetary counters, and where accumulation of wealth was valued. In fact, sharing was functional to survival for a hunter, who might not always be successful. A gift was expected in return in another occasion, but the most important element was not the equivalence of the economic value, but the respect for the former giver (Washburn, 1975, 20-22). We read in the Indian magazine *Winds of Change* (Hill, 12): "Our values as Indian people teach us to help each other; we learn from the time we are very young. [...] We need to take care of the entire camp; we need to share the buffalo)", meaning that even the game that is collected today, the casino revenues, should be used collectively. Individualism is the main shift in values in modern society, but it is still not generally accepted, while generosity is widespread. White people who had an anthropocentric attitude, had difficulties in understanding that for the Indian there was no separation between humans and the Place / Land, "*a sustainable and mutually reciprocal relationship.*" (Cajete, 1994, 44)

Another aspect of Indian personality that is seldom understood from outsiders is humour: "Native Americans have always had the ability to laugh at

themselves, especially at the most inopportune or inappropriate times. humour has been our vent in bad times," says Peter Jones an Onondaga artist (Kosteva, 19). "Humour was also, and still is today, used within Native communities as a means of correcting behaviour among young and old alike," says Janeen Antoine, Lakota (Kosteva, 15).

An art exhibition called *Indian Humor* (Bates et al.) tells us a lot about present days Indian views about themselves and the *others*. Among the various works of art reproduced in the catalogue I have chosen *Modern Times* By Jaune Quick-To-See Smith (30' x 22' lithograph, 1993) [Figure 3]; the presentation says:

Modern Times tells a story about the complexity of Indian life today with the medicine plant and pictograph which can be important to a modern Indian even though dressed in a suit with a briefcase - he may wear a headdress to dance on the weekend. [...] Then we still face racism as portrayed by the label using Indians as mascots or advertising icons. "Apples" also means to Indian people that some have turned against the old ways and are white on the inside and red on the outside. (Bates et al., 80-1)



**Figure 3**

Differing conceptions of time and space determined different performances in work procedures and achievements and also different rules of behaviour, for instance in commercial transactions, social events or political meetings. Even



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if 18th century colonial powers did not like the exchange of costly gifts with the Indian tribes, they knew that "Generous gifts cemented relationships; inadequate gifts caused alliances to disintegrate. Indian support in war time [...] often depended upon the skill with which one or the other European power had previously taken care of its Indian friends" (Washburn, 1975, 87).

The Indian concept of justice was based on restoration of balance, either through revenge or retribution. The differing legal systems led to many problems in Indian-White relations: "The failure of the white legal system to meet Indian standards of retributive justice in interracial crimes frequently forced the Indians to seek justice in their own fashion" (Washburn, 1975, 19).

The indigenous groups still fight to get their systems of law recognized on an equal basis, and there is a group working on that issue at the U.N. in Geneva.

In Canada the actions undertaken to exploit Indian country are based on the legal status of the First Nations: if a land agreement or a treaty was never signed, a band has no right upon the land, and corporations can be authorized by the provinces to come in and exploit resources. This is the case for the Lubicon Cree of Alberta, or the Innu of Labrador (Clerici, 1990, 2004). Dennis Martinez (90), O'dum/Chicano, states:

[...] the present failure of the courts to acknowledge the intrinsic way in which culture and land are connected for native peoples is basically unchanged from past justifications of genocide and enforced assimilation.

The issue of natural or aboriginal rights and of what these rights mean in terms of land and sovereignty has become increasingly important on the Canadian political agenda. For instance, from an intercultural perspective, lawyers discuss if proofs of occupancy of a stated territory based on oral tradition can be accepted. Today Native People claim territory on the basis of continuous occupancy and religious use for time immemorial, and are taking this evidence into court. But:

[...] Judeo-Christian heritage separates spirit from matter, belief from behaviour, and people from the land. In the few cases where sacred sites have received statutory (as opposed to constitutional) protection, economic and environmental arguments have determined the outcome. Martinez (90)

### **A personal experience**

Natives (but this happens in many cultures) seldom explain openly their rules of behaviour. Observation is a good starting point to get to know the values on which their social and family life is based. If the person is sensible enough and able to listen this is the way to approach a foreign context. What is more difficult to obtain is the consciousness of self, of the inner culture of the observer. The natural tendency is to compare the *other* culture with the culture in which we are raised and educated, while it is a lot more difficult the

process of conceptualization of our identity, and to become aware of our ethnocentrism. The theory of cultural relativity requires that we begin with an awareness of our values before we study the values of another culture. Rarely do we find in the documents a deep analysis of the values of the author's own culture such as nationality, socio-economic class, gender, physical and working abilities, or religion.

If we read diaries and journals of the past, we can notice a substantial difference between observations made by travelers, who consider incidents and difficulties as part of the adventure to be used for "heroic tales", and those made by residential expatriates, no more fascinated by the local culture. To be closer to and acquainted with the *other* it does not mean to communicate, and there is a big difference between interaction, and communication.

When people get in touch with *other people* without ever having experienced difference, they act ethnocentrically, assuming that all are the same. Columbus was wrong in calculating the distance between Europe and Asia, because he did not consider that *miles*, as measured by the Arabs, could correspond to a different length (Todorov, 36).

Even if *otherness* is not negative or evil in itself, if the *other* is not acting as we might expect, the tendency is to assume that we are superior. In 1500 religion made the difference: the natives, after some debate, were considered human beings with a soul and could, therefore, be converted<sup>3</sup>. Las Casas wrote in 1552:

This infinite multitude of people was so created by God, as that they were without fraud, without subtlety or malice, to their natural Governors most faithful and obedient. Toward the Spaniard whom they serve, patient, meek, and peaceful [...] (Washburn, 1964., 222).

Lieutenant Colonel Elwell S. Otis of the U.S. Army commented in 1878:

Within the same hour he [the wild savage] may be seen carrying himself with proud nobility as he indulges in flowing declamation, or with rude song keeping time to the beating of the tom-tom, while sitting in the dust and filth of camp. (Washburn, 1964, 99)

Preconceptions and stereotypes are another obstacle to communication. When a person might not feel at ease or adequate in an intercultural context, he finds his security in what he already knows. The risk is to give a general negative statement: "*Indians are all downtrodden, alcoholics*" or romanticize: "*Indians have a unique relationship with Mother Earth*", and to be amazed or upset when reality is not like the stereotype (Bennett). A painting by Rick

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<sup>3</sup> You might remember the debate between Las Casas and Sepulveda (Todorov, 225-245).

Hill --D.I.A.N.D. Dandy and Flesh-Colored Band-aids (National Museum of Man Collection, Ottawa)-- offers some insights on this topic. [Figure 4]



Figure 4

At different times the narrative has said we didn't exist and the land was empty, then it was mostly empty and populated by fearsome savages, then populated by noble savages who couldn't get with the program, and on and on. Today the equation is Indian equals spiritualism and environmentalism. In twenty years it will probably be something else. (Smith, 56).

People should not be *judged* and *classified* according to their ethnic group; other elements such as gender, social and economic roles, physical and job performances, and religious affiliation are more important aspects of personal identity (Gudykunst, 130).

If the intercultural relationship goes on, there can be a phase of balance in which ethno-relativism is experienced and cultural differences are accepted. A desire to know and understand more arises, even if a critical approach is used. A person who lives for a long time in a foreign cultural context can reach the point in which he sees the world with different eyes, changing his or her behaviour and praising different values. We can think of the *coureurs des bois*, in 18th century Canada, who adjusted in many ways to the Indian way of life in order to survive in the woods.

The process of acculturation can be due to the desire to adapt, such as the experience of many Cherokees in 19th century who adjusted voluntarily to the dominant culture. But if one culture is more powerful and its social and political structure overwhelming assimilation is often forced. Here is a testimony of Sun Elk (244), Pueblo, of the late 19th century: "They told us that the Indians were bad. They said we must get civilized. I remember that word, too. It means "be like the white man. [...] And so after a while we also began to say Indians were bad."

People who live alone, or as a minority, for a long while in a foreign context can go through a process of integration (Bennett). We can think of the *squaw men* (whites married to Indian women), or people captured by the Indians in childhood, who adjusted to the Indian way of life. It is more difficult to find example in the opposite direction, but we have some evidence in the writings of educated Indians in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century who were in non-Indian schools and colleges.

It is common in human behaviour to consider the outsider bad and the peer good. This attitude can be identified in child behaviour. Children see their relatives as similar, important, and need their approval, while strangers are different, unimportant, and unworthy of attention. Adults, as well, tend to judge according to their own experience and the characteristics of their group. This is what happened to Sun Elk (245) when he returned home after seven years of boarding school: "The chiefs did not want me in the pueblo. [...] He has no blankets. He cannot even speak our language and he has a strange smell. He is not one of us."

There is another common behaviour, that has its roots in childhood, the refusal of the other in order to avoid exclusion or punishment by the group. Teenagers experience the same refusal of an outsider in order to be accepted by their group. Especially if it is a gang or a sports club, they will conform to get approval. In fact, to share a common judgment gives cohesion to the group and can strengthen the power of a leader.

Communicating with people who have different values is a way to evaluate our own values and behaviour. It is difficult to experience change if we refuse to question our beliefs. It is easier, for example, to blame an Indian child for behavioural problems, than to admit a personal failure as teacher (Huff, 2003).

The tendency is to define the people of the *other* group as inferior or dangerous. If religion is the element that defines diversity, people can be accused of idolatry or of having no faith. If they come from a different cultural background, they are perceived as having no culture and no civil society. The difference could be due to the place of origin. The etymology of pagan or heathen is "inhabitant of the countryside", and of savage is "inhabitant of the forest." The different visibility is very easy to notice: nudity, colour of the skin and clothing are very common discriminating factors. The evolutionist theory widely accepted in 19th century was based on

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the differing habits and material culture of nomads, hunters, savages, barbarians in contrast to “civilized” society (Jennings). On the base of cultural differences aggressiveness is rationalized (Jones in Jennings 7), and conquest and conversion are justified. This behaviour, taken to the extreme, is used to justify war and extermination.

Every century has its own philosophers and theologians who elaborate myths. They claim to bring Christianity to heathens and civilization to savages. Today the gifts have new names such as democracy (Jennings 511) and development.

On a personal basis, even people with good intentions can give negative judgements or express the desire to make the *other* change. The acculturation program proposed by the American Indian association in the late 19th century, forbidding the Sun Dance because of self torture, or the potlatch because of waste, is an example of good intentions that had bad results (Prucha, 198-210).

If this happens, we need to decide if respect of diversity is what we should praise the most or if equality of rights is the highest value. Nowadays Western societies tend to prefer the second option, because it is easier to evaluate. In fact, Native Americans obtained the right to vote in 1924 and religious freedom more recently, but this does not mean they do not suffer discrimination.

The difficulty for an individual is to move from his centre and look at things from another perspective; to accept cultural relativism is a long and difficult intellectual process. It helps to refrain from immediate judgement, to give space to observation, understanding, knowledge of the culture of origin. We also need to be aware of the human tendency towards ethnocentrism.

What happens if a non-Indian meets an Indian today? You will communicate on the basis of your cultural self and with the expectations derived from what you have read, learned from the media, particularly through movies, or in oral conversation. Jennie Blatchford Greene (256), Inuit, writes in a 1982 *Tundra Times* column:

[...] when in 1972 I visited my sister in Susanville, California. One evening at a local restaurant some local people heard that I was an Eskimo. [...] My celebrity status was not based on the fact that I was bright or beautiful, but because I was an Eskimo who could actually use a telephone and ate white people's food. [...] My country] was a huge glacier and Eskimos were funny brown people who inhabited the area in a harmless but interesting fashion, not unlike penguins.

But the object of our interaction does the same, basing his behaviour on his own stereotypes. Many natives are convinced that non-Indians do not know anything about Indians and cannot understand what is going on in Indian

Country. This Indian joke is more referring to White Americans (we, European, are *different*, of course!):

Things You Can Say to a White Person upon First Meeting. - How much white are you? - I'm part white myself, you know. - I learned all your people's ways in the Boy Scouts (Order of the Bullet). -My great-great-grandfather was a full-blooded White-man. -Funny, you don't look white. Where's your powdered wig and knickers? -Do you live in a covered wagon? - What's the meaning behind the square dance? - Oh, wow, I really love your hair! Can I touch it? (Win, 10).

Preconceptions (Hoopes, Pusch, 54) may be traced back over the centuries and may be considered inner aspects of that culture (Brislin, 179). If a negative judgement has been expressed for generations by a group toward another group, and this opinion is both expressed in the family and in the social context, it is very difficult to change it or erase it. Some negative opinions toward Indians can be dated back to colonial times.

Even today considering Indians less capable justifies the fact that they are not given the same opportunities. Robert Epstein, who works as a consultant at the Grand Council of the Crees, states in an interview (1996):

Where is their [the Crees'] participation in the big economy? Where do they get their salaries from? Who are they working for? They [non-Indians] do not make any acknowledgement that to participate in this other economy they [the Crees] have to have their own territory, their own land, their own resources, their own sources of income.

In fact, Indians are often considered different culturally and psychologically, meaning inferior. They do not adapt, do not follow the law, and this endangers the social and economic order (van Dijk, 70).

Racism is a form of prejudice toward people of other ethnic groups who are judged inferior in intelligence, morality, and in ability to interact socially. These groups are deprived of certain rights on the basis of characteristics they cannot control, such as birth place or skin colour. Institutional racism is embedded in economic and political structures, but everybody experiences some form of racism, often not realizing it.

To experience another culture gives a person a chance to overcome prejudice and racism. It also gives the opportunity to better understand his own culture, and to understand how cultural personality (together with individual personality, of course) influences behaviour (Storti, 95). Interacting with the *other* we became aware of being different in an inner way, with no possibility to erase or omologate this difference. We are also able to enter into deeper touch with our identity (Gobbo, 57). Jennie Blatchford Greene (257), Inuit, writes:

I'm people with you ... be people with me  
Let's share those things that are warm  
Open your eyes, look closely at me

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I'm different but I mean you no harm.  
I'm proud to be Eskimo and different from you  
Will you accept my outstretched hand?  
You walk on the same ground that I do  
And we're one in our love for this land.

On a personal basis, to experience *otherness* is a very important maturing process. The foreign group will not be seen as homogeneous (Cushner, 136), and it will be given importance to the single persons, as individuals, and also, but not only, as a part of an ethnic group.

Unfortunately, this is a track that may be followed by individuals; states and economic power groups have other priorities.

### List of illustrations

[Figure 1] Théodore de Bry, *Captain John Smith and the Indian King* (Library of Congress).

[Figure 2] Jerry Whitehead, James Smith Band, Saskatchewan, *Indian*.

[Figure 3] Jaune Quick-To-See Smith, *Modern Times*.

[Figure 4] Rick Hill, --*D.I.A.N.D. Dandy and Flesh-Colored Band-aids* (National Museum of Man Collection, Ottawa).

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### CANLIT THEN AND NOW: OR, WHOSE CHEKHOV IS SHE, ANYWAY?

In his survey of Canadian writing from 1920 to 1960, Desmond Pacey commented that Canada “was still unsure whether her writers should seek to be cosmopolitan or to develop an indigenous tradition, was still prone either to under-rate Canadian books because they were not reviewed in the fashionable English or American periodicals or to over-rate them because they were our own, still alternated between truculent cultural self-assertion or whining cultural self-pity” (Pacey, 21) Certainly, much has changed on the Canlit scene since Pacey wrote this assessment. We have the glitz and glamour of the Giller Prize, added to the more sober tradition of the Governor General’s award. Canadian authors have won international prizes, including the Booker, the Orange prize, and the Dublin IMPAC award.<sup>1</sup> Two of our writers even managed to garner the lucrative attention of Oprah’s book club<sup>2</sup>. Annual literary festivals occur in most major cities, ordinary citizens can occasionally be found at book launches and readings, and indigenous literary fiction holds a fairly respectable place on Canadian bestseller lists. In fact, as Stephen Henighan has pointed out, “In June 1997, U.S. novelist John Irving, who lives for part of the year in Toronto, published an article in the *Globe and Mail* under the headline ‘If Craig Nova were Canadian . . . he’d be Timothy Findley.’ Bemoaning the neglect suffered by literary authors in the United States, Irving urged Canadians to recognize the exceptional quantities of media attention, prizes, and sales available to writers of literary fiction in Canada. Irving compared December 1996 best-seller lists from the *New York Times* and the *Globe and Mail*, noting that the former was dominated by the formula fiction of such writers as Tom Clancy, Danielle Steele, and Sue Grafton, while the latter featured ‘literary authors’ such as Margaret Atwood,

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<sup>1</sup> Yann Martel won the Booker Prize for *Life of Pi* in 2002, and Margaret Atwood won it in 2000 for *The Blind Assassin*. The Dublin IMPAC prize went to Alistair MacLeod in 2001 for *No Great Mischief*. Canadian winners of the Orange Prize include Carol Shields for *Larry’s Party* in 1998, and Anne Michaels for *Fugitive Pieces* in 1997.

<sup>2</sup> *A Fine Balance*, by Rohinton Mistry, and *Fall On Your Knees*, by Ann-Marie MacDonald.

Guy Vanderheaghe, Mavis Gallant, Timothy Findley, Ann-Marie McDonald, and Anne Michaels. 'I wonder if Canadians appreciate how literary the book business in Canada is,' Irving wrote.' (Henighan, 133)

However, a cultural controversy which unfolded in the pages of the *National Post* in the summer of 2000 indicates that Canlit is still plagued, in some quarters at least, with exactly the strange combination of "truculent self assertion" and "whining self-pity" noted by Desmond Pacey back in the 60s. It all started with an article by John Metcalf (as so many Canlit arguments do). In June 2000, in a lengthy feature piece titled "Canada's successful writers must rely on blessings from U.S. first," Metcalf discusses the careers of Alice Munro, Mavis Gallant, and Norman Levine. He asserts that the relative success of each writer "parallels the degree to which each writer has been embraced by the United States. This last fact," says Metcalf, "explains why Munro is so much better known in Canada than Levine is. Because we don't create our own classic books – we let the Americans do it for us." (Metcalf, E4)

These are fighting words, and they generated a vigorous response. Among the literary figures who responded to Metcalf's piece, and there were half a dozen, the most truculent was Douglas Gibson, publisher at Canada's literary imprint, McClelland and Stewart. Gibson's response to Metcalf, titled "Canadian Literature Strong and Free," appeared in the *Post* on June 24<sup>th</sup>. It is a defensive tirade as well as a direct personal attack. For example, Gibson says "I shall leave Norman Levine out of the discussion since I prefer (Metcalf may need a friend to help with this sentence) to write only about subjects where the facts are at my disposal." (Gibson, n.p) Gibson then goes on to assert that "The Metcalf thesis is a combination of the blindingly obvious ...and the loony... mixed in with so many errors of fact and interpretation that it is refreshing to see the odd truthful statement slipping through the net of misunderstanding." In his concluding salvo, Gibson criticizes Metcalf for basing part of his argument on the work of "an obscure Canadian essayist".

Well, the obscure Canadian essayist quoted by Metcalf just happens to be me. One of John Metcalf's sources for his article was an essay of mine, titled "Alice Munro's Agency: The Virginia Barber Correspondence," which appeared in a special Munro issue of *Essays on Canadian Writing* in 1998. My essay, commissioned by the issue's editor, Robert Thacker, was taken from my doctoral research on Munro's literary archive, particularly her correspondence with American literary agent, Virginia Barber, with whom Munro joined forces in the mid 1970s, and with whose help Munro achieved her first *New Yorker* publication.<sup>3</sup> In his *National Post* piece, Metcalf uses my essay, along with other sources, to assert that American "blessings" confer

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<sup>3</sup> This same article, in somewhat different form, became part of a chapter in my book titled *Reading In: Alice Munro's Archive* (Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2002).

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weight to a Canadian reputation, and that Canadians don't pay attention to writers whose work is not known in the U.S. Though Metcalf uses several of my ideas in his article, and he is scrupulously fair about acknowledging his source, he does draw conclusions and inferences that I would not have drawn. For example, when I compared the support of Munro's Canadian mentor, Robert Weaver, with that of her agent, Virginia Barber, in terms of securing a U.S. publisher for her work, I commented that here, Weaver's "limitations as an agent of Canadian culture were evident". (McCaig, 88) (Note: I used the word "agent" here, not as *literary* agent but in its generic definition of "one who has influence or power".) However, Metcalf summarized my argument as a statement of Weaver's "ineffectiveness," a description which provoked angry disagreement from several quarters. Robert Weaver's son David wrote, in a letter to the editor, that Metcalf's article "unfortunately falls victim to exactly the syndrome it proposes to criticize: it creates an utterly false comparison that only serves to elevate an American ...in order to disparage a Canadian". (Weaver, A19) Timothy Findley also wrote to the *Post*, saying "To attack [Weaver] for a lack of sway in the American publishing business is as fatuous as it would be to attack Alice Munro for her failure to broker the publication of Canadian literature in Antarctica." (Findley, B11) And then there was Ellen Seligman, powerhouse editor at McClelland and Stewart, who wrote "I have to wonder where John Metcalf has been during the last decade and a half....To hear [him] tell it, it would seem that Canadian literary publishing and the Canadian readership has not changed in more than twenty years". (Seligman, B11)

John Metcalf concludes his discussion of Munro with this statement: "I am suggesting that Alice Munro's career is an American construct, that her popularity in Canada is a result of American endorsement. The American writer Cynthia Ozick has written of Alice Munro: "She is our Chekhov." I think it's fairly clear who the 'us' is." (Metcalf, E5) Now, Douglas Gibson's response to this remark is interesting, indeed. He notes how Metcalf reads Ozick's remark as yet another instance of Yankee imperialism, then says, "I, by way of contrast, chose to include [that] splendid quote on the back of our Canadian edition because I see Cynthia Ozick claiming Alice Munro as *this generation's* equivalent of Chekhov, not as some American counterweight to some god dam Russkie. But Metcalf, it would seem, lives in a narrower world." (Gibson, B12) It's important to note the authority and power Gibson asserts here, in saying that it was he who "chose" to include Ozick's remark on the book jacket. Gibson's view of Munro's genius as a gift to the world, not just to Canada, is also implicit here. And certainly, this is a stirring and expansive reading of Ozick's praise. However, as the primary literary publisher in Canada, Gibson's personal and professional stake in the debate is obvious; his truculent insistence that Canlit is indeed "strong and free" can certainly not be seen as a dispassionate or objective statement.

So, how strong and free is Canlit, really? Kenneth Harvey, in his reply to Gibson's tirade, attempts to answer that question. Harvey's piece, titled

“Who is reading Canadian?” appeared days after Gibson’s, and began with the observation that “Douglas Gibson’s essay on a strong and free Canadian literature (June 24) seemed both defensive and barbed with snide anger toward John Metcalf.” (Harvey, B8) Harvey notes how, “While puffing up his own image as one of the first to publish this or that famous Canadian writer, Gibson failed to acknowledge the point made by Metcalf: that *most* Canadian writers cannot make it in Canada unless they find notoriety or acceptance in the United States.” Harvey’s words speak a truth that is well known to any author who has tried to make a living from book sales in Canada. Metcalf himself tried desperately to secure a US publisher or agent for his own work. I know this from my own research in Metcalf’s archive -- his correspondence files contain a disheartening array of such query letters and rejections. It is what Munro might describe as an *open secret* that any writer, how ever proud, Canadian, strong and free, hopes – whether wistfully or desperately -- for entrée into the wider markets of the U.S. and the U.K. Kenneth Harvey’s tongue in cheek approach to the problem suggests the following commandments: “start demanding that American authors be given second-class status in Canada for a change. Show a little pride for God’s sake. Buy Canlit. Get those damn Yankee books out of my country. But in the meantime, someone find me a U.S. publisher.”

But Harvey goes beyond the tongue in cheek to offer a concrete suggestion about how we might change this situation: he advises a call for Canadian content quotas to be imposed on bookstores as they are on the music industry, quotas which would insist that bookstore shelves be stocked with a minimum of 50% Canadian content rather than the present 15-25%. Harvey asserts that he has been promoting this notion for years, “But was anyone listening? No, they were too busy with their noses poked into the latest Stephen King, Danielle Steel, John Grisham, Mary Higgins Clark or Tom Clancy. [Yet] Cancon quotas worked miracles for the music industry, our only cultural industry that’s flourishing.” There’s a lot to be said, in my view, on Harvey’s common sense approach to the problem, an approach devoid of the cultural self pity of Metcalf’s piece, and the defensive truculence of Gibson’s reply. From my own point of view as a fiction writer, I have no expectations of ever becoming one of the dozen or so Canadian authors who actually make a living from book sales. And certainly if I were offered a US book contract, I would not turn it down. But to me, the most telling remark in Gibson’s attack on Metcalf was his dismissal of Metcalf’s sources, namely an “obscure Canadian essayist”. And you may rest assured that in my response to Gibson, published in the *Post* -- yes under the title “Obscure Canadian Essayist Responds” -- I took Gibson to task for unconsciously betraying, in that offhand insult, his own adherence to the very thesis that Metcalf puts forth: that in the national mindset, ‘obscurity’ and ‘Canadianess’ are all too often intimately linked.

In sober reflection, it is obvious that aspects of Metcalf’s argument really don’t make sense. For one thing, it’s highly unlikely, given the merit of her work, that Munro would have remained merely “world famous in Canada,” whether the *New Yorker* published her or not. On the other hand, Gibson goes

way over the top also, desperately trying in a kind of jingoistic frenzy to dismiss or ignore the undeniable power of the American literary marketplace.

To use Gibson's own terminology against him, it is blindingly obvious that Canlit lives in the shadow of our neighbour to the south – we all know the clichés -- Canlit is a mouse in bed with an elephant, and when American literature sneezes, Canlit catches cold.

In many ways, Canlit is a small town. (Actually some people would say that Canlit is a small neighbourhood in Toronto). This fact was brought home to me when I read an article by Russell Smith in the *Globe* a few years back, in which he admitted that he had declined to review a Canadian novel "because I didn't want to say publicly why I thought it was bad." (Smith, C5) The small town notion hit home for me again, when I heard a Peter Gzowski radio interview with Alice Munro, and noticed how, when asked to name her favourite writers, Munro declined to name any Canadians for fear of leaving someone out (and, presumably, thereby hurting someone's feelings). (Gzowski, 1996) In his recent polemic, *When Words Deny the World*, Stephen Henighan asserts that because he dared to write a negative review of a Timothy Findley novel, he was shunned, attacked, and not invited to contribute a review to the *Globe and Mail* for three years. (Henighan, 48-9).

To argue about it in the pages of a national newspaper – okay, a neo-conservative newspaper that most academics and writers disdainfully claim never to read – but nevertheless, the argument took place, it was heard, and there was a public response. And people got mad, and some even said things that weren't very *nice*... A hopeful sign indeed -- that at last, the small town we know as Canlit may be about to develop some cosmopolitan flair.

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## ANDRÉ LAURENDEAU ET PHILIP RESNICK SUR L' « ANGLOPHONIE ACTUELLE »<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction<sup>2</sup>

Il est trivial de considérer que la théorie des peuples fondateurs est tombée en désuétude; on préfère d'ordinaire invoquer le présent de la *dualité canadienne*, ce qui revient à toutes fins pratiques presque à la même chose, puisque la théorie des peuples fondateurs avait probablement pour intention et finalité principales de procurer à la dualité une assise historique, voire, quasi-juridique, qui puisse la légitimer. La pensée de André Laurendeau est souvent interprétée comme l'une des dernières apologies, l'une des plus éloquents aussi, de la dualité canadienne.

Mon propos ici aujourd'hui va table à peu près autant sur l'actualité de la pensée de Laurendeau que sur son inactualité. Très brièvement, puisqu'on y reviendra, Laurendeau est un nationaliste québécois dont l'originalité théorique se situe entre autres dans l'attention qu'il a portée à la langue maternelle et c'est aussi un théoricien ou un architecte, non seulement du Québec, mais aussi du Canada. Il estimait que ce pays avait pour caractéristique fondamentale d'être *bi-*, voire *multinational*, mais au moins binational.

On peut déplorer que son héritage politico-philosophique ait été si radicalement liquidé mais il importe de reconnaître et d'assumer cette liquidation, qui constitue un paramètre marquant de la *situation* politique canadienne.

Il n'est pas inintéressant, dans ce contexte, d'assister à des résurgences aussi brillantes qu'inattendues de ses idées, notamment dans le monde intellectuel canadien-anglais; au chapitre de ces résurgences, je pense qu'il faut compter

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<sup>1</sup> André Laurendeau, *Ces choses qui nous arrivent*, Montréal, HMH, 1970, p.147.

<sup>2</sup> Ce texte a été rédigé pour être oralement présenté, le 20 juin 2003, à Rouen, et le 19 octobre 2003 à Belgrade. Le ton plus propre à une présentation orale qu'à un article scientifique a été maintenu. Que le lecteur nous pardonne les avatars, trop perceptibles, de l'oralité qui imprègne ce texte.

les travaux de Kenneth McRoberts<sup>3</sup>, Philip Resnick et Will Kymlicka<sup>4</sup>, suivant des modalités théoriques originales et distinctes, bien entendu.

Si des témoins et commentateurs comme Jacques Ferron, avec plus de pertinence que d'élégance, se sont plu à qualifier la conception du Canada du type de celle que défendait Laurendeau de « vision de cocu », il faut néanmoins reconnaître que ce type de vision, pour avoir été historiquement inefficace, n'en demeure pas moins théoriquement coriace.

Puisqu'il était entendu que j'aborderais ici la notion de 'peuples fondateurs' – ce que je ferai moins que prévu – j'esquisserai quelques réflexions, dans une première partie, sur le rapport de Laurendeau à ce mythe. Pour résumer, Laurendeau se méfie de cette notion de 'pacte entre peuples fondateurs' mais cette méfiance l'incite plus à réinterpréter et recadrer le mythe qu'à le congédier. Cela me permettra de donner quelques détails supplémentaires sur le Canada rêvé ou souhaité par Laurendeau, qui ne cessa jamais d'être un nationaliste, canadien français, puis québécois.

À toutes fins pratiques, malheureusement, le rêve canadien de Laurendeau et la théorie des peuples fondateurs, avaient toutes deux le désavantage non négligeable de n'être, l'une autant que l'autre, que des lubies typiquement et quasi-exclusivement canadiennes françaises et québécoises, l' 'Autre'

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<sup>3</sup> Presque au hasard, dans son important ouvrage, *Un pays à refaire*, je cite ici Kenneth McRoberts, l'un de ses fils spirituels, qui assume explicitement un héritage laurendien : « En plus de reconnaître officiellement la nationalité et d'accroître l'autonomie d'institutions distinctes, on pourrait répondre également aux besoins d'un Canada "plurinational" en adaptant l'élément final de la "stratégie de rechange" : l'application aux régimes linguistiques du principe de territorialité. Une fois qu'il aura été établi que le Canada est composé de collectivités distinctes, on pourrait alors aborder la question de la langue d'une manière qui soit plus significative. Plutôt que de concevoir la langue comme l'attribut d'un individu, on pourrait reconnaître de façon claire qu'elle est l'expression d'une collectivité. » *Un pays à refaire*, Montréal, Boréal, 1999, p.367. Pour anodine qu'elle puisse paraître, cette citation est un bon exemple du type d'idée assez simple que Laurendeau n'a jamais réussi à faire admettre à ses contemporains à l'extérieur du Québec. Dans l'esprit – „un Canada multinational” – comme dans le détail – recours au „principe de territorialité” – le professeur McRoberts reconduit des positions typiquement laurendiennes.

<sup>4</sup> Will Kymlicka, qui ne se réclame jamais de Laurendeau, ne le connaît peut-être même pas, mobilise des catégories apparentées à celles que Laurendeau élaborait avec tant de difficulté : « Il nous faut trouver une forme de fédéralisme qui permettra au Québec d'évoluer selon son identité politique nationale et qui, en même temps, laissera le Canada Anglais suivre son aspiration profonde : affirmer une personnalité collective plutôt qu'un vague regroupement de provinces. Bref, il nous faut définir un nouveau fédéralisme, qui soit multinational et asymétrique. » „Le fédéralisme multinational au Canada: un partenariat à repenser”, in Laforest, G. & Gibbins, R. (eds.), *Sortir de l'impasse*, Montréal, IRPP, 1998, p.46.

Canada, l'Anglophone, ne s'y étant jamais reconnu et ayant fermement refusé, récemment encore, d'entériner ces visions.

La conception du Canada qui a eu raison – et ce, si facilement – de celle de Laurendeau – au moins institutionnellement et à Ottawa – soit celle que l'on associe à P.E.Trudeau, s'est profondément installée dans les mentalités et la culture politique canadiennes, précisons-le, à l'extérieur et à l'exception du Québec. Il est légitime de se demander ce qui est encore possible et réalisable, après le passage en politique de cet Attila tant il est vrai, comme le souligne Kenneth McRoberts, qu' « il est possible que la stratégie de Trudeau et sa vision du Canada soient désormais trop enracinées dans les institutions canadiennes, et dans la manière dont les Canadiens anglais comprennent le Canada, pour que soit possible un changement de cap majeur. Ce qui a pu être possible voilà vingt ans ou même dix ans ne l'est peut-être plus aujourd'hui. Nous avons laissé passer des occasions et fait des choix, pour le meilleur et pour le pire. » (Idem, 369-370).

Mais voilà qu'il se vérifie peut-être encore qu' « aux lieux du péril, croît aussi ce qui sauve », et qu'en tous cas, au moment où on s'y attend le moins, certaines prémisses de la vision laurendienne du Canada (re)prendraient forme et vigueur, il est vrai, dans des cercles peut-être peu officiels.

L'un des dogmes les plus virulents, contre la vision duale de Laurendeau, est sans aucun doute le postulat, si déconnecté de la réalité du pays des (au moins) deux (+ n) solitudes, que résume adéquatement le sempiternel slogan du vénérable Eugene Forsey, « *One Nation* », i.e., « *Canada as one – and only one – Nation* »!

En seconde partie, nous exposerons l'un des démentis les plus éloquents de ce parti pris uniciste (mais, il est vrai, promis à un avenir glorieux durant – et depuis! – les années Trudeau). J'esquisserai quelques remarques sur Philip Resnick, un intellectuel que Laurendeau, me semble-t-il, aurait été très soulagé de lire et d'entendre – et qui, dans *Thinking English Canada* a décrit récemment le Canada anglais comme « *A Nation that dares not speak its Name* ». Je proposerai, en conclusion, quelques remarques sur ce fait, que dans un esprit assez laurendien je déplore, que les nationalistes québécois sont, dans un texte programmatique qui définit le cahier des charges d'un nouveau nationalisme canadien anglais, (le plus) souvent dépeints sous un jour défavorable; mais j'aurai d'abord *et surtout* insisté sur le fait, important et remarquable, que ce type d'approche de la réalité canadienne anglaise – et par ricochet, canadienne *at large* – rend pensables et possibles le type de dialogue et de partenariat projetés et défendus jusqu'à la mort par Laurendeau<sup>5</sup>. Ce dernier, lors de ses rencontres avec le Canada anglais réel

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<sup>5</sup> En outre, mais nous le signalons ici sans l'explicitier, il semble qu'il existe une analogie forte et une ressemblance significative entre la solution

des années soixante, avait le sentiment de parler et de prêcher seul. Grâce à, et avec, Resnick, le partenaire, le vis-à-vis indispensable de l'activité dialogique, qui refusait de s'envisager lui-même comme tel, émerge.

## **I) Le monologue canadien-français et le rêve canadien de Laurendeau**

### **a) Le statut de la notion de peuples fondateurs chez Laurendeau**

À la fin des années soixante, l'intellectuel, romancier et dramaturge Jacques Ferron déclarait, dans ses *Historiettes*, avec la verve mordante et sardonique qu'on lui connaît :

La Confédération existait depuis plus de 15 ans. Ceux qui vont racontant qu'elle est le pacte librement consenti de deux nations libres, portent livrée. Ce sont des larbins. (14)

Le Canada bi-ethnique et bi-culturel relève autant de la Confédération que du caniche de monsieur Robert Choquette. (19)

La traque rendue à Vancouver, évanouie l'Amérique amérindienne, pendu Riel, vous pensez bien que notre rêve d'un Canada bi-ethnique et bi-culturel n'alla pas plus loin. Le Manitoba bilingue fut biffé de la carte et envoyé aux archives. (...) En attendant, qu'on me permette de hausser les épaules et de continuer de penser, si le shérif veut bien m'en laisser le droit, que la Confédération, telle qu'on nous la propose, elle est tout simplement pourrie, vu qu'elle a été pendue à Régina avec Louis Riel. (31)

On aurait tendance à penser que la position de Laurendeau, qui est toujours resté l'un des penseurs les plus attachés à la notion de dualité canadienne, se distancierait de ce type de propos; en réalité, Laurendeau prend soin de distinguer l'usage historique ou historiographique de ce paradigme du pacte entre peuples fondateurs, et l'usage normatif qu'il reste possible de faire d'une notion qui devient ainsi allégorique, un peu comme la notion de contrat social dans certaines théories politiques modernes. Le *pacte* n'aurait pas plus *eu lieu* que ces *contrats* initiaux et fondateurs mais tous deux définissent des exigences et des normes.

Ainsi, se référant, dans son livre sur *La crise de la conscription*, à un compromis concernant la participation canadienne-française à l'effort de guerre et au soutien canadien-français à la mère-patrie britannique,

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institutionnelle que préconise Laurendeau pour que le Canada sorte de la « crise la plus grave » qu'il ait traversée, et les « *possible modalities of a confederal union* » proposées par Resnick.

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Laurendeau se demande « qui ce pacte – aussi flou et douteux que celui de 1867 – engage-t-il? »<sup>6</sup>

En d'autres termes, quand Laurendeau défend la dualité canadienne, ou que lui échappent même les termes de « peuples fondateurs » ou de « pacte confédératif », sa démarche ne consiste pas à rappeler au signataire du contrat les termes de l'engagement mutuel : il ne pense pas, en premier lieu, que ce contrat ait été signé.

### **b) Les peuples fondateurs et la diversité culturelle canadienne**

Mon propos, très schématique, va ici s'appuyer sur un texte important de l'histoire de la pensée politique canadienne, et qui reste pour plusieurs l'un de ses meilleurs moments, ainsi qu'aujourd'hui encore une source vive d'inspiration; il s'agit d'un texte connu sous le nom de *pages bleues*, qui ont été rédigées par Laurendeau en guise d'introduction aux nombreux volumes issus de la Commission qu'il a co-dirigée dans les années soixante sur le bilinguisme et le biculturalisme. Nombreux sont les interprètes de ces *pages* à lire une sorte de « testament politique de André Laurendeau ».

La tâche qu'assume Laurendeau dans les *pages bleues* est celle de donner corps à un principe énoncé par le mandat de la Commission qu'il co-dirige, soit le principe de l'égalité devant présider dorénavant au développement et à l'évolution de la Confédération canadienne. Cette tâche est normative, utopique, et n'a rien d'une méditation historique sur un quelconque âge d'or, se réduit-il aux conditions exemplaires mais très limitées dans le temps, de la signature d'un pacte.

Le Canada que rêve et projette Laurendeau est un ensemble biculturel parce que bi-linguistique (ce pénible et laborieux néologisme répond au besoin, ici impérieux, de ne pas susciter de confusion avec le terme de « bilinguisme »); les deux communautés ou les deux « sociétés » ayant scellé une alliance en 1867 doivent se montrer « accueillantes » et « ouvertes » envers les citoyens canadiens désignés par ce que le mandat de la Commission appelait les « autres groupes ethniques »; ces citoyens, qui ne sont d'origine ni française ni britannique, peuvent évidemment exercer les mêmes droits que les individus issus des peuples fondateurs, mais à condition précisément de s'intégrer à l'une des sociétés dont les contours ne sont pas tracés ethniquement mais linguistiquement (ce qu'ont toujours fait, d'ailleurs, ces communautés « néo-canadiennes »).

Pourquoi le bilinguisme est-il indissociable du biculturalisme, lui-même intimement lié à l'existence de deux sociétés autonomes se développant séparément?

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<sup>6</sup> Montréal, les Éditions du Jour, 1962, p.32 (l'italique est de nous, S.S.).

### c) L'importance de la langue dans le nationalisme de Laurendeau

Pour Laurendeau, penser *sérieusement* l'égalité entre les citoyens canadiens, c'est se demander à quelles conditions ils peuvent exprimer et développer leur personnalité dans une société, c'est-à-dire un ensemble complexe et complet d'institutions structurant les sphères privée et publique, réceptive à leur identité. De manière plus concrète, plus précise et plus pratique, la promulgation au Canada du principe d'une égalité authentique entre les citoyens oblige à prendre en compte le phénomène linguistique qui est depuis longtemps, et reste aujourd'hui, le véritable axe de différence ou d'altérité et, malheureusement, de conflit.

Il est impossible de comprendre la position de Laurendeau sur la dualité canadienne, comme réalité et comme norme, si on ne perçoit pas d'abord la riche conception qu'il entretient des besoins réels des individus, ainsi que sa conception très aboutie et minutieuse des conditions de possibilité de l'exercice, par les individus, de leurs droits et de leurs capacités de choisir et de s'exprimer. Ceci, selon lui, n'est possible que par le biais de l'inclusion et de la participation à une culture, celle – *i.e.* pas n'importe laquelle – que l'individu assimile en apprenant, lors de sa venue au monde, une langue maternelle<sup>7</sup>.

Derrière la théorie politique de Laurendeau et l'architecture précise de son rêve institutionnel canadien se trouve donc le régime d'exigences que je résume en le citant :

Il faut donc qu'à tous les paliers de l'activité humaine, l'individu puisse trouver le cadre qui lui permette de s'épanouir, de s'exprimer et de créer selon sa culture propre, sans être forcé, pour progresser au-delà d'un certain degré, de s'intégrer à des cadres étrangers au point de

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<sup>7</sup> Signalons au passage que Laurendeau développe ici des conceptions qui, dans d'autres sphères et d'autres milieux de la recherche – et je pense à la philosophie politique – ne réapparaîtront que deux décennies plus tard, chez des théoriciens tels Avishai Margalit, Joseph Raz, Moshe Halbertal, Yael Tamir ou encore Will Kymlicka, bien qu'il faille reconnaître qu'elles étaient apparues deux siècles auparavant en Allemagne chez Herder, que ne connaissait vraisemblablement pas André Laurendeau. Voir le paragraphe 39, des *pages bleues*: „Certes, (ces deux cultures) ne sont pas des blocs hermétiques, elles évoluent, elles se font constamment des emprunts; dans la mesure où elles sont vivantes, elles ne cessent de se transformer selon le dynamisme et dans la direction qui leur sont propres.” Sur la préfiguration laurendienne de ce que plus tard Kymlicka a appelé la *justice ethno-culturelle* et les *droits culturels*, il faut admettre qu'elle est en butte aux mêmes objections qui ont été adressées au travail de Kymlicka, à qui on reproche, pour schématiser, d'avoir peut-être prouvé que les individus ne peuvent s'accomplir au sens libéral que par l'inclusion dans une culture, mais pas d'avoir permis de déterminer quelle devait être cette culture.

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s'y fondre et, en fin de compte, de cesser de contribuer au progrès culturel de son groupe.<sup>8</sup>

De même,

« une culture ne sera pleinement vécue qu'au sein de la société où elle s'incarne; ailleurs elle vivra, certes, mais d'une vie restreinte, à la mesure du nombre de ses membres et de la vigueur des institutions dont elle dispose. D'où l'importance capitale, conclut-il, de la notion des deux – insistons-y, *des deux!* S.S. – sociétés distinctes (...). » (parag. 77).

Aujourd'hui, au Canada, on se querelle au sujet de la reconnaissance – et de la non-reconnaissance – de « la » société distincte, mais cette vue est en partie biaisée : certes le Québec est une *province* distincte mais les deux sociétés – et on ne parle pas encore des Autochtones – sont distinctes, à moins, pour paraphraser et dépayser une vieille plaisanterie, que le deux le soient mais que l'une le soit plus que l'autre.

Toujours est-il que la dualité de fait du Canada, et la percée normative dont cet état de fait est affecté chez Laurendeau, qui a au moins pour conséquence que cette dualité doive être pérennisée et institutionnellement articulée, incitent Laurendeau à conclure que « la dualité culturelle au Canada ne saurait suggérer le mélange de ces deux cultures; chacune, ajoute-t-il, a son existence propre. » (parag. 39).

Laurendeau, au terme de son odyssée canadienne, avait à l'esprit une foule inquiétante d'exemples éloquentes d'« aliénation » (parag.73), de « complexe d'infériorité » paralysant, d'« inhibition » forte et de « sous-développement culturel ». Dans tous ces cas, il s'agit d'individus jouissant de ce que Laurendeau appelle des « droits théoriques » (par.75), mais ne pouvant « les exercer (...) que dans une mesure très limitée » (idem). L'acculturation n'est donc pas un phénomène politiquement anodin, dans la perspective définie et proposée par Laurendeau.

La réalité canadienne sur laquelle se penchent Laurendeau et ses collègues en est une dans laquelle « l'égalité culturelle, au sens où nous l'entendons ici, est très loin d'exister entre les deux principaux groupes linguistiques du Canada. » (parag. 74).

Ces développements inutilement longs avaient pour objectif de donner une idée plus précise des fondements ultimes du nationalisme de Laurendeau, nationalisme qui, pour ainsi dire, ne résulte *que* d'une prise en compte sérieuse de la question de la langue, comme nerf de la question de la

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<sup>8</sup> *Pages bleues*, p.32, paragraphe 71.

« personnalité », en contexte canadien et de ses implications politiques, institutionnelles et enfin constitutionnelles.

Les accents collectivistes de cette position ne devraient pas masquer le fait qu'il s'y profile – ce qui est rare dans l'histoire de la pensée libérale, et je prétends que Laurendeau en fait partie – une pensée enfin! sérieuse et conséquente de l'individualité. Ne nous y trompons pas, nous suggère Laurendeau, « l'égalité individuelle ne saurait exister tout à fait que si chaque communauté a partout les moyens de progresser dans sa culture et d'exprimer celle-ci. » (parag. 78).

Pour enchaîner sur la suite, une dernière suite de remarques s'impose : cette conception du Canada, comme étant constitué de deux « sociétés distinctes » pouvait, selon Laurendeau, être institutionnalisée de plusieurs manières; à ce sujet, Laurendeau manifeste un esprit pragmatique : élevant (parag.82) le principe de l'égalité au niveau collectif, il s'avise de ce qu'il s'agit ici « du degré d'*autodétermination* dont dispose chaque société par rapport à l'autre. On a alors en vue le pouvoir de décision, la liberté d'action de chacune, non seulement dans sa vie culturelle mais dans l'ensemble de sa vie collective. »<sup>9</sup>

En fait, Laurendeau semble incliner vers un compromis institutionnel qui s'articule finalement assez bien à certains aspects au moins de l'histoire politique canadienne : ni, on s'en doute, la version *hard* de l'État unitaire, ni le « statut d'État indépendant », mais une formule plus souple dans laquelle, dit-il, « chaque communauté (...) disposera, dans certains domaines, d'institutions qui lui seront propres alors que, dans les autres, il lui sera loisible de participer, dans des conditions satisfaisantes, à des institutions et à des organismes communs. » (parag. 78). En d'autres termes, la « dimension politique » de « l'égalité entre les deux communautés » consiste en « la faculté laissée à chacune de choisir ses propres institutions, ou du moins de participer pleinement aux décisions politiques prises dans des cadres partagés avec l'autre communauté. » (parag. 81).

On voit bien que ce type d'arrangement ou de formule institutionnelle, tout en entérinant une séparation primordiale et un état assumé de développement séparé, suppose un bon esprit de collaboration et de partenariat, seul apte à sceller les ententes et à initier un macro-dialogue se produisant au niveau des institutions communes.

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<sup>9</sup> Il ajoute: „Il ne s'agit plus de traits qui distinguent quantitativement les deux communautés, ni encore de leur situation économique ou sociale respective, mais de la maîtrise plus ou moins complète de chacune sur le ou les gouvernements qui la régissent. C'est ici que se situe la discussion du cadre constitutionnel dans lequel chacune des deux sociétés peut vivre ou aspirer à vivre: la formule unitaire ou la formule fédérative, un statut particulier pour une province dans laquelle est concentré le groupe minoritaire, ou encore pour cette portion du territoire, le statut d'État associé ou enfin l'État indépendant.”, *Pages bleues*, par. 82.



Il devrait être plus clair maintenant en quoi le slogan de « *One Nation!* » pouvait exaspérer et contrarier la vision et les espoirs de Laurendeau. L'application du seul principe de l'égalité stricte – entre les citoyens, entre les provinces – dans cette *One Nation* n'exprime, d'une part, que le produit d'une tradition libérale appauvrie, et, d'autre part, l'incapacité obstinée d'apercevoir et d'apprécier le caractère multinational de la fédération canadienne.

De même, l'incapacité de saisir et reconnaître l'importance, pour des citoyens - certes tous égaux en principe mais - évoluant dans des univers linguistiques distincts, des cadres collectifs concurrents de leur épanouissement individuel, laissait entendre à Laurendeau que le Canada n'était pas encore prêt à intégrer et accepter l'altérité fondamentale qui s'épanouissait en son sein, *i.e.* la différence francophone.

Il aurait sans doute cautionné ce jugement de Kymlicka, à l'effet que « ce recours au principe de l'égalité masque une préoccupation encore plus profonde : celle de la nationalité. » (Op.cit., 27).

Pour résumer, on dira que le problème de cette conception strictement unitaire, le problème *au moins*, aujourd'hui, pour les Québécois francophones (de toutes origines), nationalistes comme ils le sont majoritairement, mais non séparatistes, qui aimeraient et souhaitent sincèrement nouer un dialogue avec le *ROC* ou, plus élégamment, avec le Canada anglais, c'est que le partenaire de ce dialogue, l'*autre* avec qui il faudrait échanger, se défile ou au moins ne se perçoit pas, ne parvient pas à se percevoir, comme tel et, ce faisant, annihile le partenaire québécois en le fusionnant, par défaut, dans sa propre conception du Canada.

Pour caricaturer, on pourrait dire, en admettant l'existence de ces deux partenaires, se concevant et se définissant évidemment de manières fort différentes et, au moment où je parle, inconciliables, que l'un, le Québécois, tente de faire admettre à l'autre, le Canadien anglais, qu'il existe, tandis que ce dernier tente de lui faire reconnaître que lui, le Québécois, n'existe pas...

## **II) Du monologue au dialogue : Resnick et le surgissement du Canada anglais**

« Pour persuader, comme le soutient encore Will Kymlicka, les Canadiens anglophones d'adopter la conception multinationale du Canada, nous devons attaquer de front cet idéal d'une nation canadienne unique. » (Op. cit., 28). C'est l'un des défis qu'a brillamment relevé Philip Resnick.

Avant d'esquisser, en conclusion, quelques remarques sur l'aspect parfois réactif de la démarche de Resnick dans *Thinking English Canada*, je voudrais tenter de mettre en évidence tout ce qui, dans sa démarche, s'harmonise heureusement avec celle de Laurendeau. Je le répète, mais j'espère l'exprimer

avec précisions : je prétends que Laurendeau aurait gardé beaucoup et jeté très peu dans ce texte.

Je ferai quelques remarques sur un point théorique d'ordre assez fondamental me semble-t-il, soit le fait que tous deux militent de concert pour une prise en compte robuste et radicale de l'importance de la langue et une lecture politique de cette question linguistique, chose qui n'est pas du tout triviale, soit dit en passant.

#### a) *English Canada* et le crépuscule de *One Nation*

Le fait de prime abord le plus remarquable – pour moi du moins – est la manière univoque par laquelle Resnick congédie un autre mythe – nous avons déjà évoqué celui d'un pacte librement consenti entre des peuples autonomes – le mythe de *One Nation* : « *A one-nation Canada, dit-il, - the same for English-speaking Canadians, Québécois, and aboriginal peoples – is of yesterday, not tomorrow. (...) We must stop imagining, ajoute-t-il, that we, who see ourselves as Canadians first, can share a single concept of nation with (a majority of Québécois)* »<sup>10</sup>

Je ne sais pas si je le lis correctement quand j'ai l'impression qu'il admet que l'obstination de certains Canadiens – la majorité... – à reconduire sans cesse le mythe de *One Nation* s'explique au moins en partie par la crainte de devoir assumer les dommages politiques co-latéraux d'un abandon de ce mythe; il serait en effet difficile de reconnaître que les Québécois, les Premières Nations, tout comme les Canadiens anglophones, constituent des peuples ou des nations, sans redéfinir la structure politique fondamentale du Canada, sans, très précisément que les lois de la majorité cessent *ipso facto* de s'exercer systématiquement au profit des Canadiens anglophones. Il me semble que cela est au moins un corollaire de ce que Resnick à l'esprit quand il dit que « *We need to stop using Quebec or aboriginal peoples as hostages to our refusal to confront our own identity. We need to give our imaginations freer rein.* » (Idem, 114).

Quoi qu'il en soit, Resnick assume pleinement cette dimension de la question – *i.e.* les prolongements politiques, même les plus radicaux, du virage identitaire qu'il défend - « *Thinking English Canada, dit-il, also means rethinking constitutional arrangements.* »(102). Ainsi, en adoptant sa manière de thématiser l'identité Canadienne anglophone, on s'extrait de ce qu'il qualifie de « *zero-sum game in which the very survival of the political unit, Canada, whose citizenship we espouse, seems threatened by any concession on the subject of nationhood.* » (7).

Mettons toutefois certaines choses au clair : le projet de *Thinking English Canada* me semble, en l'état, tout à fait étranger au projet d'instaurer un dialogue constructif avec l'autre – ou les autres – nation(s) composant le

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<sup>10</sup> *Thinking English Canada*, Toronto, Stoddart, 1994, introduction, p.x.

Canada et y cohabitant avec le Canada anglophone. Je suis persuadé que Philip Resnick, ailleurs et en d'autres circonstances, a été plus loquace sur cette autre dimension du problème qui lui est certainement chère, mais dans ce texte, c'est comme si le Canada devait refaire ses forces, après, pendant, ou avant un traumatisme qu'il aurait tout intérêt à affronter en bon ordre de bataille et dans l'unité et la cohésion qui lui font présument défaut.

Je présente donc ici Resnick comme un allié objectif de Laurendeau mais pas encore comme un allié subjectif – ce que je suis presque sûr qu'il est par ailleurs.

### **b) Resnick et le nationalisme**

Sur le phénomène du nationalisme en général, Resnick nous incite, d'une part à constater la pérennité de sa prégnance (en effet, rappelle-t-il, « *One of the enduring lessons of the two centuries since the French Revolution is that national sentiment is no passing phenomenon,* » (104), mais d'autre part à écarter les confusions conceptuelles qui bloquent la voie à des aménagements institutionnels pertinents, voire urgents, tout en nous empêchant d'envisager le phénomène du nationalisme avec la sérénité qui sied à cet examen. Ainsi, met-il en garde ses compatriotes contre les avatars et dangers du multiculturalisme mou, compromettant la quête légitime de repères et de structures collectives : « *In a world, dit-il, where nationality remains a primary source of identity (...) English Canadians must be careful not to deny themselves the ability to think of themselves as a nation.* » (76). Il renchérit, avec une tonalité plus dramatique : « *Despite the globalization we are witnessing in the economic arena, and real limits to the sovereignty of states, national identities remain of critical importance (...). We will either be a nation, with a commitment to something larger than region and a sense of identity as English Canadians, or we will have lost our very reason to exist.* » (86).

Il est donc urgent pour le Canada anglophone de se saisir et se concevoir autrement que comme simple « communauté de communautés » ou comme conglomérat spirituellement désarticulé de régions, mais cela n'entraîne en aucune manière selon Resnick qu'il faille envisager sérieusement la désagrégation du Canada comme pays et État, puisque Resnick a écarté la prémisse à son avis discutable, voire fallacieuse, suivant laquelle il faudrait confondre la nation sociologique et l'État. Je reste toutefois personnellement curieux de voir jusqu'à quel point Resnick se sent capable de les distinguer; mais Resnick se contente de suggérer, si je le comprends bien, qu'il ne faut pas les confondre purement et simplement, ce qui ne signifie pas qu'ils n'entretiennent aucun lien, conceptuel et/ou historique<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> „Nor is Nation (...) quite the same thing as state”, p.103 ainsi que p.8: „To the degree that we can separate sociological nationhood from political statehood, we

Par ailleurs, je soupçonne que Resnick a eu au Canada anglophone le même type d'ennuis que Fernand Dumont au Québec; les deux tentent d'expliquer à leurs contemporains qu'il existe une telle chose que l'identité, soit canadienne-française, soit canadienne anglaise. On s'amuse probablement tout autant d'un côté que de l'autre de la frontière séparant les *deux solitudes* à leur lancer le défi d'établir une liste valable et « universelle » des caractéristiques identitaires; il faut admettre que les deux ne s'en sortent pas si mal; un tel exercice de définition ne s'alimente d'ailleurs pas nécessairement, quoi qu'on en dise, de présupposés essentialistes et fixistes à propos de l'identité nationale. Ainsi, Resnick, de son côté de cette *frontière*, propose : « *Ours is an ongoing society with certain political traditions developed in the 19th century and furthered in the 20th. Reference has already been made to conservative, liberal, and social-democratic strains in English-Canadian political culture. In the same vein, we can speak of traditions of constitutionalism, parliamentarism, rule of law, individual rights, and the like. These are not principles with which most English-speaking Canadians would be prepared to dispense, at least not without some very persuasive arguments. They, therefore, represent touchstones of Canadian identity that immigrants buy into by coming to this country. English Canada is not some tabula rasa or blank sheet to be recast every time new cultural communities come along.* » (73).

### c) Resnick et la langue

Par ailleurs, Resnick emploie la même délicatesse et la même minutie à distinguer sa notion de *English-Canadians* de celle de « canadiens d'origine britannique », que Laurendeau, dans les *pages bleues* l'avait fait, et dans une direction similaire, pour écarter une lecture étroitement ethnique voire raciale des notions de *peuples fondateurs* et de *sociétés distinctes*.

Ni l'un ni l'autre, au-delà de l'aversion morale qu'ils partagent de toute évidence à l'endroit de tout phénomène de segmentation ou d'exclusion à base ethnique ou raciale, n'a de toute façon besoin de ce type de conception éculée pour étayer son nationalisme; les deux disposent d'un outil moins explosifs et plus rigoureux; leurs anthropologies philosophiques respectives tablent sur une donnée plus souple : le langage, la langue maternelle. Tout comme Laurendeau, Resnick ne tente pas de réduire purement et simplement la culture à la langue, mais il est évident que, dans un cas comme dans l'autre, l'insistance sur la langue permet de penser l'identité en termes à la fois rigoureux et parfois stricts, mais également de manière, potentiellement *et* réellement, inclusive. Ce que Resnick, après tout, tente de démontrer, notamment contre une certaine conception du multiculturalisme, c'est que le

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*may be able to address an issue that has dogged other states around the world with significant linguistic, cultural or ethnic minorities."*

Canada anglophone est une notion rigoureuse, tout en désignant un ensemble ouvert.

Il y a une réelle affinité entre tous ces individus que regroupe le terme de *English Canada* et la langue n'y est pas pour rien; en fait, si elle n'est pas une condition suffisante de participation à cette culture (si elle l'était, les Néozélandais, les Écossais, une partie des Camerounais, les citoyens de Hong-Kong et l'immense majorité des États-Uniens seraient tous des Canadiens Anglophones), elle n'en demeure pas moins une condition nécessaire. Elle est d'ailleurs « *the clearest defining characteristic of English Canada.* » (25). Quoi qu'on dise et pense du multiculturalisme, cette idée, cette norme et/ou ce programme de mesures de l'État Canadien ne remettent en question, ni *de facto*, ni *de jure* le fait que les citoyens canadiens – et même les Néocanadiens – qui s'installent sur la « communauté territoriale » Canadienne anglophone sont ou deviennent, rapidement d'ailleurs, anglophones. Pour citer Resnick avec une certaine liberté, je dirais que, comme pour les autres nationalités qui composent l'humanité, « *language is a central facet of (the) makeup (of English Canada).* » (73). Il est toujours délicat et malaisé, pour les nationalistes québécois, d'insister sur la primauté, dans la sphère publique québécoise, du français; chose certaine, une phrase comme la suivante, que je tronque et ne cite que partiellement: « *National identity requires a primacy for english against any other language* », donc, une telle phrase, n'aurait surpris Laurendeau – qui la cautionnerait par ailleurs – que dans la simple mesure où il savait comme nous croyons encore le savoir que ce genre de déclaration, malaisée et si terrible à entendre pour ceux que Trudeau appelait les *bleeding hearts*, est à toutes fins pratiques inutile dans une région du monde – i.e. l'Amérique du Nord - où personne n'est suffisamment téméraire pour, ne serait-ce que, rêver à se passer de l'anglais au quotidien, dans la sphère publique en tous cas.

## Conclusion

J'ai gardé mes réserves et perplexités à l'endroit de la démarche de Resnick pour la fin, la conclusion:

Le nationalisme, chez Resnick, est une valeur; ou alors je n'ai rien compris à Resnick. Évidemment, pas *n'importe quel* nationalisme; mais il est encore plus évident, il me semble, que l'*anti-nationalisme*, selon Resnick, fasse fausse route; c'est ce dernier qui, par définition et donc non pas de manière accidentelle, coupe les citoyens et les individus de ressources et repères identitaires si précieux, et compromet peut-être une bonne partie de ce que la *polis*, et l'activité politique qui s'y ancre et s'y déploie, offrent de meilleur.

Je suis sûr que Resnick comprend l'impatience et la colère des nationalistes québécois – voire des Québécois tout court, qui ont massivement ceci de « nationalistes » qu'ils s'identifient majoritairement, et, qui plus est, de plus

en plus, au « Québec d'abord » comme en attestent de nombreux sondages - face à ce qu'un auteur a qualifié récemment de « pari de la démesure »<sup>12</sup> canadien. Il sait très bien que, comme l'un de ses collègues - et autant que je sache, frère d'arme - l'a dit clairement récemment, la lutte acharnée, et si peu actuelle, contre le nationalisme et le séparatisme québécois, a mené, pour le citer dans le titre anglais, à *a Misconceiving (of) Canada*. Si, bien entendu, le Canada au complet fait les frais de ce type de stratégie grandiloquente, les québécois et les nationalistes québécois, n'en sortent pas gagnants non plus, loin s'en faut.

Si donc il sait quels Bonaparte, quels Robespierre ont occupé le devant de la scène assez longtemps à Ottawa, pourquoi parle-t-il avec une telle emphase de « *sovereignist wolves* » (22), qui, pour l'essentiel, ont vu leur marge de manoeuvre réduite à une peau de chagrin au moment où d'autres « loups » ont pour leur part réussi à concentrer comme sans doute jamais dans l'histoire canadienne le pouvoir à Ottawa, pour faire court, entre le *PMO* et le *Privy Council*? Est-il finalement si pertinent et adéquat, au plan de l'explication et du jugement, de s'attarder aux « *Quebec nationalists (...) Machiavellian schemes* » (111) quand on sait, comme le rappelait, la même année de parution que *Thinking English Canada*, Jeremy Webber que « pas une seule modification n'a pris en compte les préoccupations traditionnelles du Québec quant au pouvoir fédéral de dépenser, au partage des compétences, au pouvoir de désaveu ou au caractère distinct du Québec. »<sup>13</sup> Peut-être ce type de commentaire, de la part de Resnick, s'explique-t-il essentiellement par les circonstances dans lesquelles ce texte a été rédigé et publié, ainsi que par les attentes présumées du public auquel il était destiné, à qui Resnick voulait sans doute faire comprendre que le fond du propos, comme il le dit lui-même, « *is not a matter of buying into the sovereignist argument.* » Je suppose par ailleurs que Resnick reprocherait à cette branche du nationalisme québécois - *i.e.* le mouvement séparatiste - son association trop intime, sa mise en équation trop directe, de la nation et de l'État.

Enfin, il reste encore et surtout vrai que la position de Resnick est infiniment plus hospitalière à la position et aux *demandes traditionnelles* du Québec que ne l'est la position canadienne officielle.

Avec - et grâce à - Philip Resnick le Canada anglophone, non seulement devient « *A Nation that dares speak its Name* » mais également, ajouterais-je dans un anglais moins élégant que celui de Resnick, « *dares admitting its own nationalism* »; en d'autres termes, les Canadiens - enfin, - *the Canadians* -

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<sup>12</sup> Michel Seymour.

<sup>13</sup> *Reimagining Canada: Language, Culture, Community and the Canadian Constitution*, Montréal&Kingston, McGill-Queen's UP, 1994, p.159, traduit par et cité dans Langlois, Simon, „Le biculturalisme oublié”, ms p.8.

cessent d'être des *closet nationalists*, ce qui constitue, en principe et à certaines conditions, un autre aspect de la facilitation du dialogue avec les Québécois qui aperçoivent enfin leur partenaire dans ce dialogue (ou, disons, pour être plus précis – et prudent! - , certaines prémisses de l'émergence d'un tel partenaire), ou au moins l'un de leurs partenaires, puisqu'il est effectivement urgent d'y convier les Premières Nations; on peut imaginer qu'un Canada qui se saisirait et se représenterait lui-même à travers la notion d'un vaste et continu dialogue entre les trois grandes nations qui le composent ressemblerait un peu plus à la nation exemplaire qu'il prétend d'ores et déjà être, et ce, de manière, semble-t-il, aussi rapide et abusive que tonitruante.

À ce titre, il me semble qu'à *Thinking English-Canada* fait défaut une dimension qui me semble pourtant cruciale à ce genre de texte de nature politique; *Thinking English-Canada* participe trop souvent du jeu de langage

du « couteau sur la gorge »<sup>14</sup> : Resnick semble avoir beaucoup à dire sur – et contre – le péril que les « *separatist wolves* » font courir au « meilleur pays du monde »<sup>15</sup>, mais assez peu sur le type de projet assez constructif qui pourrait faire coopérer et construire, édifier et oeuvrer *ensemble* des nationalistes canadiens-anglais ou *canadians* et des nationalistes québécois ou tout simplement des Québécois; en d'autres termes, ce qui me semble faire défaut à cet essai programmatique, c'est une « proposition » alternative, une préfiguration utopique de ce que pourrait et, osons-le, *devrait* être le Canada, susceptible de mobiliser, de mettre politiquement en mouvement dans une autre direction. En faisant l'économie de cette dimension dans le cadre de son travail de saisie de l'identité canadienne-anglaise comme assise d'une nation, et ce, je suppose, pour ne pas trop « charger la barque », Resnick risque de voir sa démarche réduite à une réactionnaire entreprise de rétrécissement des *dimensions*, un pis-aller défaitiste pour un Canada si ambitieux. Pour résumer, il faut absolument que Resnick trouve le moyen de présenter le virage qu'il défend comme autre chose qu'une défaite politique et un repli identitaire, quitte à reconnaître que ce virage s'alimente d'un nouveau « sens de la mesure » et qu'il signe peut-être en effet la fin du néo-jacobinisme qui a cours à Ottawa. Pour résumer de manière très maladroite : son texte est trop théorique et pas assez pratique.

Enfin, et cela prolonge le point précédent, s'il semble accepter assez volontier que, comme il le dit lui-même, « *(the) concept of duality is dead and gone* » (22), je ne comprends pas son appréciation plus nuancée du fait que

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<sup>14</sup> p.xii, il est fait référence à „*the inevitable institutional restructuring that faces this country*”; p.22, d'une manière qui évoque plus la *Realpolitik* qu'un souci normativement orienté pour la justice, Resnick demande, à ce sujet, „*do we really have a choice?*”

<sup>15</sup> Cette dernière n'est **pas** une expression de Resnick, précisons-le!

« *Canada as a federal state has involved a de facto pact between the English-speaking majority concentrated outside Québec and a French-speaking majority in Québec* » (74). La manière radicale dont il faut prendre en compte la langue et la culture pour pouvoir parler de dualité est exactement ce qu'il nous faut pour, finalement!, reconnaître et accorder aux Premières Nations la dose d'autonomie qu'elles réclament souvent et parler non plus de dualité mais d'une association plus complexe à trois, ou plus, *partenaires* autonomes et reconnus pour ce qu'ils sont.

Bref, quelle est la nature de la réticence qu'éprouve Philip Resnick à l'endroit du principe de la dualité? Je suis moi-même assez curieux de l'apprendre mais suis persuadé que cela aurait intéressé André Laurendeau.

Deux choses restent finalement assez étonnantes chez cet intellectuel canadien-anglais issu de la gauche : les nuances et restrictions qu'il applique à la notion de multiculturalisme ainsi qu'une franche et robuste remise en question du pancanadianisme qui caractérise la gauche *canadian* au moins depuis les années 30.

Il doit en tous cas y avoir un prix à suggérer - en accréditant et reconduisant implicitement le résumé par Lord Durham du Canada comme siège d'une lutte entre deux *nations* - que la bonne perspective interprétative sur le Canada, la plus juste (aux sens autant théorique – i.e. historiographique – que pratique – i.e. politique ) puisse finalement être celle de ses « victimes »<sup>16</sup> (idée que Resnick aurait pu emprunter à Lukacs...), les Canadiens-français devenus pour certains les Québécois<sup>17</sup>, et les Premières Nations.

Cela doit amplement suffire à nous faire craindre que Philip Resnick n'ait éprouvé, au moment de proposer *Thinking English Canada* à ses contemporains et à ses concitoyens ou plus particulièrement au moment de la réception de ce texte, une solitude tristement similaire à celle qui avait accablé un Laurendeau épuisé, au crépuscule d'une existence dont je ne suis probablement pas le seul à regretter la brièveté. Faut-il considérer que la solitude est un prix raisonnable pour exaucer le souhait que Laurendeau émettait, il y a maintenant plus de 40 ans : « On peut imaginer que, pour se

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<sup>16</sup> Il sans doute trop simple de qualifier les Canadiens français de « victimes » de l'histoire canadienne; que ceci ne soit entendu que comme très imparfaite abréviation...

<sup>17</sup> Le propos de Resnick confère une nouvelle vigueur et une nouvelle légitimité à de larges pans de l'historiographie canadienne-française; Resnick s'attendait-il à conférer une seconde jeunesse à certaines conclusions de Michel Brunet? Pour vérifier, la réalité de cette seconde jeunesse, il suffit de lire le dernier paragraphe de „Essai d'histoire comparée: religion et nationalisme” (in Michel Brunet, *Notre passé, le présent, et nous*, Montréal, Fides, 1976, p.97) en guise de postface à *Thinking English-Canada*. Il ne s'en dégage pas assez de dépaysement pour que le travail de Resnick n'éveille aucune suspicion...



défendre contre le remous québécois, le Canada anglais parvienne à former une nouvelle unité et réapprenne à se définir, alors, nous trouverions à *qui parler*, dans les deux sens, et le conflit serait rude. Cela vaudrait mieux, il me semble, que le marécage dans lequel nous pateaugeons tous»<sup>18</sup>?

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<sup>18</sup> *Ces choses qui nous arrivent*, Montréal, HMH, 1970, p.147 (l'italique est de Laurendeau).



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## THE ENEMY IS US: SHIFTING DEFINITIONS OF THE OUTSIDER IN NEWFOUNDLAND DRAMA

In this paper I intend to address the *outsider*, or *stranger* figure as it is depicted in contemporary Newfoundland drama. This figure is a subject of much fetishization in Newfoundland culture, and is a primary aspect of the region's traditional modes of self-identification.

The stranger figure is present in post-colonial cultures, often replacing the dominant, departed culture and retaining many of its identifying markers. More than anything, however, it exists as a necessary determinative of interior and exterior geography. Post-colonial cultures like that of Newfoundland, in struggling to define and clarify an identity of their own, use the stranger as a means of identifying the familiar and the safe in contrast with that which is foreign and therefore threatening.

While elements of this identity-based use of alterity exist in all cultures and are a primary tool in the discourse of survival, enabling us to order and discriminate, in an orphan-society like that of Newfoundland its role is carries greater immediacy and a correspondingly increased local currency. Where survival is a more prevalent daily issue, and the omnipresence of the ocean exists to negate any human fantasies of immortality, otherness becomes the coin of the realm.

Sara Ahmed states that “the stranger allows Law to mark out its terrain”(Ahmed, 23) conjuring up ideas of the Old West in America, or perhaps of dogs at a street corner, warily eyeing each other as they raise their legs. This is the creation of a “visual economy” (24), one where the stranger has no space, but acts in delineating the home territory of natives, those who “belong”. The term “CFA” – “come from away” has long been ascribed not only to visitors to Newfoundland, but to those who have been resident for twenty-five years or more. They are welcomed, but in the most essential analysis, such residents do not belong.

This distinction is relatively benign until a community comes under duress. The history of Newfoundland is replete with duress, of both a quantity and variety that would tire the Seven Horsemen of the Apocalypse – tidal waves, town-consuming fire after fire, a generation of young men lost in ill-advised military action, the collapse of the fishery, the Smallwood government's resettlement programme, the predations of the British merchant class and the

sectarian violence of Catholics and Anglicans, the subtle sadness of young people lost to the thriving mainland. As entire communities disappear due to economic or demographic collapse, the island, seemingly, grows larger and larger. The 15<sup>th</sup> largest island in the world, Newfoundland has only around 550,000 people. Historically isolated from each other in out port settlements accessible only by boat, Newfoundlanders are today much more in contact with each other but find their numbers falling. A point in the future where a demographic tipping point is reached is foreseeable.

An island community necessarily breeds a sense, etymologically, of *insularity* (with apologies, I leave aside, for the moment, the even more remote and isolated region of Labrador). But there were many other factors, remarkable perhaps for the fact that Newfoundland has been courted, or at least ravished, by no less than three and possibly four colonial cultures, depending on one's definitions and terms. In fact Newfoundland has *never* been regarded never been regarded as an integral part of any of the nations which have served as their overlords, in spite of islanders' wholly perverse affection for England. An island, 1700 nautical miles from Europe, and with its main port placing the colony's back to mainland North America, Newfoundland has traditionally been perceived as nothing more than a commodity. In a report to the British House of Commons in 1793 this attitude was precisely summed up:

the island of Newfoundland has been considered... as a great ship moored near the banks in the fishing season, for the convenience of English fishermen. (Prowse, *xix*).

In the midst of what once were the world's richest fishing grounds, the land, resources, and economy of Newfoundland have been dominated, at various times, by the French, the Americans, Canadians, and the English. Save for a brief period of independence in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Newfoundlanders never been able to regard themselves as anything but "others". The British government legislated repeatedly against colonization on the island in order to protect the interests of the West Coast merchant fishery, crippling the settlement of Newfoundland from until 1700; despite two centuries of resource privateering, they refused to recognise Newfoundland as a colony until 1824, starving the small knot of settlers of infrastructure and essential services (Halpert and Story [eds], 26). An Order-In-Council of 1671 enjoined settlers to set up their fragile houses, or "tilts" no closer than 6 miles to the shoreline, effectively eliminating their ability to make a living from the sea (Halpert et al, 14).

This restriction signalled an opening for the French, whose Catholic beliefs required a steady diet of fish, to found settlements on the west coast of the island. Disputes over these and other North American territories led to incursions from the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century by the French army, burning and razing settlements on the English side of the island and thus discouraging the idea of any increase in migration until the disputes were arbitrated in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (Major, 155).

The British did not even bother to designate a Governor for the island until 1729; no Governor would reside there full-time until 1817 (Major, 153,197). This left the justice system, such as it was, in the hands of the first three ship's captains to reach the fishing grounds each spring (71). Settlements, called out ports, were small isolated from each other, and dominated by the local merchant and the *truck system*. Under the truck system, the local merchant, a man in the service of the Water Street fish merchants of St. John's, would provide equipment and staples to the fishing families of an out port in exchange for their catch. The advantage lay with the merchant: he set the prices of the goods he advanced to the families at the beginning of the season; and also set the prices of the fish at season's end. Thus was created a cashless system where the fisherman was constantly held in debt from one season to another, as the amount garnered by the catch never equalled the debt incurred.

The truck system was in large measure responsible for the creation of an ill-educated, poverty-stricken, disenfranchised citizenry until its grudging abandonment – and that only in the 1940s. Certainly the development of an indigenous culture was retarded by this repressive series of colonial actions. Settlers from the English West Country and Ireland managed, however, through the slow growth of low-cost social functions like the *kitchen party*, the *community concert*, and, above all, the tradition of *mumming*, to transform the songs and stories of their native cultures into something clearly identified as being of, and about, Newfoundland.

The social divisions created by the class-based, anti-Catholic tendencies of the fish merchants have now diminished to some degree, but are still more apparent than in mainland Canada. The tendency for a Newfoundlander to define herself in opposition to another has remained as its legacy. By the time of Confederation with Canada in 1949, out port *bay men* voted massively for the union while the affluent *townies* of St. John's massed support against. The centuries-long mistrust of outsiders – the English merchant, the French military, the Portuguese and Spanish pirates who illegally trawled the Grand Banks, even the Canadian Confederates of 1869 – had now been placed as secondary to islanders' mistrust of each other.

It is with this commodification in mind that we can recall the term *Newfie* and its casual condescension. In Canada it has been used – one must add by Newfoundlanders, themselves, as well – to describe a kind of *Harlequin* or jester character, a sly, good-natured rube with a coarse accent and a love of music and rum. The term has at last begun to fall out of usage in Newfoundland; but the stereotype persists in Canada, and certain tourist industries in the region persist in presenting this image of the *rubber-boot Newfie* to meet tourist expectations. Newfoundlanders are acutely aware of their status as outsiders in Canada, just as they were, to a somewhat lesser degree, whenever they appealed to Whitehall for assistance throughout the long period of British mercantile dominance.

It can be no surprise, then, that Newfoundland's dramatic literature consistently features an oppositional equation, what might be called the *us vs. them* motif. What makes this rather pedestrian paradigm more remarkable is the shifting nature of who constitutes *otherness*. Within the tight-knit community of a Newfoundland out port is a complex web of dyadic relationships which not only intertwine and provide a fabric for community life, but which feature the fissures in that life, providing, if you will, the definition and terms of censure for belonging.

Outsiders seldom choose to be outsiders. When this status, or lack of status, has been so designated, however, perhaps the most positive response, in terms of the discourse of survival, is to call yourself an *insider*. This creates the need for *others*, those who can aid a people in demarcating their ethnic, social or geographic boundaries. Nowhere is this more clear than in studies of life in Newfoundland out ports – whose very nomenclature indicates their otherness.

Nothing in an out port is more dangerous than a *stranger*. The earliest manifestations of Newfoundland theatre - again, distinct from those of Canada - were entirely devoted to ritualized depictions of strangers. The aim of *mumming*, which has now nearly disappeared from the out ports where it was most prevalent, was to disguise *insiders* as *outsiders* as a means of social regulation. Members of the community dress up (generally in the costume of the opposite sex), disguise their faces with pitch or crudely made paper masks, and walk from house to house in a village on nights during the twelve days of Christmas. The behaviour of these *mummers* changes from one community to another but always begins with a knock on the door. In a rural society where members of the community simply enter each others' houses with a verbal salutation, this is a clear signal that outsiders are demanding entry (Halpert and Story [eds], 67). The fact that the Mummers are actually members of the community creates a dyadic obligation for the hosts; the door must be answered.

Mummers then announce, in a frightening, ingressive voice, "Mummers allowed in?" The Mummers enter and sit silently while they are asked questions, until their identity has been successfully ascertained (Halpert et al, 33). At other times they may dance their "special step", giving a further clue to their identity. Nonetheless they remain vaguely threatening. In northern out ports the family children have been threatened with "if you're not good the Mummers'll come and take you away" (123).

Reports indicate that, even though each family is well aware that the mummers are members of their community, there is a good deal of unease at allowing these grotesque, strange-talking, nearly silent entities into their homes (70). For good reason; in some communities mumming has been used as a means of settling scores, where the threatening nature of the ritual, with its *feast of fools* quality of the low-status individual temporarily acquiring status over people with *airs*, becomes palpable.

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The entire Mumming ritual centres around unmasking the stranger and eliminating the danger a stranger represents. For, while the Mimmers, once unmasked, are the most sociable of insiders, and in fact represent the *coöptation* of the outsider, the ritual lays bare the truth which underlies my analysis of Newfoundland and its drama – that the outsider is a fixed figure, which remains regardless of who is chosen to inhabit it; there will always be another stranger, another danger. Mumming lays bare, in its curious way, the implication that the insider in an out port is always at risk of losing his insider status.

Let me introduce a dramatic example of this mentality with one that bridges the macro social and micro social definitions of outsidership.

The two most famous of Newfoundland's playwrights are David French and Michael Cook. Both are regarded as "outsiders" in Newfoundland – French, because while he was born there, moved away when he was six years old; Cook, because he came to the island as mature adult. Interestingly, in recent years it is French, who in every way except actual birth is a Canadian playwright – developed through Tarragon theatre and the Canadian system, a lifelong mainland resident, who has been re-adopted by the burgeoning Newfoundland theatre festival industry as a *native son*. This may have much to do with the fact that his plays are sentimental reiterations of a mythologized version of Newfoundland history, featuring a hard-done-by people who struggle bravely and with outsized good humour against all manner of off-shore evil, and whose affection and natural generosity are used and abused by others.

Cook, who in his lifetime contributed far more to the actual working life and development of an indigenous Newfoundland theatre (as a playwright based in Newfoundland, a theatre company founder, and a critical essayist of national acclaim), is produced far less frequently. He is regarded with suspicion, primarily because his plays are unsentimental and often brutal depictions of a less attractive trait; Newfoundlanders' predilection for placing blame away from themselves. The plays are not unsympathetic, and are filled with an acute observation of people that can only come from a lifelong passion for a land and its people. However, revealing as they do Newfoundlanders self-mythologization as a victimised people, they place him, effectively, in an objective position. This exteriorizes Cook and his work – his sense of distance is acknowledged and returned – he is an outsider.

Finally, I will give an example of a single play from the emerging Newfoundland canon, one which places many of these insider-outsider distinctions in full view. That is *Young Triffie Been Made Away With* by Ray Guy. The fact that it has not been produced since its debut in St. John's by RCA Theatre in 1985 has, perhaps, something to do with the baring of this mode of survival in naked view.

In *Triffie*, an out port community is torn apart by the discovery of a young girl's body. Ray Guy's principal achievement lies in the savage humour with which he dissects the prejudices and moral rot in an insulated community. Fashioned in the manner of a well-made whodunit, the play mercilessly depicts parochial attitudes and the corruptive nature of tribalism. *Triffie* stands as a marker of the schism between the urban attitudes of St. John's, where the play was produced, and the out port communities it satirises.

More importantly, Guy's play portrays a Newfoundland society at war with itself - where virtually every character is an outsider. The central trope of the play is that of *the stranger*. A figure common in the social discourse of rural communities across Newfoundland, the stranger is the silent rover, the figure glimpsed - or created - in the area and remembered after any disastrous event has taken place. As I have mentioned, the stranger (in the form of mummers) is used as a means of social control over children, the retribution of being taken from the community in his bag.

In the play's first scene we are introduced to the village doctor and his wife. Both are from mainland Canada. Partly to cope with their confirmed status as outsiders in Swyers Harbour, Dr. Melrose is a confirmed alcoholic; his wife Millie pops pills. A mysterious rash of sheep maimings takes place. The Doctor describes the reaction of the town's postmistress:

Anyway, lordy, but Aunt Millie Bishop was a sight to behold. Couldn't blame her, I suppose. She'd gone out around her henhouse to look for one of her pullets and this...this thing hit her square in the face. It was hanging by the neck with its one unbroken leg pointing straight up at the sky like the finger of doom or something. "The Stranger" shrieks Aunt Millie. "It was the Stranger done it. I knowed it. I knowed it. I seen him. (Lynde, 108)

Then he adds,

Yeah. The Stranger. Every place comes equipped with a stranger....Lots of people have seen his footprints in the sand or the snow or the mud. But few claim to have ever seen him. (108)

The Pastor of the community, Pastor Pottle, heads an evangelical sect of believers. Another outsider who has come to the out port from away - in this case the next out port up the coast - Pottle has created his own club of "insiders" to combat the ostracisation of the community authorities. Pottle and his flock had targeted Old Man Washbourne as the probable killer of the sheep, and have been barely prevented from storming his isolated hut.

Pottle has a daughter, Tryphenia, who is developmentally delayed. *Triffie*, by nature of her condition, is also an outsider. She has a single friend, Billy Head, a local boy ostracized not for his unwillingness to speak or his constant desire to shoot things, but for his friendship with the town eccentric, Old Man Washbourne. Washbourne, interestingly, is a local resident - but one with an



education and an ascetic streak who has moved his cabin to the edge of town, a physical talisman of his status in the community.

To top off this initial list of outsiders, Ranger Hepditch has been called in to investigate the sheep maimings. Like most members of the provincial Constabulary, he's based in one town and makes calls as needed to surrounding out ports. Hepditch is the only outsider in the play who is nearly free of the constrictions associated with the effort of portraying oneself as an insider. The spectator's gaze is thus directed through his eyes.

Billy discovers Triffie's body in the land wash and concludes that she didn't make away with herself, that "she been made away with". This discovery accelerates the play's central action, begun with the news of the sheep maimings. That action revolves around the desperate fight for insider status and the need to identify, and vilify, outsiders as the root causes of evil and unhappiness, as manifested in Triffie's death.

A new outsider is introduced: the provincial government, based in St. John's. Melrose dismisses the relevance of the provincial government in a place like Swyers Harbour:

Inform our so-called welfare system? Contact that farce of an orphanage in St. John's? Pardon me, Sergeant, but lodge a complaint with you? Fine. In six months, perhaps a year's time, perhaps something might be done. Might. Might. (114)

In this way the outside world is epitomized as an indifferent, benignly malignant entity, a referent for the festering insularity of the out port. Problems will be identified within the community, solutions enacted within the community. The outside world is not relevant to the daily dynamics of Swyers Harbour.

The list of outsiders within the community continues to grow, as, with Triffie's death added to the sheep maimings, panic spreads in the community. In scene four we're introduced to Aunt Millie, the postmistress, who blithely gives her list of possible suspects to the naïve Ranger. The postmistress can be seen, of course, as a guardian against the outside world, formalising and regulating communication, and acting in a censorial capacity. In the play this is exactly how Millie enacts her role. She holds back the Pastor's package of pornography, having checked its contents herself.

But this quintessential insider's status in the community is put at risk by the off-stage presence of her son, Vincent. He is heard, not seen, swearing violently at each of Millie's gentle remonstrations. Vincent has been damaged irrevocably by outsiders. He has returned from the Second World War shell-shocked. Millie keeps him safely away from prying eyes – the kind of judgment which would undermine her insider status. Having become an outsider to her son, whose only words to her are "Fuck Off!" she is desperate to retain her dyadic status in Swyers Harbour.

News arrives that Pastor Pottle has been bugging the children at the orphanage in nearby Whitbourne for years, and Ranger Hepditch goes to the church to pick him up. In a curious and dramatic scene Guy reveals his conscious use of the insider/outsider as the defining motif of the play. Ranger Hepditch enters the church. He sees a man sweeping the floor angrily, muttering to himself, and asks the man if he is Pottle. It is, but Pottle denies it. He is not interested in evading the law, however, so much as his own identity, for in a profane, incoherent rant filled with obscure biblical references, Pottle reveals himself.

Pottle has become an insider of one. Separating himself from his spiritual flock, bleating like a sheep, over and over, he is led away, like a lamb to the slaughter.

The list of suspects matches the expanding number of outsiders. Vincent has run away; it's revealed that Triffie was pregnant, from Billy, who, it turns out, is actually her brother. The imposition of themes of incest and child abuse on top of the other degradations attributed to the characters of Swyers Harbour makes the dramatic structure of the play unwieldy. This especially evident in the finale of the play, when two characters are killed in rapid succession.

But, at least in part, this is Guy's purpose; to take all the recognised conceptions of rural Newfoundland life – not so very different from, say, those attributed to the folk of the Appalachian mountains – and pound them into a mash where no one prejudice rises above the others. Because it's not about prejudice, or justice: it's about who can be culled from the community for its sins. In Swyers Harbour, everyone is guilty and no one admits it; by imposing clichés of rural behaviour Guy appears to be indicting the audience in a similar manner. The objective spectator catches himself nodding at the familiarity of the clichés and, perhaps, distancing herself from them. If they are inappropriate as dramatic structure they are surely inappropriate as measures of any community. In this respect Guy acknowledges, reifies, and heightens the place of the spectator as the outsider. Only as outsiders, in Guy's view, can we gain a measure of objectivity in viewing the actions of others, and ourselves.

The last words of the play, fittingly, belong to Aunt Millie, the inside/outsider:

Oh, Mr. Washbourne, sir, what a going on. What a goin' on. And that's the God's truth. Do you think, sir, when them American's goes back home where they come our little community will be the once-tranquil place it used from that...that to be? (141)

In truth, of course, Swyers Harbour, with its mix of strangulating dyadic cords and codes of inclusion, has, like the rest of the island society it represents, never been tranquil. In viewing this example of Newfoundland drama, I hope that in some way we can begin to understand the uniqueness of an insular culture which is, at once, its greatest strength and its most destructive aspect.

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Since Confederation with Canada in 1949, Newfoundland has produced a staggering creative output unrivalled, in per capita terms, by any other province or territory. Its theatre, while young, has gradually evolved from the predictable colonial models and narratives to a body of work that continues to define itself and its people in ever more specific terms. As the *Newfie* recedes and the *Newf*, or Newfoundlander, takes his place, a new confidence in artistic expression grows. We may look for cultural signals that this singularly creative people have become less dependent on mythologizing their otherness as a means of survival.

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## DUCHARME, GODBOUT, BESSETTE: CES AUTRES PERSONNAGES QUI (S')ÉCRIVENT

Le roman québécois des années soixante apporte de profonds changements à la littérature québécoise. Comme l'écrit Gilles Marcotte,

le roman canadien-français a déjà conquis ses libertés essentielles, il approche de sa maturité. Dans la mesure où la société canadienne-française se structure et se diversifie, il n'est pas impossible qu'il prenne bientôt la relève de la poésie, comme le genre le plus apte à exprimer nos vérités. (*La littérature qui se fait*, 50)

Marcotte écrira en 1976 que les événements allaient lui donner tort et raison. Raison, puisque le roman monte en grade par rapport à la production poétique durant la décennie précédente; ne rappelons que quelques romanciers de cette décennie, tels Gérard Bessette, Jacques Godbout, Jacques Ferron, Hubert Aquin, Jacques Poulin. Par la suite, Marcotte s'arrête sur le mot maturité. Si la Révolution tranquille peut être prise pour un baccalauréat, pour un passage vers la maturité politique et socioculturelle de la nation, il n'en est rien du roman. Peut-on parler d'une maturité par rapport à un Réjean Ducharme, d'une Marie-Claire Blais ou d'un Jacques Poulin? Réjean Ducharme ne s'acharne-t-il pas tellement contre l'âge adulte et par la suite contre la maturité? Citons Marcotte encore une fois: « tout se passe chez eux, comme si le roman retombait en enfance » (*Le roman à l'imparfait*, 10). Et pourtant, nous constatons que d'un point de vue, le roman a mûri pendant les années cinquante au point d'être capable de cette production immense. S'agit-il là d'un paradoxe?

Dans le but de mieux rendre compte de cette question trop vaste, j'ai choisi un aspect particulier qui a retenu mon attention et qui pourra, comme je l'espère, ouvrir d'autres chemins et suggérer d'autres manières de recherche. Car on notera facilement à quel point les personnages des romans de cette période écrivent eux-mêmes. Les personnages de Bessette, de Ducharme, de Godbout, d'Aquin, de Marie-Claire Blais ont fréquemment la plume à la main. Il s'agit d'une écriture intradiégétique, emboîtée, insérée dans un roman par une mise en abyme littéraire du travail de l'écrivain; du travail, mais souvent aussi d'un projet d'écriture de l'auteur lui-même. Quelle est donc la distance que le personnage doit parcourir pour s'identifier à son auteur? Et quelle est la distance que l'auteur doit parcourir pour s'identifier à son personnage?

Parfois, loin d'être de simples scripteurs, les personnages de Bessette, de Ducharme, de Godbout, sans oublier Aquin, se donnent un projet d'écriture. Souvent, il s'agit d'un journal intime, mais leur idéal, c'est sans doute un roman parfait, achevé. En d'autres mots, un projet d'écriture mis en abyme qui peut être coréférentiel avec celui de l'auteur mais pas toujours.

Pour illustrer la problématique, j'ai choisi trois romans, *Le nez qui voque* de Réjean Ducharme, *Salut Galarneau* de Jacques Godbout et *Le Libraire* de Gérard Bessette. Chacun de ces romans est marqué par une présence plus ou moins visible du journal intime et surtout par un questionnement des rapports entre la création littéraire et par l'écriture du quotidien, des rapports entre l'écrivain et le personnage qui, l'un comme l'autre, écrivent.

Le fait de glisser la plume dans la main de son personnage est riche en conséquences mais aussi en enjeux. L'auteur remplace ou fait semblant de remplacer sa propre écriture par une autre écriture, celle de ses personnages. Ou mieux encore l'écriture de l'auteur est mise à distance et couverte par l'écriture du personnage. Les conditions et le contexte de cette écriture au second degré déterminent une série de potentialités: s'agit-il d'un roman autobiographique où le romancier se décrit lui-même en écrivant? D'un autre personnage? Ce personnage est-il intradiégétique ou extradiégétique à ce qu'il écrit par la suite? Quel est le thème de cette écriture? Est-ce encore l'écriture? Est-ce l'écriture du personnage? Ou bien, par contre, celle de l'auteur? Question assez simple: un personnage peut-il écrire un roman? Un roman au parfait? Une autre question légitime s'impose: L'écriture peut-elle mener du journal intime au roman en tant que modèle de perfection? Ces écritures, sont-elles identiques ou sont-elles vraiment autres? Quel est le chemin que les personnages sont obligés de parcourir avant de parvenir d'un brouillon de roman à un roman parfait?

Toutes ces questions mènent à un pacte de lecture. S'agit-il d'un pacte autobiographique classique? D'une fiction autobiographique? Ce contrat de lecture apporte un mode de lecture, tantôt plus facile, tantôt plus difficile, mais le désir de l'auteur peut même être établi de telle façon qu'il soit impossible de découvrir le mode de lecture véritable. Plus le récit est compliqué et structuré, plus difficilement ce pacte s'établit, par une série de négociations entre l'auteur et le lecteur, et plus l'auteur court le risque que le pacte ne s'établisse pas du tout.

Philippe Lejeune, qui a consacré une grande partie de sa recherche à l'autobiographie, a effectué également un travail sur le journal intime (même des recherches sur les journaux intimes qui se tiennent en ligne). Selon lui, le journal intime vrai et authentique est de par ses propriétés intrinsèques discontinu, lacunaire, il est caractérisé par le manque de communication, il est allusif, répétitif et non-narratif. Discontinu et lacunaire veut dire que l'on omet des tranches de la temporalité et des faits, allusif signifie que l'écriture sert de signe mnémorique à celui qui écrit, qui se dit « ainsi je me souviendrai du passé » – elle établit un système allusif de valeurs qui n'est familier qu'à celui qui écrit. Non-narratif, finalement – il n'est pas construit

comme un récit avec un début, un milieu et une fin – même s'il contient des éléments en commun avec le récit.

Nous reconnaissons sans peine que le genre du journal intime, comme il est décrit ici, est loin d'être l'incarnation du roman parfait, mais qu'il peut être en même temps au début et la fin de ce roman. Le journal intime est sans doute une métaphore, un des points de départ imaginaires du chemin qui mène à travers le « roman à l'imparfait » vers le roman achevé.

Où faut-il donc situer le journal intime du personnage, qui est à la fois un roman? C'est une question importante à laquelle je voudrais proposer une réponse. Les romans en question, sont-ils une sorte de « journal intime » de la littérature québécoise de cette période? S'agit-il, avec Laurent Mailhot, d'une autre langue ou d'une *parole autre*?

Il ne s'agit pas ici d'une autre langue que le français mais d'une *parole autre*. L'homme et le livre québécois disent autrement leur insertion dans le monde, leur désertion du monde. C'est plus qu'une nuance, qu'un accent, c'est une couleur, un discours, une écriture. (*Ouvrir le livre*, 117)

Et finalement, si le personnage est cet *autre* du romancier, qu'en est-il du lecteur, et qu'en est-il du roman québécois?

Au début de ce genre d'écriture se situerait donc le journal intime en tant que lieu privilégié de l'altérité du personnage par rapport à son auteur et de l'auteur par rapport à son lecteur. Plus tard, c'est une rencontre des tentatives de l'auteur et du personnage dans le roman à l'imparfait.

Quelque part entre le journal intime vrai et authentique et le roman parfait, on retrouve le roman à l'imparfait, le roman qui se fait, une autre écriture, qui peut l'être soit volontairement (souvenons-nous du *Prochain épisode* dont les séquences et les hésitations d'un roman « à mi-chemin » ne sont que feintes et qui ne sont que la surface d'une structure profonde et élaborée), soit involontairement, une ouverture vers l'écriture, automatiste, relâchée, ou simplement désintéressée. Pour situer le journal intime du personnage et le roman à l'imparfait dans les trois livres cités, trois moments me semblent essentiels – le pourquoi, cette raison d'être de l'écriture qui décide de l'existence du journal ou du livre, le *topos* de l'écriture; les épanchements de cette écriture vers d'autres significations; et dernièrement, la finalité/fin de l'écriture.

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En ce qui concerne les marques extérieures, visibles dans les trois romans, c'est *Le Libraire* qui se présente seul comme un journal portant à l'en-tête les dates des événements qui recouvrent la période du 10 mars au 10 mai. Les marques formelles dans deux autres romans sont représentées par l'insertion de poèmes à l'intérieur du journal, de petits extraits de journaux, de publicités, de lettres; avant tout, c'est l'aspect matériel du cahier qui est

accentué (chez Galarneau, le livre est divisé en deux grandes parties intitulées *Cahier Numéro Un* et *Cahier Numéro Deux*). Cet aspect matériel me semble très important du point de vue de la crédibilité de ce récit à l'imparfait – de nouveau, notons que nous ouvrons un livre imprimé et non un cahier, le cahier, même s'il avait existé, est soumis à l'empire de la presse, il existe donc un décalage entre l'écriture originale et l'écriture offerte au lecteur. De plus, le personnage, par sa décision d'écrire, imite l'intention d'écrire de l'auteur (mais pas forcément en même temps).

La raison d'écrire du Nez qui voque est assez particulière:

C'est le neuf septembre mille neuf cent soixante-cinq. Mais les hommes ont besoin des hommes, même de ceux qui sont morts. J'ai besoin des hommes. Je rédige cette chronique pour les hommes comme ils écrivent des lettres à leur fiancée. Je leur écris parce que je ne peux pas leur parler, parce que j'ai peur de m'approcher d'eux pour leur parler. (*Le Nez qui voque*, 12)

Nous constatons une différence possible entre la fonction communicative de la parole et celle de la littérature. A cause d'un mutisme oral, le mot écrit remplace paradoxalement la parole en tant que moyen de base de la communication, ce qui a des conséquences pour le roman. Ce qui est important, c'est que l'objectif de l'auteur peut coïncider avec l'objectif de Mille Milles. La raison d'écrire du Libraire est beaucoup plus banale, mais aussi radicale, allant contre les règles du journal intime: "Je n'ai pas commencé ce journal pour ressasser des souvenirs. Je l'ai entrepris pour tuer le temps le dimanche quand les tavernes sont fermées" (*Le Libraire*, 13).

Ici, la raison d'écrire va paradoxalement contre l'écriture de Bessette, qui, probablement, n'entreprend pas l'écriture pour « tuer le temps ». L'explication de François Galarneau ne manque pas d'intérêt non plus:

Depuis longtemps, je devais en avoir besoin, pour me vider, j'étais trop plein mais j'aurais pas osé. Non vraiment. Bien sûr, j'avais entendu parler d'un chauffeur de taxi qui avait publié, comme dans un roman, des aventures qui lui étaient arrivées avec son taxi. (*Salut Galarneau*, 26)

Un autre versant de cette écriture, comme nous découvrons plus tard dans l'intrigue, c'est que, partiellement, Galarneau a été manipulé dans ce rôle d'écrivain: "vous m'avez dit: ça va être drôle, ça va te distraire... Je ne moisiss pas des heures dans ce maudit cahier seulement pour vous amuser, stie!", écrit Galarneau (*Salut Galarneau*, 87).

La décision de tuer le temps est pareille, mais ne provient pas de Galarneau lui-même, mais de Marise et de Jacques, pour distraire le « petit frère ».

Nous constatons que l'entrée en écriture est préméditée chez Mille Milles. Cependant elle vient brusquement à la pensée de Jodoin (un peu plus loin il regrette de ne pas avoir commencé à écrire le journal plus tôt) et elle se



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prépare depuis longtemps chez Galarneau et c'est subitement comme une quasi-explosion que le besoin d'écrire se fait sentir chez lui.

Non moins fascinante se révoque la comparaison du *topos* auquel est lié l'acte d'écriture du roman. Si la décision d'écrire est caractérisée par un manque de contenu (au début, on sait *que* mais non *quoi* on va écrire), dans les trois romans en question, le lieu est choisi avec certitude, délimité et strictement gardé.

Dans le cas de Ducharme, les adolescents Mille Milles et Chateaugué ne quittent presque jamais leur refuge, leur appartement. La pire menace pour eux, c'est lorsque Chateaugué se fait renverser par une voiture et ils ne peuvent pas empêcher les adultes de pénétrer dans leur lieu intime, cet espace clos limité, qui est la métaphore de l'écriture. Le refus du monde des adultes, des automobiles, et des systèmes urbains témoignent d'un effacement, d'une fermeture devant le monde, parallèle à ce type d'écriture.

Jodoin ressemble à Mille Milles. Son *topos* n'est représenté que par la librairie, la taverne et sa chambre chez Rose Bouthiller. Ces trois lieux sont partagés par trois groupes de personnages qui ne se mêlent jamais entre eux: Rose, le patron et les vendeuses, et les clients au restaurant. Seule la chambre devient le lieu de l'écriture et ce n'est, sauf quelques exceptions, que le dimanche qu'elle s'accomplit. Une construction classique, admirablement dépouillée ici, correspond d'une façon remarquable à la banalité des lieux, des personnages et de l'atmosphère entière de Saint-Joachim.

Finalement, Galarneau a, lui aussi, son lieu d'écriture: il s'agit de son stand « Au roi du hot-dog », symbole de la société commerciale par excellence, mais aussi du mélange de l'anglais et du français et du danger que représente l'écriture allophone pour l'écriture québécoise.

Les trois personnages occupent des lieux bien définis et restreints pour écrire, mais il y a une différence: Galarneau est en contact perpétuel avec ses clients dans son stand, Jodoin est à mi-chemin: il a ses clients mais ils ne l'intéressent pas. Mille Milles, par contre, cherche l'isolation complète.

En deuxième lieu, et découlant de la raison d'écrire et du *topos*, l'acte d'écrire diffère de toutes les autres activités des personnages parce qu'il imite l'écrivain du livre et par la suite prend des dimensions symboliques: la décision d'écrire, de devenir écrivain, d'entrer dans le domaine de l'écriture, influence l'intrigue du livre, mais elle est aussi symbolique et métaphorique. Sans la ville, il n'y aurait point de roman urbain, mais sans l'écriture, il n'y a point de livre, quel que soit ce livre.

Une fois installée dans le roman par la décision d'écrire, l'écriture s'épanouit et gagne du terrain. Dans *Le nez qui voque*, la question complexe de la mort est profondément liée à l'écriture: non seulement l'écriture s'arrête avec la mort de Chateaugué, mais en fin de compte c'est un journal intime de la mort, avec le projet d'écrire avant de mourir, les deux héros s'étant promis de se

suicider (et trouvant le mot de la mort « se branle-basser » au hasard dans un autre livre, le dictionnaire). Elle est exprimée aussi par une symbolique visuelle: Mille Milles et Chateaugué se maquillant les lèvres en noir par de l'encre et décidant de ne pas enlever ce maquillage avant de mourir, et tout un réseau de significations est lié au concept nelliganien de la pureté, de l'enfance et du papier vierge que l'écriture salit.

Un motif analogue de l'écriture considérée comme une saleté apparaît chez Godbout: "Stie. J'ai déjà terminé un cahier. Je devrais peut-être jeter tout ça à la poubelle avec les épiluchures" (Salut Galarneau, 91). Et le libraire finalement, ricanant de sa manière typiquement ironique, souligne l'aspect matériel du livre: "Je lui déclarai que les livres brûlaient moins longtemps que le charbon mais que, faute d'autre combustible, il arrivait de m'en servir" (Le Libraire, 21). Le vide, la saleté et l'espace restreint décrits ci-dessus se rencontrent dans l'espace symbolique. De nouveau, l'écriture est ramenée à son état inaccompli, aux notes de l'homme du peuple, à son journal intime.

La multitude d'exemples portant sur l'écriture, le livre et le personnage-écrivain témoignent d'une réflexion profonde qui a lieu non seulement dans les romans en question, mais au sein de toute la littérature québécoise de cette période. Par le roman à l'imparfait, les écrivains-personnages aspirent à la création d'un idéal du roman, d'un roman « parfait ».

Malgré la diversité apparente qui sépare les ouvrages en question, il y a, à mon avis, un commun aspect symbolique important qui les lie. La fin du livre apporte une rupture radicale avec ce qui la précède: le libraire fait transporter et vendre les livres à Montréal par un geste cynique et anti-héroïque, Galameau retrouve le concept de vécrire et Chateaugué se tue. Ce geste symbolique de la fin coïncide avec la finalité du roman, un geste coïncidant avec le roman « parfait » par où le journal intime se mue finalement en roman.

Car ils se révoltent tous, chacun d'une drôle de manière, mais c'est tout de même une révolte de la parole (minuscule) contre la Parole (majuscule), de la parole de quelqu'un d'insignifiant contre la parole officielle, celle des adultes, des automobilistes et des autorités urbaines, de l'Eglise et de la petite ville, ou de l'institution littéraire. Comme le dit Gilles Marcotte:

L'écriture du personnage rentre par ce geste dans le creuset d'une autre vision du monde qui semble caractérisée en première instance par le flou, l'indéterminé, l'im-parfait. Or, quand nous rêvions d'une maturité romanesque, du « grand roman de la maturité », n'était-ce pas à la première vision du monde que nous nous référions, à la forme classique, conquérante du roman occidental? ... Ils nous parlent différemment parce qu'ils nous parlent d'un autre monde. (*Le roman à l'imparfait*, 250)

Il semble alors que ce n'est pas dans l'acception « inachevé » du terme qu'il faut chercher la substance de ces écrits, mais plutôt dans ce qui est délibérément inachevé ou ramené à l'état inachevé. Si je suis un auteur, c'est

donc l'écriture d'un autre, à savoir de mon personnage, qui me permet d'établir cet espace nécessaire à deux niveau où je peux construire le roman à l'imparfait.

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“OTHERNESS IN CANADIAN ARCHITECTURE”:  
A CENTURY OF CANADIAN ARCHITECTURE

My presentation intends to give an idea about otherness in Canadian architecture in the last century.

There are as many ways to view architecture as there are approaches to its practice. The ideal of this presentation it is to open a number of windows onto the architecture of the last century, in some instances to invite fresh observations of buildings now taken for granted as masterpieces from another time, in others to elicit a second look at structures so integral to everyday life that they seem to exist only as featureless facilities, and in yet other instances to shed light on buildings so recent that it may be difficult to see them yet as signposts of a period in our architectural history.

There are so many notable omissions. Although such a poll could never be comprehensive or fully representative, a handful of neglected projects are worth mentioning.

Over the last hundred years architects' outlooks on the nature of their work have formed, shifted and reformed; the public view of architecture has undergone stages of acceptance, bafflement, as well as episodes of intense involvement and interest. There are also some notable omissions. Although such a poll could never be comprehensive or fully representative, a handful of neglected projects are worth mentioning.

To underline that this is not a historical survey, the selected projects are grouped in five sections: *Mainstreet*, *Public Visions*, *Space of Industry*, *Domestic Realm*, *Ritual Space*.

Admittedly, the 1889-1989 time-frame is just that: a limit to the window through which thirty-five examples of architecture, some well-known, some all but forgotten, might be seen.

Notably, while this time-frame corresponds to the first century, it bears mention that it is not the first hundred years of architecture, nor is it a history of architecture in Canada. Architecture existed before the establishment of an organized profession: it was carried out earlier in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by architects such as John G. Howard and Frederick William Cumberland, who moved to Ontario after an architectural apprenticeship in England, and by resident architects such as William George Storm, who gained architectural

training in Ontario as a contractor before apprenticeship with English-born architect William Thomas.

The first section, called *Mainstreet*, acknowledges that much of the underlying character of Ontario towns and cities - and consequently of Ontario architecture derives from their organization about a primary roadway, with its sidewalks, stores, and often special vernacular conditions. *Public visions* is the label given to the second group of projects, works of architecture created by public agencies for the public good, in the understanding that architectural merit and a resulting public enjoyment count for a great deal within the definition of that good. *Space of industry* collects a number of buildings, including an entire company town, within a third group to view how architecture transforms and arises from the most utilitarian of requirements. The *Domestic realm* looks at the most intimate and the most immediate of architectural spaces, the houses and housing complexes commissioned for private habitation. The final section is called *Ritual space* and is of necessity a functionally eclectic assembly of buildings, gardens, campuses and squares where social aspirations for cultural ritual are accommodated and where the architectural image registers most accurately with an image of the society for which it has been envisioned.

An expedient chronological arrangement of projects within the five thematic sections reveals a fragmentary history that lends some focus to an otherwise bewildering collage. The period 1889-1918 contains in embryo many of the characteristics, and presages many of the contradictory impulses, of the architecture of the next hundred years. Urban life by the turn of the century was well-established: paved roads and sidewalks had begun to replace the board walks common in Canadian towns; a more continuous streetscape prevailed; brick and stone, originally reserved for important public buildings, came into more common use. A denser urban fabric and more permanent forms of construction were the confident dual expressions of a culture in process of maturation, and for which mere survival and settlement were no longer pressing issues.

Architectural styles had been in evidence since the beginning of the nineteenth century in Canada, and a great stylistic variety was in evidence by 1889. Many styles reviving earlier architectural periods, such as Renaissance Revival, Classical Revival, neo-Gothic, and Richardsonian Romanesque were simultaneously in use by the turn of the century. A strong preference for the ruggedly picturesque effects of styles like Romanesque Revival - witness an example such as Toronto's Victoria College (1891) ([PHOTO 3](#)) - vied for corporate and institutional patronage with the codified orders and ornamentation of Classical Revival buildings like Darling & Pearson's design for General Motors' Canadian magnate, Colonel Samuel McLaughlin, the house and garden known today as Parkwood (1917).

The oscillation between styles was not originally a hostile condition, or even a case of fickleness of taste. In the example of the Kingston Waterworks Company, a rather plain stone building erected in 1849 as a pump house to

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serve Kingston's City Hall, Market Square and its several fire hydrants, was expanded in 1890 by local architect Joseph Power. Power was invited to modify the earlier structure to accommodate large up-to-date water pumps; in the process, he applied new facades that gave a sense of architecture to what had originally been a merely functional building. As a matter of federal public works policy, the post offices across the province were designed as distinctive local landmarks in a sturdily Romanesque idiom; the post office at Arnprior (1896) is only one example of dozens of custom designs. Driven by a simultaneous understanding of the efficiency of large-scale steel frame construction and the customers' taste for elaborate ornamentation, Robert Simpson commissioned a design for his Yonge Street department store (1895) that clad state-of-the-art structural technology with intricate terra cotta casting.

Architect Eden Smith chose a modestly detailed neo-Tudor style to give cottage scale to the necessarily extensive exterior walls of the Bain Avenue Apartments (1914), designed for working class tenants. In commissions such as these, style was the sign of the enactment of architecture, the assignment of a higher symbolic purpose to an otherwise mundane structure.

The period 1919-1945 coincides with an era of intense cultural and social transition. The burgeoning urban populations of the first decade of the twentieth century engendered a wave of civic improvements, from sidewalk pavings and street widenings to new municipal bridges and utilities. The number of cars in use in the City of Toronto had increased over forty-fold between 1911 and 1928. With increased mobility came congestion; planning as a municipal function separate from Public Works was established in the 1930's in response.

The architectural consequences of this intense transition were profound. Arguably, the finest Modern architecture created in Ontario - and some of the most monumental municipal institutions - date from the Depression years, when traditional construction practices, cheap and plentiful manpower and a persistent taste for evident craftsmanship were applied to the emerging functionalist aesthetic.

The collaboration of architects with municipal engineers on a number of government-sponsored projects gave rise to a new architectural vocabulary of combination: masonry, previously used to cover the hitherto unsightly structural and mechanical workings of buildings, combined with steel in newly visible ways. Whereas Joseph Power's brick facade provided an opaque slipcover concealing and dignifying the Kingston pump house, Thomas Pomphrey's design for the R.C. Harris Water Filtration Plant (1929) in Scarborough offers major vistas and myriad details where stone combines with steel to promote an aesthetic celebrating the very act of support and attachment. This aesthetic of combined structure-and-ornament was particularly appropriate to the era between the wars. The need for comprehensive new facilities gave rise to an interest in combining diverse

activities within a single complex, not merely to create institutions that would be giant in scale, but whose totality would be perceived as functionally progressive. Within a unified neo-Gothic building, Hart House (1919) on the University of Toronto campus combined features of the traditional Oxford or Cambridge college - dining hall, music room, library, chapel, and studies - with the YMCA's most up to date athletic facilities. In the gymnasium, exercise and pool facilities, masonry volumes modelled after classical precedents are filled in with lightweight metal fittings, thus accommodating the running tracks, spectator balconies and other inevitable athletic apparatus of a burgeoning modernity. The Timmins Daily Press Building (1940) ([PHOTO 6](#)) combined Roy Thompson's first newspaper and radio station: the radio station was housed in a masonry building topped by an elegantly tapered steel antenna; the newspaper was housed in a lower building crowned by a square clock. The newspaper and radio station buildings are fused together through a stepped, curving form evocative of the streamlined radio consoles of the day. Architects, like painters of the period between the wars, were increasingly concerned with creating work authentic to its regional origin. Throughout Lawren Harris' house (1930), conceived as a studio-home for the Harris family and as a showcase for many of his large canvases, metalwork details reiterate a stylized pine-needle motif inspired by the painter's northern Ontario landscapes. John Lyle's 1935 additions and renovations to Parkwood (1917), particularly in the east garden wall and a lavishly appointed suite of rooms for the automobile magnate's own use, presage the streamlined forms, lightened colour palette, and chromed metal of General Motors' evolving car designs. Built for a wide range of public functions, the R.C. Harris Filtration Plant (1930), ([PHOTO 4](#)) the Dominion Public Building (1936) in London, ([PHOTO 7](#)) the Bank of Canada (1938), and Oakes Garden Theatre (1938) in Niagara Falls have in common the use of highly stylized, extremely well-crafted ornament; in all cases, ornamentation and commissioned sculpture are applied, usually through a process of architect / artist collaboration, to make reference to local industries, vegetation or natural features. Although the revival of historical architectural styles was still in use for many religious and domestic commissions, such as the Basilica of Christ the King (1931) in Hamilton, most of the important public institutions had already espoused the new architecture of the Modern Movement. That architecture, however was in process of being fastidiously crafted to adapt it to a great variety of local conditions.

The next generation of Ontario architecture, roughly 1946 to 1965, was a sustained exploration of the sculptural characteristics of new forms that had arisen, particularly as a result of developing steel and concrete construction technology. In place of the time-consuming collaborations, the carefully researched and exquisitely crafted ornamentations of the period between the wars came a sense of urgency and expediency. The industrial aesthetic, no longer a process of stylish and stylized carving or balconies applied to a monumental masonry fundament, became an end unto itself; the very practice



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of architecture was industrialized. The practice of John B. Parkin Associates, modeling itself after American mainstream mega-firm Skidmore Owings and Merrill, grew to truly industrial scale with a staff of some 200. Partners and administrative personnel occupied offices in a compact one-story building clad with glazed white bricks, while design architects and drafts-men worked (concealed behind a curtain-wall of dark glass) in long rows under the exposed steel joists of Parkin's suburban office, a building that anticipated the demands of dozens of post-war corporations for suburban plant and office complexes with startling acuity.

A building's structural skeleton was its prime form-giver, and despite contemporary prejudices against the famous steel-and-glass box, yielded an impressive variety of forms. In Sault Sainte Marie, the Memorial Garden Arena's (1948) curved front, cylindrical tower with faceted lantern, and swooping lobby terrazzo patterns reiterate the vast arc established by steel trusses spanning the skating rink. Typical of so many innovative and elegant private houses of the period, the Moses Residence's (1959) steel post and beam frame is set in studied opposition to the random tracery of birch trees all the jagged ravine profile of its Hamilton site. The black steel roof truss of Ottawa's Union Station (1967), carried by concrete columns, thrusts out over a grassy knoll in suburban Ottawa, covering the passenger drop-off, the enclosed station concourse, and the quays in a single gesture. Walls and floors are light-coloured and detailed to recede visually, as if floating free of the structure so as to restate the power of the giant steel canopy. Exploiting the plasticity of concrete, Viljo Revell's design for a new City Hall for Toronto (1965) ([PHOTO 2](#)) begins with the warped walls of the office buildings and the flattened dome covering the Council Chamber. The warp is used not as a complete form, but as a segment of a curve, expressed in the detailing of marble fragments set into the scalloped backs of the office buildings. However the impulse to separate functions and the forms that house them, rather than to hybridize as earlier, sets the post-war period apart historically.

As always, the history of the recent past is the most difficult to understand. We do not, unless inspired by the occasion of a major anniversary, step back to see in our present age the clear features of a discernable period. We see rather the family resemblances that have descended through the professional links of individual architects, the practices they have worked for and the partnerships subsequently formed. We perceive the dissonance of rival descendants, for the lessons of the past are rarely absorbed with universality. In our apparently unsettled eclecticism, it is tempting to recognize the turn of the century's struggle between Classical and Romanesque characteristics.

On one hand, the rebellion against the post-war's certain separation of city from suburb, of housing from commercial or industrial uses, of structure from skin has produced the persistent counter-approach of the infill strategy. Buildings like the Barton Myers house (1970), the Residence for the Mentally

Handicapped (1978), even the mega structures Eaton Centre (1981) and Waterloo's William Davis Computer Centre (1988), act as jigsaw pieces filling in the gaps left by modern planning with its erratic demolition and selective conservation, restoring the continuity long associated with Ontario towns. The urge to rebuild the traditional mainstreet fabric is most clearly expressed in Piccaluga Architect's proposals for the Supportive Housing Coalition (1989); on three different urban sites, the proposed rental apartment buildings have been designed to appear much like the individually owned houses that fronted the street a century ago. Despite a growing consensus about the merits of traditional urban forms, highly sculpted buildings like Trent University's Champlain College (1967) [PHOTO 1](#) or the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Transport Workers (1974) exult in their relative isolation.

The idiom of Modern Architecture has become a valid revival style in its own right: the new frontispiece of the Armstrong Plant and Office (1988) in Scarborough makes knowing reference to a German shoe factory designed by pioneer modernist Walter Gropius, while remedying the suburban anonymity of the post-war building to which it has been appended. A concern for regional authenticity animates the Harbour Marina (1988) in Parry Sound, ([PHOTO 5](#)) but this small pavilion - distinct from the stylized synthesis of such public utilities between the wars - holds out each material panel by panel, in obvious appreciation of their different qualities and values.

Architects a hundred years ago searched for ways to adapt their imported styles to the new world; they saw the streets and municipal services around their buildings as part of a concerted transformation of an inchoate landscape. The work they began and the work that has followed it remains very largely to be documented and understood.

The drawings and photographs that were commissioned for this exhibition, and that are recorded in the following plates, attempt to read the evolving characteristics of our architectural legacy, and for that reason are often analytical and partial views. In what may be seen as a return to the first half of the century's architectural collaborations with the allied arts, the work of the architects, artists, and photographers who have participated in this exhibition is meant to allow a broad audience to view diverse examples of architecture. No attempt has been made to glamorize the condition of the buildings; the underlying intention of the drawings and photographs is to reveal, so that others might form their own viewpoints of the buildings, developments and towns selected.



photo 1

Champlain College, Trent University, 1967

Thompson Berwick

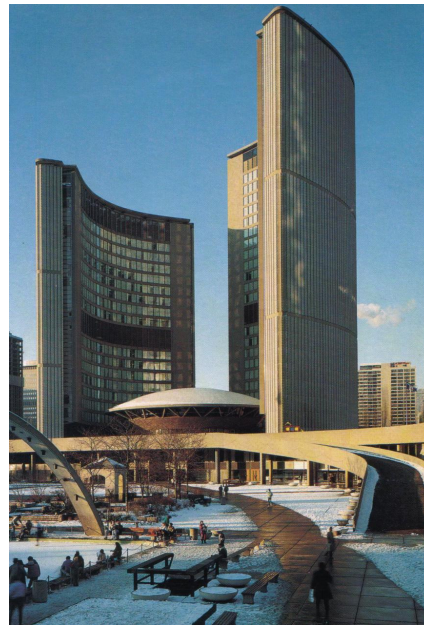


photo 2

Toronto City Hall, 1898/1965

Viljo Ravell



photo 3

Victoria University, Toronto, 1891

William G. Storm



photo 4

R. C. Harris Filtration Plant, Toronto, 1929/1952

Thomas Pomphrey



photo 5

Houbour Marina Building, Parry Sound, 1988

Natale Scott Brown



photo 6

The Daily Press and Radio Building, Timmins, 1940 Sheppard & Masson



PHOTO 7

Domion Public Building, London, 1936Watt & Blackwell

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**GAMES PEOPLE PLAY TOO MUCH – THE SCHMIER  
GAME IN ROBERT KROETSCH’S *WHAT THE CROW SAID***

In Robert Kroetsch's *What the Crow Said* hero Gus Liebhaber almost enters politics. He wants to represent Big Indian, a town in the “Municipality of Bigknife,” which lies “ambiguously on the border between the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan; no one [...] had ever been able to locate conclusively where the boundaries were supposed to be” (Kroetsch, 1978, 36).<sup>1</sup> Even the time zone is unsettled, with residents bickering over whether “Mountain Standard” or “Mountain Daylight Time” applies (111f). It is, says Kroetsch, “a real community in our imaginations” (Twigg, 111). Liebhaber has an original campaign platform: a vote for him means, “[n]o one will ever have to work again” (143). This brings up the question of what people will do instead of working. Will Liebhaber leads the residents back to Eden from ‘in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread...’?

The question is moot because Liebhaber does not win the election. ‘Thank God,’ some would say. For this is the same Liebhaber who initiates a game of ‘schmier’ – a card game similar to euchre or *skat* – that lasts without interruption for months and leaves the players “more corpses than men” (125f). In a classic survival farce, what begins as a harmless game of cards before Sunday dinner turns into ferocious gambling that carries the players to the brink of hypothermia and starvation. The card game slinks along for exactly 151 days, and for 151 days the men neglect their duties, ignore work, forgo sex and family life, and devote themselves entirely, irrationally, to the petty play and slim stakes of schmier. This paper will examine that schmier game as desire to escape from real life with all its dangers by moving into a type of play that is an absurdly reductive, entirely masculine, travesty of play.

Kroetsch’s merciless parody of a bunch of men getting together to play poker, drink a few beers and get away from the women shows that this very masculine image of play is not all it’s cracked up to be. The so-called magical realm of play turns into dangerous extravagance as these small-time gamers take things too far by becoming compulsive gamblers. By immersing themselves completely in the game, by identifying entirely with the game and

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<sup>1</sup> Subsequent references to *What the Crow Said* will appear solely as page references.

their one-dimensional roles therein, the players lose the free choice commonly associated with play; they are given over to the imperative of addiction. They forget why people play. Liebhaber and his cohorts no longer participate because they *want to* but because of an external: 'Thou shalt play!' (Cf. Huizinga). In their longing to avoid responsibility, the players find themselves accountable only to the game. The strange coincidence, one that makes concrete the idea of a specifically masculine play, is that all of the men become addicts at the same time.<sup>2</sup> For one-third of *What the Crow Said* being a schmier-addict and being male are one and the same.

The humour of the schmier game springs from the idealized notion of play as an escape from real life and real concerns, as though time stops when we are at play. Where in other works Kroetsch parodies the male quest,<sup>3</sup> here he pokes fun at what he regards a male desire to escape into a specific form of play, namely competitive games. After all, running towards play is akin to hopping on a horse and fleeing, being on the male side of the "Masculine: feminine. [...] Motion: stasis" binary (Kroetsch, 1989, 76).<sup>4</sup> But just what, we might ask, are Gus Liebhaber and his friends moving away from? Liebhaber is a troubled man, troubled by a fear of death, the alphabet, and the very maternal Tiddy Lang, whom he loves and desperately wants to marry. His human essence and occupation fuel his fears, for in addition to being mortal Liebhaber is a typesetter by trade. The effect is of a cruel vocation, a attraction to a profession that suits his terror. In addition, the name 'Liebhaber', of course, is the German for 'lover.' This traces for the reader a strange animal indeed: a celibate 'Liebhaber' who is therefore not living up to his name, and a typesetter who fears the alphabet.

The problem with the alphabet for Liebhaber is not so much its existence as its order and stasis in our minds. It is not so much "terror at the domestication of those free, beautiful letters - no, it was the absurdity of their recited order

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<sup>2</sup> Playing cards is obviously not an essentially masculine activity, rather it is rendered such by the exclusion of the women. The card game in the novel is thus in keeping with Kroetsch's essay "Fear of Women in Prairie Fiction" There he laments a male/female division, citing "a world where the most pleasurable activities – hunting, fishing, drinking, swearing, athletics, story-telling and work – are homo-erotic" and the rarity of occasions when the two sexes can come together (Kroetsch, 1989, 79).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Thomas; Hutcheon; Davey; Brown. Diane Tiefensee argues that – parody or not – Kroetsch's "basic theme is the quest of the hero" and that his thought as a whole "can never accomplish the subversion ascribed to it [...]" (Tiefensee, 6).

<sup>4</sup> It should be made clear that such binaries were a matter of admonishment, not belief. Though Kroetsch maintains "it's pretty human to think in binaries [...], if we make the binaries too rigid we get into trouble, and the West that I was criticizing [in the essay "Fear of Women in Prairie Fiction"] had [...] made them very rigid, especially in matters of gender" (Sellery, 25). This line of criticism continues in *What the Crow Said*.



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that afflicted him: ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ..." (Kroetsch, 1989, 69). With the wooden blocks that are the tools of his trade, Liebhaber literally rearranges the alphabet:

He tried, with the twist of a wrist, to turn an M into a W. Failing at that, he turned a T upside down; but he could read it as easily upside down as upright. He poured another shot of rye... (Kroetsch, 1989, 54).

Liebhaber longs to "disentangle himself from the tyranny of rote" that is the alphabet, usually by escaping through drink (Kroetsch, 1989, 69). Once, when "passed out in the can of the beer parlour," he finds the strength to say "Gutenberg did this to me" (Kroetsch, 1989, 115). Gutenberg who through the invention of movable type had "made all memory of the past irrelevant", Gutenberg who had spayed subjective experience, including its resultant narratives in flux, with the dead authority of the Written Word<sup>5</sup> (Kroetsch, 1989, 68). In contrast to Liebhaber, Tiddy Lang is not disturbed by Gutenberg or the alphabet's order. On one occasion she sneaks into Liebhaber's apartment and aligns the wooden blocks with the fastidiousness of a schoolteacher responsible for the three R's. Such diverging attitudes to the ABC's reflect a "male/female division [that] approaches self-parody" (Thomas, 102) even while fitting into the absurdly reductive 'motion: stasis' binary outlined above.

Liebhaber and the other men of Big Indian retreat to a safe world, away from the wives and would-be wives, as they shelter themselves in the make-believe bubble of play. Cards and life are both unpredictable games of chance, but the former are far from 'the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.' Though both the next hand and what lies around the corner for us are similarly unpredictable, the consequences in a game of schmier are relatively minor. Furthermore, the card player may not know which cards will come up next, but s/he does know the rules of the game. Schmier is like life because you do not know what will happen next, but unlike life in that the 'what-could-happen' is far more limited, and should have no consequences beyond the card table. To borrow from Kroetsch himself, there is often a bewilderment "when we are in a game but don't know the rules and so we have to make up a set of operative rules just to function a bit. Life or art is an attempt to discover the rules as you go along" (Neuman, Wilson [eds.], 74). Against this

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<sup>5</sup> Thus Liebhaber neatly fits Linda Hutcheon's observation that the men in Kroetsch's fiction are "are print-oriented, [and] therefore maimed and destroyed by their need to imprint themselves in a visual manner on their place and time" (Hutcheon, 54). Similarly, Stan Fogel points out a "doom in language, which frustrates all of Kroetsch's central characters [...]" (Fogel, 234). The word-fearing Liebhaber is unique in his paranoid *awareness* of the implications of print and "Gutenberg's vast design" (115).

sort of bewilderment, schmier offers Liebhaber clear rules and guidelines, a comfortable centre. Kroetsch thus confronts the reader with a further irony of Liebhaber's escaping to a game-world. If Liebhaber disdains or even fears the 'tyranny of rote,' the 'absurdity' of the alphabet's strict order, then the attraction of play's laxness is obvious. But by running to a card game, Liebhaber simply trades one rigid system for another – for while play is a rather open concept indicating freedom and physical or mental movement, a card game is in some ways the essence of limitation. Schmier, poker and even solitaire are as rule-bound as an income tax form. If the dealer refuses to distribute the correct number of cards, or if a player refuses to follow the correct playing order, then there can be no game. Dealer and player might be playing, fooling or horsing around, but neither has honoured the rules that constitute the game of schmier.

In his lengthy interview on the topic of games in *Labyrinths of Voice*, Kroetsch observes, "[i]t's interesting that we play the game, isn't it? [...] The two words contradict each other [because] play resists the necessary rules of the game" (Neuman, Wilson [eds.], 50; Kroetsch's italics). Though play itself resists definition, it commonly entails volition, enjoyment, an 'as-if' quality, frivolity, and movement (of body, mind or imagination) – in short, a whisper of freedom. In contradistinction to spontaneous 'play,' games are more regulated and organized (Cf. Caillois, 1967). Organization and regulation are somewhat contrary to the freedom commonly associated with play. Indeed, such arbitrarily imposed rules parallel the arbitrary, yet necessary signs of the alphabet that so torment Liebhaber.

In order to investigate further Liebhaber's inconsistent approach to rules, order and schmier, a few more philosophical regards of play and games are in order. In the words of the Dutch historian Johann Huizinga play "proceeds within certain limits of time and space, in a visible order, according to rules freely accepted, and outside the sphere of necessity or material utility" (Huizinga, 154). In this rather idealized view, the world of play is an intrinsic, separate 'magic circle' that is neatly divided from real world motivations and concerns. Starting to a great extent where Huizinga left off, Bernard Suits concentrates on the more specific issue of "What is a Game?" and concludes, that:

To play a game is to engage in activity directed toward bringing about a specific state of affairs, using only means permitted by specific rules, where the means permitted by the rules are more limited in scope than they would be in the absence of the rules, and where the sole reason for accepting such limitation is to make possible such activity (Suits, 148).

In other words, we accept the rules of the game only in order to be able to play that game. The rules are therefore constitutive, the *raison d'être* of the game. Furthermore, for play to 'fulfill its purpose' the player has to become 'lost' in play, or caught up in the 'flow' of the game; certainly the case in *What the Crow Said* (Cf. Huizinga). Here the problem is not engaging with

the game – that is, entering the play world, or being taken over with by make-believe world – the problem is the inability to exit. Liebhaber quits the game at least 128 times, only to crawl meekly back to its bidding (119). For Huizinga, play depends on freedom as imperative play is no longer play, linked as it is to necessity. Thus, with their gambling addiction having overcome their free will, the *Schmierers* are no longer *playing* in the intransitive, positive sense of the word. Nevertheless, they are playing a game, in the diluted, one-dimensional way that a gambling addict ‘plays the ponies’ or ‘plays blackjack.’

The marathon schmier contest lasts months, occupies the middle third of the novel and plays itself out in four places: Tiddy Lang’s house; bachelor Isador Heck’s tarpaper shack; the dark, frigid basement of the local church; and John Skandl’s granary before ending with a whimper where it all began, at Tiddy Lang’s house.

### 1) Tiddy Lang’s House

The gambling begins rather spontaneously just before dinner one Sunday at Tiddy Lang’s when the narrator glibly states “it was the inadequacy of truth” that started it (Kroetsch, 1989, 76). The game realm is entirely a male domain and no normal women are allowed to play – not that they care to. Tiddy Lang, boss of the house, object of Liebhaber’s affections, and the mother of six nubile daughters, at first endorses the game for two reasons: “She felt it was a time of year when farmers should take a few hours off” (Kroetsch, 1989, 84). Furthermore, even as the game continues without pause for weeks, Tiddy approves, for despite “all the strain she was putting on her pantry, [she] expected to find at least one husband” (Kroetsch, 1989, 85).

Things get out of hand:

For four weeks they’d been playing on her dining room table. Day and night they played, ignoring the weather, ignoring time, family, duty, season; ignoring everything but their one passion (Kroetsch, 1989, 90).

Liebhaber et al naively believe they are secure from death (the ultimate, unavoidable, if ‘inadequate,’ truth!), and the time that marches us towards it, in the womb of play. They have abused one of Huizinga’s conditions of play, namely that it have a limited spatial and temporal realm, and have allowed the fantasy world to take over their lives.

After Old Lady Lang sits in for a hand or two,<sup>6</sup> and tells a few fortunes based on the schmier hands, the men escape. Her terrifying double fortune to Liebhaber is “You’re going to die of love” and “You’re going to die in this house” (Kroetsch, 1989, 93). Her using the cards of male escape to prophesy precisely that which they want to evade adds irony to irony. This excess of irony underlines the futility of the men’s desire to avoid death by reminding the reader that playing against death is fatuous as death can penetrate the protective bubble of any game. The men do not want to acknowledge this truism and immediately distance themselves from Tiddy’s cosy abode.

### Isador Heck’s Tarpaper Shack

They flee to Isador Heck’s shack, the floor of which has never been swept by this “most eligible” and philosophical bachelor (Kroetsch, 1989, 76). Heck is the ultimate sceptic, believing in nothing; dust *might* exist, but that is no reason for believing you can actually see it. Since he truly lives his philosophy, his filthy hovel is the polar opposite of Tiddy Lang’s maternal domicile, lacking as well her plentiful pantry and creative cuisine. Things are not very comfortable at Heck’s shack: “By dawn of the second day, most of the men had diarrhoea from the bad water and the sandwiches made of green bologna” (Kroetsch, 1989, 97). The game continues with a trade, a Faustian bargain perhaps: bad food, poor hygiene, but no women or harbingers of death around. In their attempt to avoid being smothered by domesticity, the men risk death by malnutrition and soon “the stench of death spread through the shack itself” (97). Despite their rapidly deteriorating condition, the men cannot smell their own mortality.

Eventually a rumour whispers that one of Tiddy’s daughters is to marry “for love,” shocking to the men since “no person in the municipality, ever, [...] had married for love” (Kroetsch, 1989, 100). This wild possibility breaks up the game, or at least changes its location. Like the dust in Heck’s shack, love *might* exist, but “[t]he men didn’t believe it. They had to go see for themselves” (100). On leaving the shack, Eddie Brausen, the youngest player with the keen insight of the naïve eye points out what the game is really about by asking:

“We’re surrendering, aren’t we?”  
 “Surrender?” Liebhaber said. “To what?”  
 “To the women.”  
 “Never” (101)

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<sup>6</sup> Old Lady Lang sits in while men leave to relieve themselves; not a regular, she is merely an *ersatz* player, one who escapes the masculine/feminine binary established by the men of Big Indian by being a crone.

Here we see that the card game is doubly agonistic, doubly competitive. The men may be competing at cards amongst themselves, but as a whole they *believe* they are playing against the women. The foolishness, and what the men refuse to see, is that the women are not interested in schmier. As Peter Thomas writes, even before the schmier game begins, “the worlds of men and women are [already] fatally separated [as] Tiddy and her six daughters inhabit hearth and home, while the men come in from outdoors only for food and marriage [...]” (Thomas, 101). The gamesters are keenly aware of the separation, but mistake its consequences. Being ‘separated’ is hardly the same thing as agonistic, for gaming competition cannot take place unless both parties agree to play the game. The us-against-them thinking is therefore vacuous, about as meaningful as ‘beating’ an imaginary brother at solitaire.

### **The Basement of the Church of the Final Virgin**

They travel to the church to witness this marriage of love, gravitating immediately to the dark, unfinished basement to play schmier. While not quite the catacombs, the backdrop is gruesome and dreary enough to invite the comparison and corresponding aura of death. A new player arrives, the government's hangman, and the game is played with new fervour and purpose: “A man's life was at stake. [...] Unless the hangman himself failed to keep the appointment” (Kroetsch, 1989, 106). It seems one of the Lang daughters enjoyed writing passionate letters to Jerry Lapanne, a man on death row. This caused difficulties for the prison because, burning with epistolary desire, the condemned man kept trying to escape. Marvin Straw, the hangman, had arrived hoping to see the condemned man's pen pal betrothed (in the event, he has the wrong Lang daughter). The card players decide they have to keep Straw playing for three days.

They succeed: “At six o'clock in the morning, at the exact moment when Jerry Lapanne was scheduled to be [...] hanged, the sleeping citizens of Big Indian heard [a] perverse [...] ululation [...]” (Kroetsch, 1989, 111). The reason for the cry? A ghost has joined the game, namely Tiddy Lang's first and deceased husband. Not only have they saved Jerry Lapanne from hanging, they have apparently resurrected Martin Lang and seated him at the card table:

Who first saw Martin Lang's two smashed legs, bent oddly away from the knees [...] was never determined. Why all those stooped and spent men *reacted in unison*, at what signal they found their common fear and terror, remained a mystery (111; my emphasis).

The men, already uneasy with the prospect of death, do not react well to this ghostly apparition. Much self-soiling, and further, more active attempts at purgation and oblivion ensue. Like Liebhaber, who had sought the bottle as an antidote to the alphabet's tyranny, the

card players were men totally without hope. Their condition was infectious: by eight o'clock in the evening, every white adult male in the municipality was hell-bent on getting blind drunk (113).

Though the game is temporarily broken up by this bacchanalian behaviour, it does not bring the men closer to the women since the beer parlour is strictly off-limits for the women of Big Indian. Liebhaber, passed out in the facilities, blames Gutenberg. He has a vision: "only the future, and that just barely, was free of Gutenberg's vast design" (Kroetsch, 1989, 116). He predicts that John Skandl, Tiddy's current husband and therefore Liebhaber's foil, who had left the municipality in hopes of getting roads built as a politician, will return "to the assistance of his beleaguered people" (116). Reason enough to resume the card game in...

### **John Skandl's Old Granary**

The game resumes with a new purpose. If previously they were playing to save the life of a condemned man, they now play for the economic and 'moral' redemption of the community. One condition of play has already been violated, namely their ignoring of the temporal limits that play should possess; now comes another violation. By regarding the game as a means to monetary ends, the card players forget that play should be, as cited, "outside the sphere of necessity or material utility"<sup>7</sup> (Huizinga, 154): "Skandl would arrive soon. He'd be the richest and rashest player ever. Their finely honed card skills would make them all winners" (Kroetsch, 1989, 118). A new justification is found, not time off from work, not saving a life, but a new source of income. They want to spin play into work. At the same time, the politician Skandl would "[g]et some decent liquor laws on the books" (118). After the men's collective bender, only Indians could purchase alcohol in the district, all the white men having been placed on the "Indian list" (115). Of course, what the card players fail to see is that they themselves are to blame for the new liquor laws and the economic downfall of the community. The new liquor laws are a direct result of their behaviour after seeing the ghost of Martin Lang in the church basement, and the region's economic decline is hardly surprising given that much of the male population has stopped working.<sup>8</sup> The card game has become the sine qua non, one that blinds them to causality.

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<sup>7</sup> Huizinga writes of ideals, and excludes goal-driven ludic activities such as gambling from his republic of play. For him play is an attainable, though fragile, state that is entirely autotelic, without external purpose.

<sup>8</sup> In a further parody of traditional male roles, namely that of the breadwinner, the reader learns that Tiddy Lang had supported the would-be saviour John Skandl's by sending him money on a regular basis.

Joe Lightning (the loving Indian whose wedding march they heard from the church basement) has a simpler solution when he enters the granary one night, stating what the reader would if the players could only hear: "For Christ's sake, quit" (Kroetsch, 1989, 118). Lightning enjoys a privileged borderline existence in the binary between work and play because he earns his living as a professional shuffleboard player. As one who realizes there is a time and place for play, Lightning easily recognizes the problem. Rather than heeding this solid advice from another avid gamesman and quitting, the players offer to deal him in. "Joe Lightning left in disgust. It was the first time ever that a sane, adult male had refused to join the game. Liebhaber felt it was an ill omen. 'Damn drunk Indians,' he said" (119). Despite Liebhaber's ominous premonition, Lightning's refusal to join in heralds the end of the game.

John Skandl, the one who was to redeem them all, eventually ends the game, albeit indirectly. Tiddy's most beautiful daughter, Vera, arrives to say that Skandl has gone missing. Liebhaber is sceptical, as the theme of capitulation resurfaces:

"It's a trap to make us surrender."

"Surrender?" Vera said. "Surrender *what*?"

"The world," Liebhaber shouted. "The world..." He was confused.... (123).

Liebhaber has apparently forgotten why the game even started. He has completely lost himself in what he thinks is play – at the expense of reality.

### 1) Tiddy Lang's House (Again)

Liebhaber tries to keep the game going, but the men are tempted back by Tiddy who offers them sausage, eggs, "homemade bread," "homemade butter," "homemade apricot jam" (Kroetsch, 1989, 126). The game ends where it began as the men re-enter the homey, maternal realm of Tiddy Lang's house, famished soldiers surrendering to the megaphone promise of savoury and plentiful food behind enemy lines. They play a few hands but the dealing soon stops, with Tiddy Lang herself eventually throwing the cards into the same hearth on which she cooks. If the men of Big Indian were convinced that they were playing *against* the women, this purgation of the cards means that they have lost the game.

The question arises: what have they achieved after all this playing? By the time they arrive at Tiddy Lang's, they are "more corpses than men", "spectres of men" who had "suffered frostbite", whose feet "smelled of rotting skin and gangrene" and who'd survived by "cooking an old set of harness, [...] dogs and cats, [...] disease-weakened rabbits" and scavenging "garbage cans" (125f). In response to this question, the reader can turn to the crow featured in the novel's title. What does the crow have to say about all this? The crow

inhabits Tiddy Lang's house and is therefore absent for much of the schmier game. This means that in *What the Crow Said* we do not actually hear very much from him/her (its sex is never made clear).<sup>9</sup> Brian Edwards points out that "Kroetsch's crow is no gifted chronicler [...], no clairvoyant, no source of wisdom" (Edwards, 208). Though not ostensibly wise, the mouthy crow does have a smattering of common sense, as well as a proclivity for directness: "Well, Leeb [Liebhaber], [...] I've got to hand it to you. You are finally a total asshole" (128). In other words, Liebhaber's excessively manly behaviour has achieved absolutely nothing. In one of the longer speeches, the crow declaims:

Gentlemen, [...] I want to welcome you back. We missed your filthy mouths and your slovenly behaviour. We missed your abrasive laziness and your dirt and your stink. May you all die abnormal deaths (128f).

If the game was an attempt to avoid death by moving into the idealized, timeless 'magic circle' of play, the crow's blunt curse reminds them – even more directly than Old Lady Lang's previous fortune-telling – that this is futile. Within the context of idealized theories of play, the crow's curse reminds the reader that Liebhaber's playful plans were doomed from the outset because they ignore the autotelic nature of play. Play that does not exist for its own sake but is hijacked to the service of an external goal is stillborn. Thus, in one sense the *Schmierers* in *What the Crow Said* were playing too much; in another, they were not playing at all.

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<sup>9</sup> In the rigid gender binaries of *What the Crow Said*, the crow's indeterminate sex offer him/her a perspective analogous to the boundary existence of Joe Lightning, the professional player – that seeming contradiction who *plays* for a living.



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## THE FUTURE AS OTHER

Utopian fiction is the quintessential literary expression of the other, conjuring up a world that is desired precisely because it is not the one in which we live. The Greek pun in the name makes it both an *outopia* (a “no land”) and an *eutopia* (a “happy/felicitous land”) – that is, a space of both fantasy and wish fulfilment. It is a genre that arises from a deeply felt absence, that embodies a profound longing.

Utopia emerges, with Sir Thomas More, as a fiction of the present, the sober depiction of a distant but “really existing” human society in a world that was then still largely unknown and unexplored (that is, unknown and unexplored by White European males). As such it shares features with travel literature, and marks a move in the direction of “realism” from medieval travellers’ tales like those of Mandeville and his ilk. Over the course of centuries, however, as the unexplored world shrinks, the utopia increasingly becomes a genre exploring the future, and shades off into science fiction; this also marks the transition from it being a desirable world that is theoretically possible to a desirable world that is technically feasible.

With the phrase “technically feasible” we are alerted to a major shift that takes place during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Utopias begin to mutate, developing a dark side, the Mr Hyde to their Doctor Jekyll – that is, the dystopia. Though by now the grand march of Western progress seems unchallengeable, and positivistic science teaches that there is no field that is ultimately unknowable, no problem that cannot be solved, dystopias begin to appear – dystopias written out of the very belly of this untroubled confidence – that challenge its basic assumptions.

Paradoxically, a good part of the reason for this can be traced to the very nature of the utopia, which is, to quote Northrop Frye, “primarily a vision of the orderly city” (Frye 1965, 325) and of a city-dominated society. In Western culture the city has traditionally been the symbol of conscious design in the society, but nineteenth century Western “progress” simultaneously brought with it the “really existing” modern city, which was far from orderly, far from harmonious, and far from reflecting any kind of design.

Faced with the reality of the nineteenth-century city, utopian writers responded in two ways. One school refused to abandon the assumptions of nineteenth century science, and from its adherents comes the surprisingly

large number of optimistic utopias driven by a vision of the ideal society as a smoothly running machine, all parts rationally organized: logic and reason have done away not only with the chaos, the violence and the horror of the nineteenth century city, but with conflict itself. These are the technological utopists.

A second school of utopists reacts in exactly the opposite way, by abandoning the city and the technology that sustains it, assuming that it is inherently and irredeemably corrupted. This takes the form of the fantasy of the destruction of the modern city and a return to small, often isolated, rural communities – villages, artists' workshops, collectives of various kinds. These are the romantic utopists, their descendants the hippies of the sixties, just as the technological utopists have resurfaced in the evangelists of information technology and the armies of admen the world over.

But there is, of course, a third possibility – flatter, bleaker, even nihilistic. This is the response of the dystopists. Utopists, whether technological or romantic, are both “positive” in the sense that they offer solutions and project a better future for humanity. Dystopists, though formally writing of the future, are in fact a type of literary Luddite: their stance is negative, not positive, focused on rejecting the present and offering no suggestions for the future. Their response to the contemporary world is like that of the Red Queen in *Alice in Wonderland* – “Off with its head!” What will replace the head is never mentioned: the task of the dystopist is to expose, dissect, attack, warn – but not to offer solutions. In this, the dystopia is one of the purest forms of that genre of prose fiction that Frye terms the anatomy or Menippean satire – that is, a genre focused on ideas, not persons (characters here are primarily vehicles for ideas), and directed outwards to the world of physical and social space, rather than inward, to psychological space.<sup>1</sup> Though of course utopias may share some of these features, they typically are closer to other genres such as the novel and the romance. But the dystopia is a pure anatomy, the thing itself.

If the dystopia arose towards the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries as a challenge to the utopia, it soon left the latter very much an also-ran. The reality of the twentieth century shifted utopias to the margins and placed dystopias squarely at the centre. One only has to think of literary works such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), George Orwell's *1984* (1949), or indeed most of Kafka's oeuvre, or of films like *Bladerunner* (1982), to be reminded of the centrality of dystopias to the twentieth century vision of humanity and its future – a future that we as a society increasingly fear and that significant numbers see as a cul-de-sac. In fact utopias have retreated to the world of popular culture in the most pejorative sense of the word. Perhaps the last literary utopia to achieve

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<sup>1</sup> For Frye's discussion of genre and what he terms “specific continuous forms” of prose fiction, see the “Fourth Essay” in his *Anatomy of Criticism*.

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widespread popularity was James Hilton's 1933 bestseller *Lost Horizon*, a saccharine fantasy that, almost inevitably, was soon made into a highly popular movie (1937). And one could in fact even argue that it is in Hollywood that the utopia has found its true home – where else but in so many of the films originating there can one find so many “happy, felicitous lands” – and, equally, so many “no lands”?

So the utopia has retreated from the serious literary scene, leaving the dystopia in full command of the field. And it is worth pointing out here the sea-change that has taken place with this triumph of the dystopia. More's work was a positive depiction of a possible and desirable alternative to contemporary society, one, it was suggested, that already existed

somewhere. The present-day dystopia implies that there is no such alternative and provides no remedy for current ills. It is essentially negative; like the nineteenth century utopia its negative force is grounded in the present and directed against an imagined future. Its strength lies in the degree to which it can convince its readers that its prophetic message is likely to come true — though this can also be seen as its prime weakness. Just as few people could imagine the horrors Nazism would unleash, so few can perhaps quite believe in the extremes most dystopias depict. Dystopias are projections of our fears, extrapolated from the present, and as such straddle a tricky boundary between intellect and emotion. Perhaps the best readers of dystopias are those with alert minds and a slight paranoid streak.

It might be thought that Canada, a country repeatedly named by UNESCO as the world leader in terms of quality of life, would be an unlikely site for the creation of dystopias. However, the march of technology and the speeded up globalization of all aspects of life that marked the end of the twentieth century meant that Canada could not remain isolated from the major forces shaping the political, economic, demographic, environmental, cultural and ethical future of the world. Many people around the globe see these as leading to potential catastrophe in the twenty-first century – a vision of the future that is the idea intellectual breeding ground for dystopias. In this Canada is no exception, as can be seen by looking briefly at four dystopian fictions written by Canadian authors over the past thirty years. These are Wayland Drew's *The Wabeno Feast* (1973), Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986), Timothy Findley's *Headhunter* (1993) and Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, which appeared in the spring of 2003.

What all of these dystopias share is their depiction of society in the throes of disintegration. In *The Wabeno Feast* this is caused by massive pollution, decline of the infrastructure and a general decay in public morals, all leading to the collapse of the economy, the fragmentation of the society, and the retreat of individuals to the countryside and the wilderness. The situation in *The Handmaid's Tale* is not exactly one of disintegration – indeed, the society depicted there is one of ruthless control, over women in particular but extending to all acts of behaviour in a society rigidly regulated by extreme right-wing Christian dogmas. However, what has led up to this state of affairs

is hinted at in various places, and the causes include, possibly, a massive epidemic of “R-strain syphilis”, AIDS spreading to the population at large, genetic deformities caused by nuclear plant accidents, sabotage, leakages from chemical and biological warfare stockpiles and toxic waste disposal sites, and the uncontrolled use of insecticides, herbicides and other sprays – all of this leading to catastrophic biodamage, precipitous drops in birth rates and widespread warfare by various parties with different agendas for dealing with these largely man-made catastrophes. Findley’s *Headhunter* echoes the two earlier works: an epidemic of a new disease – “sturnusemia” – has swept the community and led to draconian control measures. But this is only one aspect of, more a metaphor for, a society in which the paramount concern has become control: power over others, especially those least able to defend themselves – the mentally ill, young people (victims of a vicious paedophilic ring that includes their own closest relatives), the poor – and power over the whole society in the form of the control of information. Finally, Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* records the end of society as we know it, with the human race wiped out for all practical purposes and replaced by a small band of new human beings, genetically engineered to be caring and communal but without any intellectual curiosity or, one fears, defences against future predators.

Each of these works focuses on some particular aspect or mechanism of the social breakdown – pollution, gender oppression, psychological aberration, genetic engineering – but they all share several common features. Of course first and foremost is that they reflect current concerns – that is, the threats they depict society as having succumbed to can be seen to be present to varying degrees in the Canada/North America/Western world/world of today. In other words, these are real threats (though some less immediately plausible than others): the horrendous “other” they offer to our view is recognizable here and now in embryo. Second, and this is something very “Canadian” that links them all, at the heart of the breakdowns they depict is something that might be termed the loss of community. The evils these books depict are (potentially) real, but though they do of course affect individuals their essential feature as evils is that they destroy social bonds, fostering the gap between the privileged and underprivileged, whether these be rich and poor, urban and rural communities, men and women. Third – and again very Canadian – there is the role of the natural world. “Nature” of course is an infinitely flexible concept, as is that of what is “natural”. But all of these works depict violations of natural order and the natural world, with catastrophic results that overwhelm society. And “nature” in the strictest sense acts as a form of salvation. At the end of *The Wabeno Feast*, the protagonist and his wife are seen heading back by canoe to the empty country north of Lake Superior, where they plan to somehow live the rest of their lives, or at least die with dignity, in a place that has not been degraded by human civilization. In *The Handmaid’s Tale* there is the suggestion that – as in the days of the Underground Railroad – there is still a place of escape from the Republic of Gilead to the north in Canada, where a “natural” world still

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exists. In *Head-hunter* it is those closest to the natural world – to the birds being innocently slaughtered, to dogs, to groundhogs, to of course the inevitable Findley cat – that by this very closeness are marked as standing apart from the general hysteria and lust for power. And in *Oryx and Crake* it is the small band of new/modified humans living an innocent life by the seashore, in harmony with the seasons and the changes of the tides, genetically modified to include all the positive qualities of various species of animal, that represents the future of the race. In this novel too, after the dystopia that marks the end of “our” world, a new utopia begins – not in a city and not through the conscious decision of its inhabitants, but in a condition of amnesia amidst a setting bereft of most of the attributes of human civilization. One could hardly imagine a utopia more radically at odds with the ideal community devised by the inventor of the genre, or one less likely to instil hope for the future.

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**"FROM MOLTEN LEAD TO LIQUID LIGHT":  
THE LANGUAGE OF IMAGINATION IN LIFE OF PI**

The phrase "from molten lead to liquid light", alliterative and highly poetic in import, is first found on page 10 of *Life of Pi*, yet it only confirms an impression beginning on page 1 that Pi is an exceptionally sensitive person with an overactive imagination. It soon becomes clear that Pi's imaginative capacity, along with his unbreakable will and perseverance, allow him to transform the earthbound into the desired heavenly. The image evoked is that of an experienced swimmer who, after doing many lengths and strokes, finally undergoes a rite of passage from the state of feeling that the water drags him down like molten lead to the state of being exalted by the very same that now feels like liquid light and becomes a metaphor standing for the human predicament. It is the human lot either to sink, pulled down by the molten lead of reality, or to be borne up by the liquid light of imagination that reshapes the given and makes it bearable. Pi's is not the case of Kundera's "unbearable lightness of being" though his hardships and sufferings surpass most. He doesn't simply endure and move on but actively and devoutly participates in what life gives him, thus not only surviving but ennobling and fulfilling himself in the process. My aim here is to briefly compare and contrast his path to those presented by two other famous literary castaways, touching upon the theme of otherness with respect to animal other, religious other and the otherness of death.

The literary associations and possible sources for Martel's nonetheless unique novel are various. British readers may think of *Gulliver's Travels*, *The Jungle Book*, Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Golding's *Lord of the Flies*; Americans may recall Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, *The Old Man and the Sea*, or even *Moby Dick*. Canadians may be reminded of Findley's *Not Wanted on the Voyage*. But Martel doesn't leave us in the dark and openly admits he drew inspiration from *Max and the Cats* by the Brazilian author Moacyr Scliar (1981). (Sharma-Jensen, 9) The latter is an allegorical novel about a boy shipwrecked with a jaguar. "The spark of life" Martel acknowledges in his Author's Note (XIV) refers only to the plot he borrowed, which he badly needed as a vehicle for conveying his personal message, as he says in an interview: "(Ultimately) this book is about the role of imagination in our lives." (Sharma-Jensen, 9)

My first association after having read the Author's Note was *Robinson Crusoe*. Martel's fictional author strives to achieve the air of verisimilitude by introducing elements of his own personal and professional life, acknowledging his sources and expressing his gratitude to various persons, referring to diaries, clippings, reports, tape recordings to come later, and by hedging himself in the manner of Defoe or Swift. He claims that the story is told in the first person and insists upon strict factuality, yet takes the blame upon himself for any "inaccuracies or mistakes" (XIV). Finally, there is the openly didactic tone of his last sentence: "If we, as citizens, do not support the artists, then we sacrifice our imagination on the altar of crude reality and we end up believing in nothing and having worthless dreams" (XIV). This is Defoe with a post-modern twist. In the Preface to *Robinson Crusoe* Defoe's fictional author makes clear his reasons for writing: improvement, diversion and instruction of the reader; he is convinced he is doing "a great service" (Defoe, 1) to the world by publishing his work. Martel's author, a self-mocking Tolstoy, belongs to the post-modern tradition of parodying realistic fiction and asserting the role of the artist and his importance in the society, and perfectly illustrates Linda Hutcheon's definition of postmodernism: "Postmodernism would seem to designate art forms that are fundamentally self-reflexive – in other words, art that is self-consciously art (or artifice), literature that is openly aware of the fact that it is written and read as part of a particular culture, having as much to do with the literary past as with the present." (Hutcheon, 1) Martel himself admits: "I was in need of a story. More than that, I was in need of a Story," (Sharma-Jensen, 2) spelt with a capital S. What he had in mind was a story that would save his career as an author at the same time becoming "the means to a new engagement with the social and the historical world" (Hutcheon, 1).

The suffering of a struggling writer is thus transformed into the suffering of a castaway by the means of a story that saves them both from oblivion and meaninglessness. Life is transformed into art, which in turn becomes the means of saving life, though paradoxically, Martel did not start from life at all but from fiction, again through the post-modern means of intertextuality. His idea before producing *Life of Pi* was to write about Portugal in 1939: "Thus set up, pen in hand, for the sake of greater truth, I would turn Portugal into a fiction. That's what fiction is about, isn't it, the selective transforming of reality? The twisting of it to bring out its essence?" (Martel, X) This concept failed but his commitment remained. In *Life of Pi* Martel transformed and twisted supposed reality and brought out its essence in terms of imagination. "Molten lead" was turned into "liquid light" in a story about a young castaway saved by magic and miracles of his own making.

There is another literary castaway whose survival depends exclusively on the capacity of his mind to perform miraculous tricks. It is Golding's Pincher Martin who on the opening page of the novel experiences the opposites of human existence. On one hand, "air and water mixed, dragged down into his body like gravel" (Golding, 1956, 7) in an image of merciless reality pulling him into the depths to his physical death. On the other hand, he is offered an

alternative: "The luminous pictures that were shuffled before him were drenched in light but he paid no attention to them". (Golding, 1956, 7) This ignoring of redemptive choices leads him to his spiritual death. What remains is a self-centred ego hidden in the metaphysical recesses of the human mind and pathologically obsessed with his own survival: "I won't die. I can't die. Not me – Precious." (Golding, 1956, 14)

The strategy of survival employed by Pincher Martin is highly imaginative and inventive. Out of his own despair he creates an island, climbs it, conquers it, names it, adapts it to his own needs. However, he doesn't remind one of Martel's Pi but rather of Robinson Crusoe, who is saved by his practical ingenuity. Both of them transform the given, one the physical reality of an actual island, the other the metaphysical creation of his own mind in different but essentially identical attempts to preserve themselves. Pincher Martin and Robinson Crusoe are concerned exclusively with the survival of their individual subjectivities at whatever cost. Robinson sacrifices his emotional life, his sexual instinct, his social needs, his aesthetic sense, and even his religion all in order to save his body (for which read his economic self) while Pincher Martin, a true heir who comes to life more than 200 years later, sacrifices even his physical body for the sake of transcendental existence. What is paramount to both is their indestructible will that is itself disastrously destructive, ultimately auto-destructive since it is stripped of all vestiges of humanness. Robinson Crusoe survives only to multiply his wealth without changing his attitudes. His inheritor, Pincher Martin, faces "eternity, inseparable from pain" (Golding, 1956, 14) in the mental hell of his own creation. Stubborn self-consciousness refuses to extinguish itself even when existence is turned into a theatre of the absurd.

An alternative offered by Yann Martel through Pi is based on recognizing and acknowledging the Other. Crusoe, a typical product of "the bourgeois Puritan ideology" (Morra, 63), was clearly incapable of that, the most glaring example being his treatment of Friday. Ever since he saw the print of a man's foot, he lived "in constant Snare of *the Fear of Man*" (Morra, 63) and when he a few years later finally meets the man the only way he can relate to him is in terms of colonizer. Having first colonized the tropical island, Robinson now colonizes the man's mind by giving him a new name, by dubbing himself a Master, by teaching Friday to say the first English words: "yes" and "no". Subjection, servitude, and submission are the postulates on which Crusoe builds a relationship that could not be further from the humane. Friday is misperceived initially as a dangerous Other and then, instead of being acknowledged and accepted, he is subjugated and assimilated into the Puritan system of perverted morality.

Pincher Martin is equally incapable of dealing with the Other in meaningful terms. In his case, the Other assumes the form of death. Though practically drowned the moment he hits the water, Martin, or more precisely the dark and inscrutable centre of his self-consciousness, continues the mock-struggle for

survival beyond any rational boundaries. His mind cries: "I am! I am! I am!" (Golding, 1956, 145) in a futile attempt to obliterate death. The essence of his being goes on flickering in some unfathomable metaphysical sphere while his dead body floats in the ocean because the idea of accepting the otherness of death is simply out of the question.

Martel's stand on this issue is more than explicit: "Looking at death is yet another approach to the other. And death, violence, and fear are phenomena that impel us to change. Some change is self-willed, some, through fear of death, is forced upon us. In *Life of Pi*, Pi is confronted with fear and violence and has to deal with it." (Sielke, 21) In this respect, Pi is no different from Crusoe or Martin. He is naturally afraid of death and isolation and the Other, the Other now taking the form of an indisputably dangerous wild animal. It is none less than a Royal Bengal tiger of over 200 kilos that Pi, a boy of 16, has to share a lifeboat with in the middle of the Pacific for over seven months. The extreme limits of these existential circumstances cannot possibly be pushed further. His position is worse than being on a desert island or struggling in the cold water by himself. However, his survival is much more successful than that of his literary predecessors, Crusoe and Pincher Martin, because his survival technique is radically different. When the truth dawns on him that his life is threatened by an Other whose "paws were like volumes of Encyclopaedia Britannica" (Martel, 132), Pi initially reacts similarly to them and devises six plans to kill the tiger. So far, though an amiable and pacifist Indian boy, he reasons in line with the imported Western war philosophy: kill or be killed. Luckily, his open-mindedness saves him when he hits upon a third option: "Keep him alive". (Martel, 166) In this respect, Pi reminds one of Atwood's heroines who not only believe there must be 'a third way' but also actively search for it. Pi's mental search results in life-saving wisdom: "It was not a question of him or me, but of him *and* me." (Martel, 164) This is clearly a huge step forward from the dominant ideology which Atwood succinctly expresses saying that an animal is usually treated only as "food, slave or corpse". (Atwood, 137) Pi finds an alternative and makes the tiger his partner, his companion, his saviour: "Without Richard Parker /that's the tiger's name!/, I wouldn't be alive today to tell you my story." (Martel, 164) This feat is achieved by bridging the gap between the I and the Other, between a human and an animal, between Pi Patel and Richard Parker. The only way this miracle can be worked is through the empathetic imagination.

Martel's definition of the empathetic imagination is quite simple and implies making the effort to understand the other. Before understanding there must be the effort to see, and here the unnamed protagonist of *Surfacing* comes in with a useful prescription: "Not to see myself, but to see." (Atwood, 210) Pi commonsensically adds: "The more you look the more you see." (Martel, 13) This is what Pi does all the time. He watches the world around himself, discovers its fantastic richness, and occasionally utterly loses the sense of his own identity. He transgresses the boundaries of his individual being melting with the colours, the sounds, the smells, the shapes and forms of what exists outside him. Pi begins his ordeal fearing the world "alone, alone, all, all

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alone/ on a wide, wide sea", and then literally in the manner of the Ancient Mariner ends it loving all of the creation, including the creator:

Despair was a heavy blackness that let no light in or out. It was a hell beyond expression. I thank God it always passed. A school of fish appeared around the net or a knot cried out to be reknotted. Or I thought of my family, of how they were spared this terrible agony. The blackness would stir and eventually go away, and God would remain, a shining point of light in my heart. I would go on loving" (Martel, 209)

Martel's genius compels us to contemplate even the beauty of death, when he describes the majestic sight of a dying dorado fish. Pi had to kill it and "the dorado did a most extraordinary thing as it died: it began to flesh all kinds of colours in rapid succession. Blue, green, red, gold and violet flickered and shimmered neon-like on its surface as it struggled." Pi felt he was "beating a rainbow to death." (Martel, 185)

Pi's frequent empathy with the other is not so nonsensical or intuitive as it may seem. He follows the rules of reason and, Crusoe-like, keeps a diary, makes lists of rules and observations, and very rationally trains the tiger. However, he knows reason is not enough: "Be excessively reasonable and you risk throwing out the universe with the bathwater." (Martel, 298) Reason teaches him to play a super-alpha male game with the tiger, but his empathetic imagination makes him aware of the tiger's true nature, which he has to know very well in order to predict its behaviour. This is not an animal romance but a credible story with a lot of magic in it.

The transgressing of boundaries between the animal other and Pi is made even more credible by Martel, who begins the novel portraying Pi as an extraordinary believer. He is born a Hindu, yet he converts to Christianity and Islam, not successively but simultaneously. This boy is unique in his ability to recognise the religious other, discover what is good in it, and embrace it with equal passion, whatever its outward form. His only rational explanation is: "I just want to love God." (Martel, 69) When everybody, including his religious gurus and his parents, tries to make him choose: "You must be either one or the other," (Martel, 72) he feels there must be a third way and he sticks to it. He practices all the three religions, breaking boundaries between them and creating "interfaith dialogue" (Martel, 70), which also proves to be an element of his survival technique. Crusoe and Pincher Martin are complete aliens to such a world view since what imagination they have is insufficient for them to break free from the boundaries of their selves.

Many critics have complained that Martel's promise from the beginning of the novel, that his story will make us believe in God, did not work for them. This is not surprising. One book can hardly turn a person into a believer; however it can teach one not to "kill God in man." (Martel, 28) Pi survives not simply because he believes in God (which both Crusoe and Martin formally do) but rather because he loves him in all his varieties, as "Jesus, Mary, Muhammad

and Vishnu," (Martel, 97) and whose otherness he integrates by the means of the language of imagination. This romantic faith in the imagination is, in a post-modern manner, undercut at the end of the novel by "a better story." When the Japanese investigators disbelieve the castaway's survival report, Pi realizes how void of imagination and incapable of miracle the modern man's mind has become:

I know what you want. You want a story that won't surprise you. That will confirm what you already know. That won't make you see higher or further or differently. You want a flat story. An immobile story. You want dry, yeastless factuality. (Martel, 302)

And this is what he gives them. Pi invents a new and believable story eight pages long in which he simply replaces all the animals in his boat with people: his mother, a cook, a sailor, himself, and designs a plot in which the cook brutally kills and eats the sailor and his mother and is finally killed by Pi. Although the investigators are puzzled by the imperfect match of these two sets of characters, which they don't fail to notice, they prefer this horrid story to the original one since it demands no effort upon their imagination. Human selfishness, cruelty and perversity are recognizable and more acceptable than the miracles worked by Christ-like selfless love towards all creation exhibited by Pi. Martel is clear on this point: "If you don't have any imagination, you have a diminished life. So much alienation in Western cultures is due to an excess of reason." (Sielke, 25) Relying exclusively on reason the investigators, the latest offspring of Robinson, deduce that the role of the tiger in the second story is played by Pi but they disregard this hint since they cannot figure it out. Reason is not enough for them to realize that Pi is both rational and imaginative, as Martel wanted him to be: "We are reasonable animals. That's what makes us more powerful than other animals. And we're the only animals with a strong sense of imagination." (Sielke, 27) Integrating his rational and imaginative capacities Pi controls the existentially threatening situation in the only constructive way possible under the circumstances. However, such a story is not palatable to the investigators, who can understand only behaviour motivated by brute instinct or stark reason either untingered by imagination. In their vision of the world the second story is "a better story."

Through the subversive effect of story-telling, there is an undeniable moral force in the told story. In this sense, all fiction is engaged fiction. The original story, however incredible, is not really undermined by the second, "better" story. Once it is told, made known, it subverts the authority of the more realistic story making it deficient. It incidentally subverts the world views presented in *Robinson Crusoe* and *Pincher Martin* as well. *Life of Pi* ends with the investigators' factual report, the last word of which is significantly "tiger." The report is yet another story comprising names, dates, and other facts, divorced from imagination, while the original story describes a man-eating vegetable island, two blind castaways meeting in husks of boats in the middle of the ocean, a boy overpowering a Bengal tiger at sea. The report

feels like molten lead while Pi's story lifts one's imagination into the stream of liquid light and the realm of the morally relevant.

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## VIOLENCE AND SUB-VERSION OF HISTORY IN ONDAATJE'S NOVELS

"now once more smooth as knuckle  
a tooth on my tongue"  
Michael Ondaatje, *Pig Glass* <sup>1</sup>

Michael Ondaatje is one of the most intriguing modern writers because, first and above all, he is a skilful and talented poet whose uses of language can justly be described as 'striking'; second, because he treats the provocative subject of violence employing the abovementioned, considerable poetic skills, and, third, because he rewrites the recent Western history in terms of political cruelty and responsibility. This paper will explore the specific ways in which Ondaatje treats violence and creates the so-called 'parallel underground history', which functions as a comment – highly unfavourable - on the official version of history. In order to do so, we will first briefly draw attention to the general characteristics of the main instrument he uses – his specific language.

It is not by accident, therefore, that the lines from *Pig Glass* are quoted at the very beginning of the paper. They depict sensations of touch (of taste, perhaps, if tooth has a taste - sometimes it does) – and it is this sensuousness that is, at first sight, the most conspicuous feature of Ondaatje's writing.

Take his other poems for example. The sheer sensuous beauty of *The Cinnamon Peeler*, (Ondaatje, 1984, 95-97) the poem one can almost smell, with its luxurious image of 'yellow bark dust' left on the pillow; the sensations of the hands buried in saffron, the upper thigh as 'smooth pasture'. Or the extravagant, yet oddly realistic description of a little girl's voice in the poem *Sweet Like a Crow*: (Ondaatje, 1984, 76)

Your voice sounds like a scorpion being pushed  
through a glass tube  
like someone has just trod on a peacock

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<sup>1</sup> The word "main" is deliberately used: other writers use language as the only instrument; Ondaatje, however, uses photographs and all sorts of documents - as in his celebrated *Collected Works of Billy the Kid* or *Running in the Family*.

like someone pulling a barbed wire  
across a stone courtyard,

a bone shaking hands  
a pariah dog  
with a magpie in its mouth

What is admirable about this poem is not only the extravagance of comparison; it is, rather, the poet's passionate attempt to describe the auditory impression *as precisely as possible*, to render it perfect through his imperfect medium. Therefore, precision (what Ondaatje himself labels "the clarity of architects"<sup>2</sup>) is another characteristic of his language.

One more defining attribute of Ondaatje's writing, the direct outcome of his appeal to the senses, is the *physicality* of the world he creates. "We're veiled in flesh", he says in his novel *In the Skin of a Lion*, and everything he writes about, the world he creates, seems to have a solid, *flesh* and *blood* base. The last lines of the poem *Letters & Other Worlds*, (Brown et al., 660) depicting the death of Ondaatje's father,<sup>3</sup> are quite explicit:

the blood screaming in  
the empty reservoir of bones  
the blood searching in his head without metaphor

"Without metaphor" contains the core of Ondaatje's artistic creed: everything is literal first. This certainly does not mean that his writing can be described as naturalistic, or that there are no metaphors in his work. It does mean that another dimension, *physical*, is added to the expected intellectual.

### The time around the scars

The sensuousness, precision, physicality, however, is not all. Once the fascination over Ondaatje's verbal skill has grown calmer, we have to ask what it is that he writes about. There is at least one valid answer: violence. He has "a gift for violence",<sup>4</sup> by which is understood the ability, first, to detect it, sometimes in the unexpected places and forms, to depict it in the most realistic, even (though not always) *naturalistic* manner, together with the consequences, and, second, to locate the responsibility for it, wherever possible.

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<sup>2</sup> A line from his poem *Letters & Other Worlds*.

<sup>3</sup> Ondaatje's father was killed in a train accident: the story says that he tried, though very drunk, to jump from one train into another, and failed.

<sup>4</sup> A phrase from Ian McEwan's *Black Dogs*.

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The violence Ondaatje writes about, furthermore, has many forms, different not only in degree, but in kind as well. He is careful enough to make a distinction. These different forms of violence can be divided roughly into two groups: the violence Ondaatje sees as unavoidable in human relations - especially (and somewhat surprisingly) in love, and political violence, which includes exploitation, racism and war. The two forms of violence are neither mutually exclusive nor interdependent. Both are almost exclusively physical.

The exploration of the forms violence takes is not limited to Ondaatje's longer, narrative works. His poems show the same obsession with wounding, painful and scarring experience. The aforementioned *Cinnamon Peeler*, for example, has been praised for its sensuous imagery. Yet, the same poem contains the lines

what good is it  
to be the lime burner's daughter  
left with no *trace*  
as if not *spoken to* in the act of love  
*as if wounded without the pleasure of a scar.*<sup>5</sup>

The arresting phrase 'the pleasure of the scar' is not an example of *discordia concors*, nor is it a poetic expression of masochism. What is it, then? How can scars be pleasurable?

A possible answer may be found in a poem called *To a Sad Daughter* (Brown et al., 666) where Ondaatje advises a sixteen-year-old girl not to follow Odysseus' example, not to be afraid of danger:

and if you hear the siren  
listen to it. For if you close your ears  
only nothing happens. You will never change

In other words, a scar is a trace left from an extreme existential experience, suggesting that one has undergone it; the fact that it remains on the body suggests that one has been changed, marked by it. People move on in their personal journeys that way.<sup>6</sup> Only in that sense are scars pleasurable.

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<sup>5</sup> Italics mine.

<sup>6</sup> Interestingly enough, this seems to be the idea shared by Philip Pullman as well. In his *Northern Lights* he talks about "the little incisions...by which we grow up." When it comes to Ondaatje, the incisions are literal. (Philip Pullman. *Northern Lights*. Beograd: Laguna, 2002, p. 212.

One form that those extreme, scarring, violent experiences take in Ondaatje's poems and novels is: love. Love, in all its gentleness, is inseparable from violence, from hurting and being hurt. Alternatively, an act of violence can be a gesture of love. To illustrate and, hopefully, illuminate this outrageous argument, we will resort to Ondaatje's poems first.

In *The space in which we have dissolved-does it taste of us?* (Brown et al., 664-5) he paints, word by word, a picture that could easily be called 'typical' of him if the word were not offensive. The poem culminates in the last couple of lines, with his son giving him wild raspberries, "cold out of fridge", some of which he left in his "shirt pocket/and forgot".

I sit here  
in a half dark kitchen  
the stain at my heart  
caused by this gift.

The scene is not particularly disturbing: someone with a stained shirt sitting in his kitchen. As everything else in Ondaatje, it is fairly realistic. Yet the words 'heart', 'gift' and especially 'stain' point to something deeper, paradoxical: the person *hurt* by this small act of kindness, the gift of fruit, paralysed by the tenderness implicit in it. Not knowing how to react, sitting in "half dark [ness]", very much like a bleeding, wounded prisoner of war. There is an analogous scene in *The Skin of a Lion* when Patrick Lewis, in the company of his Macedonian friends, being handed a Macedonian cake, "surrounded by friendship, concern" smiles and almost simultaneously starts crying. (Ondaatje, 1988, 113) This is the first, by no means the only<sup>7</sup>, association of tenderness and hurting.

Another is to be found in a minor scene in *The English Patient*, when Kip talks about his brother in jail "lying back on his cot at night, his arm raised within plaster, *broken by his friends to protect him*, to stop him trying to escape". (Ondaatje, 1995, 201) The fact that it was his friends who broke his arm certainly does not diminish the pain, yet this act of violence paradoxically testifies to their *love* for him. The whole incident is Hamlet's *being cruel to be kind*, only literal.

The scene in *The Skin of a Lion* is even more interesting, since it seems to locate the origin of the odd violence /love association more closely. In order to impress his lover Clara, Patrick blindfolds himself and starts running around the room, jumping over pieces of furniture. Clara has been warned not to move. All of a sudden, "she is hit hard and her left hand jars against her skull, knocking her over. (...) Patrick is grabbing a part of the sheet towards his face. He is snuffing, the blood begins to come out of his nose onto the sheet." Clara moved; they are both hurt. The scene ends with Patrick

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<sup>7</sup> That is why the word 'typical' was so tempting.

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watching the sheet in his hands'. "So much for the human element, he thinks." (Ondaatje, 1985, 80-1)

This scene, both realistic and symbolic, presents the possible explanation of violence in love, as Ondaatje sees it - violence is inevitable; such is the human situation: moving blindly, colliding hard with one another, not being able to stand up from 'the pain and dizziness'. It is inherent in the physicality of world, in the physicality of human beings, their being "veiled in flesh". "The human element."

Thus in Ondaatje's world, whatever someone does, the unspoken assumption is: they will get hurt. Being in love, paradoxically, only increases the risk. Yet the inevitable hurting, as we have seen, does not exclude tenderness and vice versa.

Political violence, in contrast, has nothing to do with love. It is different from the so-called 'love' violence in both degree and kind. It is larger in scope, methodical, logical, affecting a great number of people. It has many causally connected forms: exploitation, racism, war. And it is exposed and explored both in *The Skin of a Lion* and *The English Patient*.

In order to move on, however, some background information on the novels must be given.

*In the Skin of a Lion* is a beautiful, many-layered novel that we, unfortunately, cannot explore here in its totality. At the most literal level, it is an unusual love story, taking place in the Toronto of the 1920s, having for its protagonists a curious triangle of Patrick Lewis, a worker, Clara Dickens, an actress, and Alice Gull, a former nun, an actress, an anarchist-communist revolutionary. At another, it is the parallel, non-officially recorded history of Canada, the history created by the immigrant, socially deprived workers – mostly Macedonians, Finns and Italians. It is also a grand, touching tribute to the beauty of friendship - the odd, long-lasting alliance between Patrick and an Italian thief called David Caravaggio, or the friendship between Alice Gull and Nicholas Temelcoff, the Macedonian baker who saved her life once, but could not do it twice. At yet another level, *In the Skin of a Lion* is a powerful exploration and uncovering of the forms of political violence, especially exploitation and racism, which marked the history of "democratic" countries – Canada being one of them.

Ondaatje, it has already been established, possesses a gift for violence. It is what enables him to detect sadism – with which the socio-political system treats its less privileged members - in seemingly trivial instances, such as the scene depicting the dyers desperately wanting a cigarette during their five-minute break; *yet they are denied even these minutes of pleasure* - they could be in danger of fire. (Ondaatje, 1985, 130-1) This is Ondaatje the poet talking: "A cigarette, a star beam through their flesh, would have been enough to purify them."

The purification they desire, though, is not merely metaphorical but *literal*: the dyers worked with the leather of freshly killed animals and “they had consumed the most evil smell in history, they were consuming it now, flesh death, which lies in the vacuum between flesh and skin (...)” Not only will they “die of consumption” though “at present they did not know it”, their lives are infected in another way, the smell of their bodies being such “that no woman in bed would ever lean towards.” (Ondaatje, 1985, 132)

Alice lay beside Patrick’s exhausted body, her tongue on his neck, recognizing the taste of him, knowing the dyers’ wives would never taste or smell their husbands again in such a way (...)

Having painted this sadness of destroyed health and denied intimacy, Ondaatje says only “They were paid one dollar a day.”

The seemingly detached, objective, matter-of-fact way of telling Ondaatje sometimes employs is a most powerful instrument of conveying criticism. For instance, this is how he depicts working conditions in the Toronto of the 1920s:

During the eight- hour shifts no one speaks. (...) For eight hours a day the air around them rolls in its dirty light. From somewhere else in the tunnel there is the permanent drone of pumps attempting to suck out the water, which is constantly at their heels. All morning they slip in the wet clay unable to stand properly, pissing where they work, eating where someone else left shit. (Ondaatje, 1985, 106)

Ondaatje is the poet whose use of language is extravagant and daring, the poet who can write such a line as “*My father’s body was a globe of fear*”; (Brown et al., 658) yet, what is noticeable in the quoted passage is certain *nakedness* of description, which eloquently expresses his attitude. It seems that using verbal ornaments, playing with language, would be *immoral*: this is too terrible to be decorated, even verbally.

Another form of violence Ondaatje detects is *racism*; the violence directed at immigrants, Macedonians, Poles, Italians, and Finns. This expresses itself, in its refined form, as the prohibition to use their native languages; needless to say, this is the violence that is sanctioned, legalized by the socio-political (*democratic*, remember) system, embodied in the figure of *Police Chief*.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> “He [Patrick] catches only the names of streets, the name of Police Chief Draper, who has imposed laws against public meetings by foreigners. *So if they speak this way in public, in any language other than English, they will be jailed.*” (*In the Skin of a Lion*. p. 133. Italics mine.) This, of course, is nothing new. While reading Neil Gaiman’s novel *American Gods*, I came across an interesting passage, dealing with the position of slaves in the American South: “White men always took great care to separate the slaves from the same villages and regions. They did this in order to prevent rebellions and uprisings. *White men did not like to hear the slaves talking to each other in their native languages.*” ( Neil Gaiman. *American Gods*. Beograd: Laguna, 2002, p.256. Italics mine.)

Not so refined is the good old physical violence, done to those who are made helpless, prevented from defending themselves. This is painfully clear in the scene when Caravaggio is blindfolded and beaten in prison. Not only do the three men beat him up, calling him "Fucking wop! Fucking dago!", but they cut his throat as well. This is prohibiting speech on the most literal level – the throat is the seat of vocal cords. The language in which this is told is a curious combination of "the clarity of architects" and poetry. Ondaatje creates a "noli me tangere" scene where a living man is reduced to suffering body because of his nationality.

He gets to his knees on the mattress-hands and elbows propping up his bruised body so nothing touches the pain. The blood flows along his chin into his mouth. He feels as if he has eaten the animal that attacked him and he spits out everything he can, old saliva, blood, spits again and again. (Ondaatje, 1985, 186)

Significantly, there are no words, only spitting blood. In the face of violence, Ondaatje will later declare, "all language dries up".

A large-scale version of the *same* violence takes place in the 1930s and 1940s. *The English Patient* is larger in scope – Ondaatje moves across space and time with great skill, from Herodotus' fictional "history" to the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, from the Sahara desert to Canada, India and Italy. The fact that he writes about the same characters against the background of the Second World War only emphasizes that the underlying violence is the same. What happened to them? Patrick Lewis is dead – yet present, and very much alive, in his daughter's Hana's memories. Hana is a "shell-shocked" nurse, who, at the end of the war, stays with an "English patient", a man burned beyond recognition, in an Italian villa. Her father's friend, the skilful thief Caravaggio, appears there unexpectedly. He is physically and mentally ruined, having been arrested and tortured by the Germans. Hana falls in love with a young Sikh called Kip, who devotes his life to defusing bombs. The story of their falling in love is intersected by the flashback episodes gradually revealing the identity of the English patient, who turns out to be Ladislaus de Almásy, a supposed (or actual?) German spy. The novel, here only outlined, focuses on the forms of political violence and, especially, the damage that is the result of it. What is the damage?

Destroyed life, most obviously, destroyed family ties, destroyed friendship ("the delicate tapestry of companions" "slashed apart by someone's war"),<sup>9</sup> denied possibility of the healing power of love. In *The English Patient* love,

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<sup>9</sup> Ondaatje, 1985, 241. This is even more painful if we bear in mind the tribute to friendship from *The Skin of a Lion*. In *The English Patient*, friendship is shattered, as everything and everybody else.

no matter how passionate or mad, when faced with the great demonstration of cruelty, proves to be “so small it can tear itself through the eye of a needle.”<sup>10</sup>

Patrick Lewis, who at the end of *The Skin of a Lion* chooses <sup>11</sup> to be Hana’s father, to protect her as a father should, dies burned in a dovecot, ironically, a shelter. Almasy’s friend Madox shoots himself in church, in another shelter, listening to the preacher celebrating the war. He shoots himself in the heart.<sup>12</sup> David Caravaggio, Hana’s “Uncle”, has his thumbs amputated by a professional nurse, *who is supposed to help people*. He is treated like “a large animal” (Ondaatje, 1995, 27) even by the Ally doctors, who only give him morphine for the pain in his hands and consider him helped. But he is an animal in another, literal sense: opposable thumbs, together with language, are what separate human beings from animals. What defines human. This morphine addict does not have them anymore.

Smashed family ties are not all. Hana aborted the child she was pregnant with when the father’s child, a nameless soldier, got killed. So, not only the existing lives but also the potential to create new life is destroyed. What makes it even more painful is the fact that Hana keeps talking to her dead child - indicating that the need to love and create is still there.<sup>13</sup> When Kip appears, Kip “who has mapped, better than anyone else, her sorrow”, when they fall in love, there seems to be some hope for regeneration, healing. After the bombing of the Japanese cities, however, he leaves “the dead to bury the dead”; disgusted, he turns his back on Europe, on white people, including his lover Hana. There is no permanent healing for the people trapped in the repetitive history of violence.

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<sup>10</sup> Ondaatje, 1985, 289. I have in mind Kip’s leaving Hana after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, despite the fact that he loves her. Love, in this case, is not enough.

<sup>11</sup> He is not her biological father. She is the daughter of the woman he loved, Alice Gull. At the end of the novel, Clara Dickens, his ex-lover, asks him “Is she your daughter?” Patrick does not answer immediately, he talks about something else for a while, and then he says simply: “Yes. She is my daughter”. His reply, in its simplicity and inevitability, is the most beautiful statement in the whole novel.

<sup>12</sup> The words in praise of war are deadly; they enter human heart like revolver shots- in Madox’s case literally. Even though he commits suicide, he is killed in war just as Patrick is.

<sup>13</sup> “I had continued conversations with the child. I worked very hard in hospitals and retreated from everybody around me. Except the child, who I shared everything with. In my head. I was talking to him while I bathed and nursed the patients.”(*The English Patient*, p.82.) The need for creative, meaningful existence is also signaled by Hana’s desire to make a garden, “in spite of the burned earth, in spite of the lack of water”. ( *Ibid.*, p.43.)



And it is violence only that appears eternal and omnipresent. Almost at the very end of *The English Patient*, (Ondaatje, 1995, 280) there is an important passage: Kip realizes that he has been "fooled" by the white flower that the painted angel on the church wall is holding. Because of the white flower, with its immediate associations of peace, innocence, physical and moral purity, Kip has foolishly believed that the angel is merciful, that it protects peace, but now he realizes: "This angel too is a warrior."

In *Europe*, in *centuries old* churches, sacred places, *shelters*, angels are warriors in disguise. This is the final insight, rich in implications, with which Ondaatje leaves us.

### Parallel history

Somewhere in *The English Patient*, Almasy quotes Herodotus: "*This history of mine has from the beginning sought out the supplementary of the main argument.*" "What you find in him", Almasy continues, "are cul-de-sacs within the sweep of history-how people betray each other for the sake of nations, how people fall in love . . ." (Ondaatje, 1995, 119) Ondaatje plays with this idea; he seems to take the role of Herodotus, telling the story of Almasy, Hana, Kip falling in love, of Almasy betraying nations for the sake of Katharine.

Yet, the history Ondaatje creates in his novels does not function merely as a lively, fairly exotic supplement of the "main story", making it more vivid, colourful. It serves, rather, as a comment, a judgment, a *verdict*. The gesture itself, let alone the novels, says plainly that the writer is not satisfied with the main story, with the official version of history. In order to see why, we will make a brief digression.

"If we can rationalize *this*", writes Hana (prophetically, as subsequent history proves) in a letter the day after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, "we can rationalize anything." Rationalization of political cruelty instead of judgment or, at best, horror, has always been the socially desirable, politically correct reaction. It is this function that official history successfully performs, with its insistence on figures, information, and data. From the point of view of the official history, personal sorrows over a dead father, an aborted child or lost lover are irrelevant. The unpleasant, possibly calculated by-product of such an attitude is that all the pain and suffering seem unreal, as if they had never happened. In the official history all the painful, terrible, specific deaths of specific human beings are turned into figures, into statistics, infinitely less disturbing, easy to deal with, to rationalize, to - why not? - justify. *And* teach in schools. Somewhere near the end of the *Skin of a Lion* Patrick confronts his former employer:

*You fought. You fought. Think about those who built the intake tunnels. Do you know how many of us died in there.*

The man replies: *There was no record kept .* (Ondaatje, 1985, 236)

That is why the official version of history, the “main story” is not good enough. It does not keep the record. It rationalizes, conceals and/or celebrates political cruelty. It should not come as a great surprise, then, to learn that the parallel version of history created in Ondaatje’s novels is inimical to the official version.

This devotion to what Ondaatje himself termed “*betraying official history*” may well be the most morally and artistically relevant feature of his work. Passing a judgment upon one story by creating another. Sometimes a *word* is enough. Let us examine closely this passage from *Running in the Family*:

When the government rounded up thousands of suspects during the Insurgency of 1977, the Vidyalkankara campus of the University of Ceylon was turned into a prison camp. The police weeded out the guilty, trying to break their spirit. When the university opened again the returning students found hundreds of poems written on walls, ceilings, and in hidden corners of the campus. Quatrains and free verse about the struggle, tortures, the unbroken spirit, love of friends who had died for the cause. The students went around for days transcribing them into their notebooks before they were covered with whitewash and *lye*. (Ondaatje, 1984, 84)

As always, Ondaatje writes “slowly and carefully”<sup>14</sup>. What he does in this passage is brilliant. In a calm, detached manner he presents the facts - but see what he chooses to talk about in the first place: turning a university into a prison; the history of resistance; how it was drowned in torture.<sup>15</sup> In the last sentence, the poet, sensitive to the play of sounds and meaning, uses the word ‘lye’ which is, of course, homophone with ‘lie’. That is how he passes a judgment, *with a word*. At the most literal level, the walls with the poems on them are whitewashed. At another, lies are produced to ‘cover’ the truth: the spirit of *resistance*, the *love* for those who died for the cause, the *cruelty* of government. A single *image* may also function as a judgment.

Early in *The English Patient* (which is, significantly, *after* the war) there is a scene describing Hana’s work “in the garden and [apple] orchard”.

She carried the six-foot crucifix from the bombed chapel and used it to build a scarecrow above her seedbed, hanging empty sardine cans from it which clattered and clanked whenever the wind lifted. (Ondaatje, 1995, 14)

The scene is realistic, what Hana does is logical: making use of all the objects available, in this case a crucifix, to protect the seeds she has sown in a

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<sup>14</sup> A line from Ondaatje’s poem *Burning Hills*. “He has written slowly and carefully/ with great love and great coldness”. *The New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse in English*. Ontario: Oxford University Press, 1983, p. 406.

<sup>15</sup> But not completely; the students transcribing the poems into notebooks are a guarantee that the resistance will continue in one form or another.

Robinson-Crusoe-like attempt to survive. Yet the symbolism of the imagery, and the judgment implicit in it, is inescapable. "The bombed-out orchard" (Ondaatje, 1995, 7) is the twentieth-century version of the Garden of Eden; the crucifix turned into a scarecrow - the powerful symbol of what has become of "Mercy Pity Peace and Love" that Christ died for and which the crucifix symbolizes. Still, the greatest discrepancy between the official and the "parallel underground" history; the greatest animosity of the latter towards the former, is to be seen in the atomic bomb episode in *The English Patient*. Again the situation is similar to the description of working conditions in *The Skin of a Lion*: the language cannot but be as clear, as precise as possible.

I'll leave you the radio to swallow your history lesson. (...) All those speeches of civilization from kings and queens and presidents...such voices of abstract order. *Smell it*. Listen to the radio and *smell the celebration in it*. (Ondaatje, 1995, 285)

This is Kip, a young Sikh, speaking, forcing not only Almasy but also the reader to swallow the 'history lesson', to remember the speeches of civilization while smelling the burnt human flesh in Hiroshima and Nagasaki simultaneously. The lesson is frightening in its simplicity; it is, to borrow the words from Robert Lepage's *Polygraph: L'HISTOIRE S'ECRIT AVEC LE SANG*. History is written in blood. But Ondaatje adds something else, something important: blood is shed selectively.

He [Caravaggio] knows the young soldier is right. *They would never have dropped such a bomb on a white nation*. (Ondaatje, 1995, 286)

"You name the enemy and destroy their power", (Ondaatje, 1985, 124) says Alice Gull, the passionate revolutionary. Ondaatje does this, he names the enemy, taking great care to locate the responsibility:

American, French, I don't care. When you start bombing the brown races of the world, you're an Englishman. You had King Leopold of Belgium and now you have fucking Harry Truman of the USA. *You all learned it from the English*. (Ondaatje, 1995, 286)

Not only that, through Kip, he says what should be done: "In my country, when a father breaks justice in two, you kill the father."<sup>16</sup> He names the bombing as well, calling it what it really is: "A new war. The death of civilization."

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<sup>16</sup> Kip does this metaphorically, by turning his back on Europe, with its "deal makers. The contract makers. The map drawers." "The first thing that he does is reject the identity given to him by his assumed English fathers, signified by the name that lord Suffolk and 'Uncle' Almasy used to call him-Kip and reclaim his real name: "His name is Kirpal Singh and he does not know what he is doing there." (Ibid., p. 287.)

That, however, is parallel history, driven underground. The official version, as created, for instance, in *An Outline of American History*, devotes less than a sentence to the death of civilization, placing it within a time clause: "In August, after atomic bombs *were dropped* on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the war was brought to an abrupt end".<sup>17</sup> The use of the passive voice is also highly conspicuous. It is used, any grammar book will say, when the doer of the action, the so-called agent, is unknown or not important. The official version thus virtually says that *someone* dropped the bombs and that the act is not important, since the war was ended. The point, however, is: the war had already been over. Dropping those bombs was an unnecessary act; it was yet another exercise in cruelty, another demonstration of power. "The tremor of Western wisdom", Ondaatje calls it, and the reader feels that the word 'Western' is spat out as the most offensive curse.

In the end, is there a conclusion? Only this: the process of testing and judging [hi] stories against the background of one another is inconclusive. The only landmarks we can trust are these sentences:

Official histories and news stories were always soft as rhetoric, like that of a politician making a speech after a bridge is built, a man who does not even cut the grass on his own lawn.

( . . . ) Official histories, news stories surround us daily, but the events of art reach us too late, travel languorously like messages in a bottle. (Ondaatje, 1985, 145-6)

But, they *do reach* us, if too late. If there is any hope it lies in this: the official history continues to be betrayed.

At the end of this paper, it is easy to repeat, with great conviction, the thesis with which we started it: Michael Ondaatje is one of the most intriguing modern writers. He demonstrates impressive sensitivity to violence in his poems and novels, employing his beautiful, precise language, his "*great love and great coldness*"<sup>18</sup> to raise the questions about responsibility, to expose and judge pain, cruelty, injustice - all the greater when contrasted with the temporary escape from them<sup>19</sup> because they are there, because pretending they were not would be morally wrong and artistically bad. Thus he finds his place in the long literary tradition ranging from Aeschylus to Hemingway and Edward Bond.

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<sup>17</sup> *An Outline of American History*, p 117. Italics mine.

<sup>18</sup> From the poem *Burning Hills*

<sup>19</sup> *The days that belonged to the moon*. The phrase is from *The Skin of a Lion* and it refers to the period of Patrick's greatest happiness with Alice, Hana and his immigrant friends.

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## WRITER AS ELEGIST: MCLEOD'S SHORT FICTION

### **Contemporary theory and the meaning of nostalgia**

I began to think and write about Alastair McLeod's strikingly beautiful stories while still unaware that this year's conference is on otherness in Canadian culture. I had practically finished the essay before I realised how its subject fits into the theme of the conference. McLeod does not write about the native traditions of the North American Indians, or those brought over by the immigrants from Asia – these most obvious, racial others that have helped define, by repudiation or exclusion, the Canadian and the western cultural identity in general. His stories tell instead of what is the integral part of the white settlers' heritage - the immemorial Celtic modes of life that the immigrants of Scottish and Irish origin transplanted to their new home in Canada. Having survived through centuries of deliberate cultural marginalisation and suppression in Britain, these traditions spread fresh roots and flourished for a time in the soil of Nova Scotia, the austere beauty of Maritime landscape absorbed into the Gaelic language and lore. Now these ancestral tribal cultures are receding into the past and joining the Indian pagan traditions in the realm of otherness. What seems to doom them is not any violent disinheritance but merely the inexorable logic of cultural change which, on the analogy with the inherently developmental biological evolution, we all too often identify with improvement.

Small wonder that McLeod's elegiac stories have been described as conservative, by a literary world cluttered, as Jane Urquhart explains in the Afterword to McLeod's 1986 collection of stories, with theories and "isms". But it is not theorizing in itself that is to blame but the kind of confused theorizing that fails or refuses to distinguish between change as expansion and renewal (which indeed is what life demands) and change as diminishment and decline of life. It is only when this distinction is blurred that nostalgia becomes a conservative sentiment, and is treated as a failure at correct interpretation of and identification with the upward movement of history. The example of this kind of theorizing is provided by Francis Fukuyama whose quite illegitimate appropriation of Marx enabled him to proclaim the worldwide expansion of capitalist free market a desirable and triumphant end of history. ( Fukuyama, 1992)

It is these two readings of history and of the self that lie behind the by now almost automatic habit to dub writers (including the great modernists) obsessed with mythological origins and ethnic roots conservative. The ideological uses of this kind of theorizing are specially obvious in the post-colonial and multiculturalist debate, where an inordinate amount of energy has been wasted on the false dichotomy between ethnic particularity and cosmopolitan universality: for surely, the current cultural recolonisation of the few remaining free nations of the world will run more smoothly once the reading public, or, if possible, even the writers, are persuaded that to be provincial is the opposite of being cosmopolitan. As a matter of fact, the reverse is true. F. R. Leavis reply in 1967 to those who dismissed as provincial his insistence on the cultural continuity in English education is still relevant: "Better than to be provincial than cosmopolitan, for to be cosmopolitan in these matters is to be at home nowhere, and he who is at home nowhere can make little of any literature – the more he knows the larger his ignorance". He added prophetically that "it is an American ethos that prescribes these cosmopolitan cures for our provinciality, and the idea that being provincial is what we suffer from is itself American." He concluded that instead of looking for a sense of purpose in America, which for all its wealth and power is in a no more satisfying spiritual condition than England,

we should fight to preserve what is essential our cultural heritage – the heritage that is only kept alive by creative renewal...and get it shared as widely as possible with the third realm, which the technoligico-Benthamite world despises and ignores, in order to see what a living cultural tradition may do for humanity.' (Leavis, 179-183)

The conclusion is worth quoting because it anticipates another stumbling block in the multiculturalist debate: the initial dilemma between ethnicity and cosmopolitanism has been recently resolved by a cynical denial of any possibility of choice. It is true that the immensely publishable exoticised "ethnic writing" into which some postcolonial writers have been seduced and the highly commercialized folklorist revivalism are mistaken ways of countering cultural globalization. For what is revived in this way is not the spirit of original native tradition but its visible, simplified external expression: those tiny decorative bits - dances, clothes, cuisine – exotic surrogates that trade well because they feed the spiritually famished audience who can no longer identify the nature of their hunger. But it does not follow from this that the ethnic past has become simply inaccessible. The claim that it has is one reason why multiculturalist and postcolonial studies, initially founded to protect the ethnic "others", have really become a programme of cultural non-interference.

The Leavis quotation is important because it points the way to the shared living tradition which is a true alternative to both ethnic stereotyping and the uprooted desiccated universalism. Thus he provides a perspective from which the meaning of McLeod's, and also the great modernist writers' "conservativism" can be properly understood. Leavis shares this perspective



with the archetypal critics and thinkers such as Herbert Marcuse. They all assume that reminiscence is essential to all literature, that beneath the rich variety of its forms, all art is recollection; and that in remembering, and "conserving" the past, the artist is engaged in the ethically most radical task. This view derives from their refusal to compromise with the post-modern de-originating theories of history and the pro-imperialist politics more or less successfully concealed under the slogans of material progress and democratic improvement. For these critics western history has been mostly a hindrance to creative change, so that its course, despite, or rather in proportion to the technological development, is a steady spiritual decline. If this is so, then the great writers from the classical Greek tragedians, through Shakespeare to Ted Hughes, from D. H. Lawrence and James Joyce to Margaret Atwood and J. M. Coetzee, have been the most eloquent in naming what, in fact, has been the common goal of all western art: it is to locate the moment when the decisive wrong turn was made, ("When did we go bad?" asks the heroine of *Surfacing*) and reach beyond it to the spirit of that past which Wordsworth sought to enshrine for future restoration. For them all, writing has been a kind of Janus-like, double-faced mental archaeology, at once looking backward and forward in time: as Wordsworth's spiritual heir, Seamus Heaney, put it, "poetry is digging, digging for finds that end up being plants." (Heaney, 263)

The paths those backward and inward journeys have taken were different, for they always started where Leavis claimed all great art starts: at home, in the local and regional. Yet they invariably lead to the discovery of the common heritage, to the "one and one story only" that, according to the poet and anthropologist Robert Graves, the business of the western artist has been to retell. (Graves, 1955) Thus it was by following the underground streams of Irish legends that Heaney arrived at the transnationally valid myth of Hercules and Antaeus and reworked it into a poem about the function of poetry. Initially the story of the overthrow of Antaeus, the son of Geia by the sky-born Hercules was meant to celebrate the newly acquired emancipation of the patriarchal Greeks from their hitherto earth-bound destiny. Heaney's poem, on the contrary, is a lament over this tragic anthropological re-orientation. His Antaeus is not an aggressive challenger but a mould-hugger, tied to the earth by bonds of blood and emotion. Hercules's motives, on the other hand, are usurpation and mastery. His chief asset is intelligence: it is a "spur of light", helping him take the measure of the dark powers feeding of the territory; he uses it as a "blue prong", to gripe his opponent out of his element and lift him up into the air, beyond the reach of the earth's strength-reviving maternal body. Antaeus, weaned at last, falls into a dream of origin and loss: of the cradling darkness of caves and souterrains, the hatching grounds, the river-veins, the secret gullies of his strength. He bequeaths them all to the elegists. Their poetry is a reminder that, driven underground, there still exists an alternative to the monstrous concept of progress engendered by Hercules' triumph: to a history whose underlying impulse to master "the other" finds its expression in the twin

phenomena of imperialist politics - the conquest and dispossession of the races still bound to the soil by the Antaeon love - and of excessive rationalism - the inward conquest of the blood by the brain.

**The intellectual mind and the betrayal of memory: “The Lost Salt Gift of Blood”**

McLeod transposes the primordial Antaeon scenario into elegiac stories of the vanishing rural traditions of Nova Scotia, but manages to endorse their spiritual values without any false exotic idealisation of the material practices to which they were attached. The immemorial modes of life still persisting in the out ports are rendered lyrically yet with historical precision. The first settlers were forced to emigrate from Britain by Scotland’s Highland Clearances, and by extreme poverty; scarcity and excessive physical toil have marked the lives of their Canadian descendents for the next three hundred years. Frequent loss of human life due to primitive conditions of work has been another reason for the younger generation’s decision to move to the more civilised urban west. Thus the narrator of “The Road to Rankin’s Point” remembers the death of his grandfather, who lost his footing on a particularly tricky piece of the brutally steep, ice-covered road. He recalls other deaths in the family caused by accidents at work: a sudden bolt of a horse sent one into the teeth of a mowing machine, another was drowned in a sea storm, and still another, separated from his sealing ship by an unexpected obliterating blizzard, froze on the lunar ice fields of early march. But he remembers too the more bizarre and ironic deaths of those of the younger generation, who moved west, seeking the safety of regulated urban order far removed from the uncertainty of the elements and unpredictability of suddenly frightened animals. Real estate brokers and vice-presidents of grocery chains, they had their lives terminated by deaths as modern and affluent as their careers had been: choking on a piece of steak at an expensive restaurant, from too much sun on the beach while jogging at five A.M. “Perhaps the death by affluence is the same as death by physical labour”, meditates the narrator. That it is not is suggested by his own belated return to Rankin’s point. Having spent the years of his absence teaching the over-urbanised students of Burlington in the classrooms that always seemed overheated, he comes back now, diseased and dying, to his grandmother and through her, “back to the knowledge of being and its end as understood through second sight and spectral vision and the intuitive dog and the sea-bird’s cry...back to anything rather than to die at the objective hands of mute cold science.” (McLeod, 1989, 154) Now that it is too late for healing, to be able to sink back into the embrace of the elemental purity of his original environment is a final consolation: “almost as the diseased and polluted salmon”, he says to himself, ‘who knows of no cure for the termination of his life, I have returned now to swim for a brief time in the clear waters of my earlier stream.’ (McLeod, 1989, 144)

It is significant that the hero of the ‘Road to Rankin’s Point’ and the narrators of several other stories left their native Cape Breton to become teachers.

This defines their theme not merely in terms of a choice between wholesome poverty and decadent prosperity but more ambivalently by what seems to be a contrast between the provincial spiritual inertia and the growth of the mind promised by formal education. Yet they turn out to be subtle explorations of invisible processes of betrayal by the academically trained mind of the spontaneous, blood-begotten and love-sustaining ethics which, recorded in the native oral traditions, have for centuries been the spiritual guidance of the "uneducated" generations. When McLeod's protagonists are teachers of literature, as in "The lost salt gift of blood", the questions the stories raise are all the more disturbing, forcing the (academic) reader to re-examine his own professional and moral choices. When and under what circumstances is the pursuit of literary education and academic career justified? How is one's life improved by literature, and how does one go about teaching it, if to do so one has to renounce the reality which the purpose of literary fictions is to re-invent and celebrate?

The theme of 'The Lost Salt Gift of Blood' is comparable to that of J. M. Coetzee's novel *Disgrace*. The hero of *Disgrace*, a teacher of literature at the Capetown University, is guilty of a sexual abuse of a female student, an act he first confounds with the spontaneous erotic love praised by the romantic poets. The narrative traces the gradual adjustment of perception until the hero recognises his personal crime against the female as inseparable from the racial crime against the native blacks of South Africa and both as having origin in the inner "apartheid," the divorce of the intellectual mind from the soul. To atone for these sins and heal his broken soul he leaves the city and goes back to the farm of his childhood where he begins to compose an opera – bringing words and music together being a cure for the overly rational male mind famously prescribed by Nietzsche and Samuel Beckett. McLeod's teacher suffers from the same divided condition, but in his case it is incurable. The painful process of self-recognition recounted in "The Lost Salt Gift of Blood" culminates when the obscure and disconnected fragments of the past preserved in the narrator's deficient memory finally fall into a pattern. Yet it is a vision of truth untranslatable into action, for although he can now see more clearly, he is still incapable of seeing feelingly, and thus remains beyond redemption.

The story opens with a lyrical evocation of the purity and beauty of a piece of landscape on the coast of Nova Scotia, a place, as the narrator remarks sadly, more distant from Detroit and Toronto than from Ireland, to which the rocky edges of the harbour seem to loom yearningly. It is from one of the large American Midwest cities that, after a long absence, the narrator himself has come back to his birthplace, a tiny fishing village some way up the coast. He is welcomed there by a family of three people, an old man and woman and their grandson, the link of middle generation unaccountably missing. But the explanation is not provided until the simple integrity and mutual affection of these people, and the cleanliness of their primitive, salt smelling cabin have been given prolonged and melancholy attention. During dinner the tense silence of the grown-ups hints at some tragic failure on the narrator's part.

There are clues too in the old ballads the boy sings to the guest about a faithless lover and a dead girl Jenny, and in the narrator's unspoken enigmatic response to their words: "Fog does not touch like snow, yet it is more heavy and more dense. Oh, moisture comes in many forms!" (McLeod, 1989, 62)

A partial disclosure follows in the old man's account of the death of his daughter and her husband when their pickup crashed into a utility pole on the Toronto Queen St. West a few years before. Bad visibility caused by heavy fog contributed to the accident, reads the newspaper clipping the host shows to his visitor. The eventual revelation of the narrator's identity occurs later that night, when in the darkness of the sleeping house he gropes his way to the door of the boy's room and bends his ear to hear "the even sound of my one son sleeping". He hesitates to open the door knowing that there is nobody in the room waiting for him, the son he has disowned no more beckoning to him than the non-existent voices which minutes earlier, like a foolish Lockwood, he approached the window of his room to hear. Nor is there a boiled egg, or shaker of salt with a glass of water on the chair, he muses, as the nature of his crime gradually emerges out of the flood of his confused reminiscence. He remembers that there was once a belief held in the out ports that if a girl would see her true lover, she had to boil an egg, scoop out half the shell, fill it with salt, take it to bed and eat it, leaving a glass of water by the bedside. In the night her future husband or a vision of him would appear and offer her the glass. She could do it only once.

There are gaps in the narrative and the dates are not certain but we may infer that this ritual preceded the night of lovemaking when the narrator's son was conceived, and that he did not stay to see him born, or left immediately after his birth. For he recalls that eleven years earlier bright young graduate students were collecting this type of belief and old songs all about the wild wide sea and the lost and faithless lovers for their theses and archives of North America and hopefully for their own fame. Carried away by his success in this scholarly enterprise, he remained persistently blind to the emotional loss and moral defeat that it involved. He had exchanged reality for literary fictions, or dreams as he calls them, and dreams for fame. Divorced from personal experience and reduced to a means of professional advancement, the traditional customs and old ballads, and later poems and novels from which he quotes abundantly, have been rendered ineffectual, incapable of interpreting him to himself. Even now that he has met his estranged son and first known himself as a character from these stories, a faithless lover and an absent father, a foolish Lockwood, and Yeats's embittered Cuchulain, these literary reminiscences still stand between him and reality, and hinder the depth understanding of the comparisons they inspire. What they make visible is the invisibility: they are shadows without reality conjuring up closed surfaces they cannot unlock, "flickers of imagination touching restlessly the walls of memory", or illuminating the fog, that, like the fog on the Toronto road on which the woman he had deserted perished, still envelops his way. He yearns to see it more clearly, but cannot because the insight into the past

he finally gains is as cerebral as was his tempering with literature, because, once again, he has defined conceptually what he cannot understand experientially – and his melancholy self-mockery shows that he is aware of it. He sees now that he has collected many things which he did not understand but is still the man who “would like to penetrate the mystery of fog by capturing it in a jar like the beautiful childhood butterflies that always die in spite of the air holes punched with nails in the covers of their captivity – leaving behind the vapours of their lives and deaths”. His newly acquired self-knowledge, in short, is negative. He knows that he does not know, or rather that he does not know enough to recover what he knows he has lost:

And perhaps now [he meditates bitterly] I should go and say, oh son of my *summa cum laude loins*, come away from the lonely gulls and the silver trout and I will take you to the land of Tastee Freeze where you may sleep till ten of nine. And I will show you the elevator to the apartment on the sixteenth floor and introduce you to the buzzer system and the yards of the wrought-iron fences where the Doberman pinscher runs silently at night. Or may I offer you the money that is the fruit of my collecting and my most successful life? Or shall I wait

to meet you in some known or unknown bitterness like Yeats's Cuchulain by the wind whipped sea or as Sohrab and Rustum by the future flowing river? Again I collect dreams for I do not know enough of the fog on Toronto's Queen St. West and the grinding crash of the pickup and of lost and misplaced love. (McLeod, 1989, 69)

Unlike Coetzee's teacher, who decides, after his disgrace, to remain on the farm and expiate his sin, McLeod's teacher excuses himself in the morning and starts back to the city. Before he leaves though he is presented with a smooth round stone - the parting gift of his son, who likes to collect them on the beach. Polished to almost perfect lustre by the relentless work of the waves, given by the son who has never received anything from him, the stone is a reminder of the realities, that the father, a collector of dreams, has sinned against. The sea, the girl with her shaker of salt, the salt-smelling room of their brief love, the child – his own flesh and blood, and the memory which McLeod tells us in another story lives in the blood – all these meanings are fused in the richly suggestive metaphor of the story's title: “the lost salt gift of blood”.

### **The integrity of the poetic mind: “Tuning of Perfection”**

“Tuning of Perfection” tells of a man who would not forget. No intellectual, Archibald is the incarnation of the intuitive mind, a natural worshipper of what once were the prime emblems of poetry. Poetry, Robert Graves reminds us in his statement of the great poetic theme, comparable to Heaney's in “Hercules and Antaeus,”

is religious invocation of the Muse. ...This was once a warning to man that he must keep in harmony with the family of living creatures among which he was born, by obedience to the wishes of the lady of

the house; it is now a reminder that he has disregarded the warning, turned the house upside down by the capricious experiments in philosophy, science and industry, and brought ruin on himself and his family. "Nowadays" is a civilisation in which the prime emblems of poetry are dishonoured. In which serpent, lion and eagle belong to the circus tent, ox, salmon and boar to the cannery, racehorse and greyhound to the betting ring; and the sacred grove to the saw-mill... In which money will buy almost anything but truth, and almost anyone but the truth-possessed poet. (Graves, 1961, 14)

A lumberman in love with his mountain forest, a passionate lover of his wife in his youth, and a singer enamoured of old Gaelic ballads, McLeod's Archibald is an Orpheus who remains faithful to all his loves to the end. He is now seventy eight, and is still treating his forest as if it were a garden, hauling more timber with his horses than his neighbours with all their devastating heavy equipment, yet keeping the mountain mysteriously fresh and replenished. He still lives high up there where he first climbed, at the time when everybody was moving down in the opposite direction, to build a house for himself and his future wife to be alone together in. Both sang tirelessly as they worked on it. A year after his wife died giving birth to the fifth child, the only son he might have had, Archibald was quietly astonished by his widowed sister-in-law's marriage proposal and even more by the coarseness of its terms. For the next fifty years his sexual abstinence has remained an object of equally obscene jokes. Yet, ironically enough, the authors of these very jokes decided that there was something sexually disturbing and unnatural about his four daughters living alone with their father, so the relatives took the children over from him to give them a proper upbringing. Since then Archibald's chief company has been the memory of his wife, with whom he often talks silently when awake and who often visits him in his dreams; and a couple of monogamous eagles whose loss of vigour lately, as he watches them flying ever lower so that the male has to touch his mate to infuse her with new energy, has filled him with the anxiety for the future of their young. He did not know that their fatigue was due to the ecological damage caused to their habitat by chemicals; nor did he realise, until his friend Carver told him, that the pet mare he believed he had sold for work was actually meant for birth control pills: she was to be kept pregnant all the time so women won't be. To his uneasy question, "What do they do with the colts?", Carver replied carelessly that they threw them away. Of all the instances of mindless blasphemy against the natural bonds of love that Archibald witnesses or is told about, the most haunting is the image of the dead colts dumped out together with carcasses of other unwanted animals on manure piles behind barns. His melancholy foreboding intensifies steadily until he feels somehow betrayed by forces he cannot control. Yet the narrative's skilful and immensely eloquent intertwining of images of life and relentless forces that threaten their sanctity builds towards the crucial scene of Archibald's last act of personal resistance.

Its full significance emerges if we perceive in it the outline of the Orpheus myth. A story about memory, love and art it is, in fact, in the background of all of McLeod's short fiction. But one among its many interpretations is of particular relevance to "Tuning of Perfection." According to a psychoanalyst critic Ruth Gisela Clausmeier, the power of Orpheus's song to quell wild beasts and move trees dates from the time when he served Dionysus, an archaic deity of spontaneous creative ecstasy and a faithful husband of Ariadne. At this stage Orpheus's sole inspiration was his mother, Caliope, the one with the beautiful voice, and the mother's incarnation, his wife Euridice, and not yet his father Apollo, the god of emotional restraint and formal perfection. Euridice's death and the injunction against the backward glance registers the shift in the Greek culture away from the Dionysian towards the Apollonian art. But what the Greeks demanded from their poet, when they cut him off from the source of his inspiration, was in fact impossible: an art at once perfect and yet emptied of the memory of completeness of being once embodied in woman's love. If the verb "to remember" has derived etymologically from the noun "member" and has preserved the latent meaning of "re-membering", re-assembling the torn and scattered body parts, the verb "to dismember" may also have the reverse symbolic meaning of "to make forget", "to mentally fragmentize". If this is so, the dismemberment of Orpheus may be understood as an external symbolic equivalent of the violent interruption of his mourning for the past, of inner fragmentation that results from forgetting. In the light of this interpretation, the prohibition against nostalgia, by the fashionable theories of art and culture that I mentioned at the beginning of the essay can be seen as a repetition of this ancient cultural crime.

Unlike his counterpart from the "Lost Salt Gift of Blood", Archibald remains impervious to this kind of manipulation. The last of the Cape Breton singers of his kind, he can still reproduce without fault the exact words, and authentic spirit of ancient Gaelic songs. He does not mind the folklorists either, who discovered him in the sixties, and offers patient advice when they come to consult him about articles on, for instance, "The Mnemonic Devices in Gaelic Line". When he first hears about the invitation to participate in the "Scots round the world" festival of Gaelic song in Halifax that year, he responds with mild interest and caution. His doubts mount however as he begins to realise that he would not be allowed to do it "his way" and what sham the supposed revival in fact is. At the audition, moved to tears by the song about lost love he has not yet finished, he is interrupted by the producer and briskly informed that his face satisfies the criteria of high visibility on which the success of the big show will depend, but that the ballads themselves pose problems: they are too long and too mournful. To tune them up to post-modern mass media "no leisure from pleasure" concept of perfection he is to sing them faster, omit half of the stanzas and, for God's sake, change the titles such as "Oh how heavy is my heart". That evening, like Orpheus descending into the underworld to seek his Euridice, Archibald

sinks into a long uninterrupted dream of his dead wife. They often sang together in his dreams but on this night she only sang:

Every note was perfect, as perfect and clear as the waiting water droplet hanging on the fragile leaf or the high suspended eagle outlined against the sky at the apex of its arc. She sang until the first rays of the sun began to touch the mountain top, and then was gone. (McLeod, 1986, 113)

After Euridice's final disappearance Orpheus was converted to the Apollonian sense of perfection, and scorned women ever after. Archibald's confidence that he should sing do it "his way" or not at all was strengthened after his dream: he woke up refreshed in a way he had seldom felt since sleeping with his wife so many years before. He cancelled the trip to Halifax, to the immense disappointment of his granddaughter who was hoping for a chance to sleep in without her husband bothering her, and other relatives keen on shopping in a large city. Archibald's family were replaced by another group of singers lead by the "adjusted" Carver. The producer had initially eliminated him, because his face was badly scarred and would spoil the visual effects he was after. But Carver had in the meantime grown a beard to cover his disfigured mouth and did not mind that his song, "Brochan Lom", was not even a song but a bunch of nonsense syllables strung together, for he knew nobody would have understood the words even if they had made sense. And he needed the money for a new power saw engine. He did not spend what he had earned on a new engine though. Drunk, with a fresh cut on his temple that no moustache or beard could hide, he appears suddenly one rainy night and solemnly places five boxes filled with bottles of bootlegged liquor on Archibald's floor. The most abstemious man on the mountain, Archibald is moved even more by the total inappropriateness of this expensive gift, for he is aware of its cost in many ways. It is a token of Carver's remorse for the betrayal of everything the old man stands for and everything he himself still remembers in his deepest self. To remember truly is like being wounded, remarks the narrator of another story entitled "Vision":

You can imagine the scar tissue that will form and be a different colour and texture from your skin. You know this even as you are trying to stop the blood and trying to squeeze the separated edges of skin together once more. Like trying to squeeze together the separated banks of a newly discovered river, so that the stream will be subterranean once more. It is something like that, although you know in one case the future scar will be forever on the outside while the memory will remain forever deep within. (McLeod, 1986, 128)

Carver's words at the end of the story - "Look Archibald, ... We know. We know. We really know" - briefly intone this recurring motif: they bring together Carver's scars and his buried memory. Abrupt and meagre as they are, they articulate the inner "blood" knowledge lost to the faithless father in "The Lost Salt Gift of Blood". Summoned by Archibald's stubborn integrity



to his own moral core, Carver becomes, for a symbolic moment, the son the old man might have had.

The moment is also an allegory of the reading experience. Seamus Heaney wrote once that the function of the cultural heritage transmitted by literature is to summon us to the answerable centre of ourselves. This healing process is the theme not only of *Disgrace* but of all Coetzee's novels, from *Dusklands* to *The Lives of Animals*. They are written to honour the other: the dark-skinned races of the world who still live in the Antaeon garden, and also "the idea of gardening" buried in white man's racial memory, which Coetzee calls the "dark self". Steeped in blood and emotion, the dark self is a wellspring of moral feeling and rebellious courage. It is encouraging that despite the increasingly fierce campaign to cleanse us of these archaic virtues, writers who stood up in their defence, Heaney and Coetzee, should both be recipients of the highest prize for literature. McLeod is not a Nobel prize winner but his two slim volumes of elegiac stories place him among the greatest of the writers committed to the ethos of the Antaeon tradition.

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### COMPRENDRE L'AUTRE: *LE CŒUR DÉCOUVERT* DE MICHEL TREMBLAY

Quels qu'ils soient et où qu'ils se trouvent, les tenants du conformisme et de l'intégrisme sexuels voudraient, en somme, un monde uniforme et prévisible. Pour eux, nous sommes condamnés non seulement au mimétisme mais aussi à l'ennui. Paradoxalement, un monde où prévaut la ressemblance est plus un monde « homo » - où prévaut le même – qu'un monde « hétéro », où prévaut le différent, l'Autre. Tous pareils dans nos sexes, nos genres et nos érotismes préfabriqués, que nous resterait-il à apprendre les uns des autres? (Dorais, 23).

Bonne question, que celle que nous pose Michel Dorais. En effet, l'univers a pour caractéristique essentielle et indéniable, la diversité. Chaque être humain, dans le monde, est une personne unique, puisque douée de signes, de caractères qui lui appartiennent en propre, à quoi s'ajoutent le milieu, les conditions de vie, la culture, la vie sociale qu'elle mène.

La diversité ne peut pas être envisagée (parce qu'elle ne l'est pas) comme marginale, perverse, anormale. Cette identité qui trouble et dérange, parce qu'on ne la comprend pas, est soumise à la persécution (ouverte ou pas), à la honte. « Notre identité est le résultat d'une construction sociale de la réalité: on devient ce qu'on croit être à travers notre perception de nous-mêmes et à travers le regard des autres. L'identité est une fiction rendue vraisemblable par sa confirmation incessante » (Dorais, 160), une trajectoire, un processus de questionnement, de composition et recomposition, une prise de conscience, une dimension subjective. Et lorsqu'un être différent par « l'origine, la nationalité, la foi, l'orientation sexuelle, la profession, la sociabilité, le mode de vie, l'engagement politique, l'état civil, [...], le genre », comme le dit Maclure, est soumis à la discrimination, on comprend qu'il éprouve un sentiment de persécution et un complexe d'infériorité, qu'il trouve difficile de trouver sa place parmi les autres et que, par voie de conséquence, généralement, ses relations avec ceux-ci soient faussées: à l'incompréhension des autres il oppose l'ouverture de l'esprit, la tentation de comprendre et de faire comprendre sa nature profonde et le refus d'une ghettoïsation, en attendant, réelle.

Le roman très attachant de Michel Tremblay, *Le Cœur découvert*, aborde avec une sincérité désarmante ce problème, très complexe, de l'altérité, dans

les relations entre les sexes, en cherchant au-delà des préjugés la reconnaissance du droit à la différence considérée comme une richesse et non comme un handicap, la reconnaissance et la compréhension de l'autre dans sa trajectoire identitaire encore trouble.

Le roman tisse un canevas de relations de couples se manifestant dans leur quotidien: amour des homosexuels masculins (Jean-Marc – Mathieu), des lesbiennes (Marie-Hélène – Jeanne), des hétérosexuels (Louise – Gaston), des enfants (Sébastien – Marie-Ève); relations de couples et entre les couples qui créent un « roman d'amours » (comme le souligne le sous-titre), un roman de l'amour tout court. Cet amour, qui n'est pas une relation « sulfureuse » mais qui fait qu'on devient l'autre:

J'entendais résonner sa voix à l'intérieur de son corps et j'ai eu l'impression pendant un très court instant d'être lui. Et j'ai su que quoi qu'il arrive Mathieu ferait à tout jamais partie intégrante de moi. Ou moi de lui. Le choix s'est fait avec une facilité déconcertante. Une grande chaleur s'est ouverte, comme une fleur qui se déplie. Je venais de trouver mon élan. (Tremblay, 391)

Jean-Marc, 39 ans, professeur de français à l'Université, passe par un mauvais moment après la rupture avec Luc, acteur, «bête qui sue la sexualité», Don Juan impénitent et insatiable. La mauvaise expérience vécue avec celui-ci, « les scènes pénibles », « ses crises », « ses doutes », « ses certitudes souvent si pitoyables », lui font repousser d'emblée tout acteur aspirant, de la même manière dont une femme déçue par un homme hait et rejette les hommes. Cela risque de détruire, avant même qu'elle ne commence, la relation avec Mathieu, 24 ans, vendeur à Eaton briguant une carrière artistique, « officiellement acteur en chômage » (34), comme il se présente lui-même.

Jean-Marc aime la diversité, il n'a pas de préjugés: « ...les bars gays qui acceptent les femmes ont toujours ma sympathie. Les ghettos me font peur; je préfère les mélanges même les plus hétéroclites aux cohues trop homogènes d'où toute diversité est bannie et qui sentent la spécialité à tout prix » (22). « Il me semble impossible de toujours désirer la même chose, un même gabarit, une même allure, une même atmosphère. Ça finit par avoir un petit côté fixation qui m'agace » (25). « Les hommes qui courent les femmes enfants » ou ceux qui « ne jurent que par le muscle gonflé et la tête de militaire sadique » (25-26) lui répugnent à égale mesure, et qu'on le veuille ou non, « homo » ou « hétéro », on reste humain et donc soumis aux erreurs, aux préjugés, aux fixations irrationnelles, à l'intolérance devant ce qui fait peur ou ce que l'on ne comprend pas, indifféremment de l'étiquette que nous (nous) collons.

Jean-Marc, mûr et sensible, n'est pas un hypocrite, il s'assume sans réserves: « J'ai pourtant fait un fou de moi assez souvent pour ne pas trop prendre au sérieux les mésaventures qui peuvent se produire dans ma vie d'homosexuel pratiquant et plutôt téméraire » (45).

Seul homme dans un groupe de lesbiennes, il fraternise avec elles, amies et sœurs, les considérant comme sa famille, même si elle est « inventée de toutes pièces », parce qu'il leur fait confiance, n'ayant pas confiance dans les hommes. Pourquoi des lesbiennes? Parce qu'elles l'ont tout de suite adopté, comme lui même les a tout de suite aimées, parce que leurs revendications ressemblent aux siennes, et qu'elles ont une manière à part de lutter: « elles ne sont jamais heavy et plutôt que d'agresser les hommes, elles en rient » (40). Le rire et le sarcasme deviennent des armes des plus efficaces.

La relation de Jean-Marc et de Mathieu ressemble tellement à la relation d'un couple hétérosexuel, que parfois on oublie qu'il s'agit d'un amour homosexuel. Cette relation s'amorce timidement, avec des sentiments ambigus, parce qu'on ne sait pas où on va:

C'était comme lorsqu'on rêve pendant des mois de s'acheter quelque chose et qu'on se rend compte, cette chose obtenue, que c'était beaucoup plus excitant de la désirer que d'en jouir. Maintenant que Mathieu arrivait je ne savais plus si j'avais encore envie de le voir. (63-64)

C'est la peur de l'inconnu, une émotion, « une véritable névrose »: « j'avais froid, ma poitrine était trop petite pour la grosseur de mon cœur, mes mains tremblaient... » (64). D'emblée, l'entente, la confiance, la complicité s'installent et c'est du sentiment, puisque le sexe en est absent à ce moment. Bien qu'inquiet pour son indépendance, il se comprend, il se sent transparent à lui-même sinon aux autres:

J'étais attiré par Mathieu mais je le repoussais, comme si j'avais été effrayé par ce qu'il pourrait devenir dans ma vie si je le laissais faire. Ma méfiance envers les jeunes acteurs n'était peut-être en fin de compte qu'une excuse pour protéger ma fragile indépendance. (74)

La confiance qui s'établit, donc, entre eux les pousse à des aveux réciproques. Jean-Marc apprend que Mathieu, marié à 18 ans, séparé de sa femme depuis deux ans, quand il a compris ce qu'il était (prise de conscience déclenchée par la découverte que sa femme le trompait), a un garçon de quatre ans qu'il adore, pour lequel il éprouve « une passion presque douloureuse ». C'est Sébastien, sa raison de vivre. « Meurtri, fatigué, désillusionné », amer, Mathieu accepte sa condition:

...il avait fini par oublier l'acuité de la douleur, la gravité du dilemme dans lequel il s'était trouvé, ses doutes, ses certitudes, ses questionnements, ses crises d'affirmation, celles, tellement plus violentes, de révolte devant une révélation qu'il ne comprenait pas et qu'il refusait de toutes ses forces tout en la vivant avec une intensité qui le dépassait. (95)

Cette relation naissante est basée sur la sincérité, sur l'honnêteté, sur le respect de l'autre, sur la délicatesse, la compréhension:

La duplicité de certains soi-disant bisexuels me pue au nez; elle sent trop souvent la misogynie des hommes complices entre eux, la peur de la vérité telle quelle, l'amertume du non-assumé. Alors la franchise de Mathieu qui n'avait pas hésité à tout bouleverser dans sa vie à l'apparition des premiers symptômes de sa nouvelle sexualité forçait mon admiration. Quel courage ç'avait dû lui prendre pour tout avouer, assumer toutes les conséquences... (87)

Par-delà ce courage évident, Jean-Marc sent toute la fragilité de Mathieu, la blessure qu'il cache, et se découvre « impliqué » au-delà de toutes ses prévisions; il doit reconnaître qu'il est amoureux comme un adolescent: « Trente-neuf ans et je fondais pour un baiser sur la joue ! Je me disais que ça, quand même, je ne l'avouerais pas à mes amies » (90). Malgré une première dispute qui conduit au compromis, comme dans tout bon vieux couple, et parce qu'ils se complètent et se comprennent, ils veulent *aimer*. Mathieu « voulait rester pour aimer » (132).

Fortuite, la rencontre de la « famille » de Jean-Marc est décisive pour les deux, comme le sera celle de la famille de Mathieu, car, ne vivant pas en vase clos, dans un univers coupé de celui des autres, on doit assumer tout ce qui est l'Autre: non seulement l'être aimé, mais tout ce « bagage » de sentiments, d'habitudes, de relations familiales ou amicales qui vient avec. (Jean-Marc se laisse entraîner par Mathieu, accroc au cinéma, à assister au Festival du film, par exemple).

Mathieu est tout de suite accepté par les filles, Jeanne et Mélène (Marie-Hélène) qui semblaient le trouver « sympathique et même plus »: « Parce que je l'aurais senti tout de suite si elles l'avaient rejeté, se dit Jean-Marc, à leur air faussement intéressé, à l'ironie à peine dissimulée dans leur regard, à la trop grande politesse avec laquelle elles l'auraient traité » (144). Le premier qui intègre leur nouveau couple est Sébastien, le fils de Mathieu. Les préparatifs de son accueil marquent leur amour, leur considération, leur désir de ne rien cacher à l'enfant. Les sentiments de Jean-Marc sont contradictoires: peur (« Qu'est-ce que tu dis à un enfant de quatre ans? Qu'est-ce que tu fais avec un enfant de quatre ans? » (221-222), exaltation et dépression:

Une grande partie de moi jouissait du spectacle effarant de la nature dans ses derniers soubresauts d'énergie et l'autre voyait avec terreur s'approcher le moment où j'aurais à me pencher sur un visage d'enfant que je n'avais pas choisi de connaître et qui risquait de bouleverser mes petites habitudes de vieux garçon. (223)

La mère de Mathieu, qui se trouve « entre comprendre et accepter » la condition de son fils nouvellement apprise, demande du temps pour rencontrer Jean-Marc:

Après tout le bonheur de Mathieu ne valait-il pas mieux que ses préjugés à elle? Mais un arrière-goût, un rien d'amertume gâchait un peu sa journée: entre comprendre et accepter, il y avait un pas qu'elle

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n'avait pas encore franchi et qui serait probablement le plus difficile. (291)

D'autre part, l'ex-femme de Mathieu surprend tout le monde par son ouverture d'esprit face aux préjugés repris et reproduits par Gaston (son actuel) et par sa famille à lui:

Gang d'épais ! Tu diras à tes brillants frères, surtout le subtil Paulot, que si j'avais une p'tite fille de l'âge de Sébastien j'hésiterais à la laisser s'approcher d'eux-autres pour les mêmes maudites raisons ! Y'ont ben plus l'air de maniaques sexuels que Jean-Marc pis Mathieu ! Jean-Marc pis Mathieu bavaient pas devant toi, à soir, pis y faisaient pas de farces grasses sur ton physique, tandis que quand tes frères me voient arriver... (...). Mais ça, on sait ben, c'est normal ! Eux autres, y'ont tous les droits parce que chus une femme pis qu'y sont hétérosexuels ! Y'ont même le droit de faire des farces plates sur les seins de ta petite nièce qui commencent à pousser... C'est pas sexuel, ça? C'est pas malade, ça? (346)

Les autres gays, comme n'importe quel autre groupe social hétérosexuel, manifestent les mêmes attitudes qui jaugent et jugent, ils sont moqueurs, non équivoques, ironiques ou envieux, à cause de la beauté et de la jeunesse de Mathieu (ceux de l'âge de Jean-Marc), dragueurs et indifférents, surpris par la fidélité de Mathieu « à son vieux » (ceux de l'âge de Mathieu). Les *straights* leur jettent des regards méprisants, supérieurs.

La discrétion de leur couple est si distincte des attitudes belliqueuses, des hauts cris ronflants, redondants de certains membres de la confrérie qui nuisaient ainsi plus à leur cause qu'ils ne la défendaient!

Comme toute relation de couple, celle de Jean-Marc et Mathieu n'est pas exempte de moments difficiles, éprouvants mais qui, comme il arrive souvent, ne font que raffermir ce qu'est un amour véritable.

Mathieu, comme d'habitude, va profiter de ses vacances à lui, puisqu'il avait fait ses réservations deux mois plus tôt, et aller à Provincetown, ville réputée gay, ce qui fait peur à Jean-Marc, peur de le perdre, peur de rester seul, peur de découvrir le ridicule dans leurs relations. Il essaie de retrouver ses habitudes d'avant Mathieu, mais sans succès, il se rend compte qu'il l'aime profondément, il fait une véritable dépression. Mathieu, de son côté, se rend compte de l'inutilité de la semaine passée loin de Jean-Marc; il a le temps de réfléchir et de comprendre qu'il aime Jean-Marc:

Parce qu'il savait maintenant qu'il aimait Jean-Marc, qu'il allait, à son retour, le lui dire, simplement mais d'une façon très claire, en essayant de ne pas trop le bousculer tout en étant ferme sur ses intentions: ce serait tout ou rien; tout étant une vie à deux bâtie autant que possible sur le respect mutuel et l'humour, et rien... (161)

Leur rencontre est émouvante, sans paroles inutiles, ils se comprennent en lisant dans leurs yeux « les interrogations, hésitations, certitudes et déprimés des derniers jours. L'image de Mathieu s'est agrandie démesurément pendant que fondait le reste du monde » (188). Ce qui cimente leur relation, c'est, outre le naturel, la communication qui s'établit entre eux. Lors de la visite de la « belle-mère » et de l'arrivée impromptue de Louise et Gaston, Jean-Marc réalise qu'à cause de l'amour pour Mathieu il peut et doit accepter « tout ça, l'enfant, la belle-mère, l'ancienne femme, le nouveau chum de l'ancienne femme... ». Après leur départ, Jean-Marc et Mathieu se couchent, font l'amour (« avec une énergie nouvelle – en tout cas renouvelée ») et, surtout, ils parlent tard, dans la nuit: « Il m'a décrit ses impressions, je lui ai dit des miennes » (338).

Il y a tendresse surtout et beaucoup d'humour: Mathieu le réveille le lendemain:

- Tu ronfles tellement fort que Mélène vient de donner deux coups sur son plancher !
- C'tu vrai?
- Ben non. C'est les deux sorcières d'en bas qui viennent de donner des coups de balai sur leur plafond.
- C'tu vrai?
- Jean-Marc, retourne donc où tu étais...T'as oublié de ramener ton intelligence... (338)

Aux moments difficiles, aux moments de crise, ils s'appuient réciproquement. Mathieu se montre, malgré son jeune âge, son peu d'expérience, son peu de culture, d'un grand courage: « J'veux absolument pas guérir de toi. Moi, du courage, j'en ai pour deux. Si tu veux, j'vais t'en passer... » (391). Satisfaction, soulagement, entente parfaite et complice sont couronnés par leur éclat de rire, à tous les deux:

- L'éclat de rire qui s'éleva dans la chambre fit sursauter Mélène et Jeanne à l'étage au-dessus. Jeanne regarda son amie avec un petit air dépité.
- « Ça fait longtemps qu'on n'a pas ri comme ça à c't'heure-là, nous autres, hein? »
- Mélène lui donna une légère tape sur les fesses.
- « On est un trop vieux couple... » (400)

Leur rire fera sursauter Jean-Marc et Mathieu: « C'est quand même extraordinaire, hein, rire comme ça, à cette heure-là, après tant d'années de vie commune... » (400). Le groupe de femmes que Jean-Marc est arrivé à considérer comme sa famille, dans lequel il se sent tellement en confiance plus qu'en sécurité, complice de ses joies mais aussi de ses déprimés, est une oasis de douceur et sérénité:



Jeanne est revenue, un coke à la main. Elle s'est assise sur le bras du fauteuil de Mèlène, a posé un baiser sur son épaule. Une telle douceur émanait du tableau qu'elles formaient, une telle sérénité, que j'en ai eu le cœur serré. Elles sont ensemble depuis plus de dix ans et forment une espèce de cliché de vieux couple qui me touche autant que mes parents me touchaient pendant mon adolescence, avec leurs petites manies et leurs attentions, leurs engueulades enfantines, leurs réconciliations exubérantes, leurs troublants silences. (74)

Mèlène devient sa confidente (« notre mère à tous ») car elle le comprend, et parfois le comprend mieux que lui-même ne le fait: « D'ailleurs, chus un peu fatigué, des fois, que tu vois mieux en moi que j'arrive à le faire moi-même... » (100). Comme une vraie mère, elle lui donne des conseils, elle lui suggère d'ouvrir les yeux, de faire attention, de considérer tous les aspects de sa relation avec Mathieu, surtout la différence d'âge, au cas où il ne l'a pas fait. Mèlène et Jeanne n'acceptent pas non plus le lesbianisme à outrance, le refus de tout ce qui est masculin, l'enfermement dans cet autre type de ghetto sans issue, dans cette « désolante pauvreté intellectuelle et physique voulue » (258).

Louise, ex-femme de Mathieu, et Gaston forment un couple tout ce qu'il y a de commun, celui-ci occupe effectivement la place du mari, il partage tout avec Louise, il est un père pour Sébastien qu'il aime et cette découverte inattendue cause un véritable choc à Mathieu qui n'avait jamais considéré Gaston comme un rival, le méprisant plutôt pour « sa passion pour les sports » et pour « ses petits airs de macho », « une quantité négligeable », un « figurant », « mais voilà qu'il devenait humain à part entière, tout à coup, et un être humain avec des droits sur son propre enfant, en plus ! » (215).

La scène de ménage que déclenche la rencontre imprévue de tout le « gang » chez Jean-Marc jette aussi une lumière nouvelle et désagréable pour Sébastien:

... jusque-là Gaston avait toujours été celui vers qui il pouvait courir quand sa mère était furieuse contre lui; c'était le papa gâteau, le tampon qui savait tout atténuer par une farce irrésistible ou une parole apaisante, mais voilà qu'il pouvait lui aussi se changer en démon... (343)

Mais les différences d'opinion se résolvent (ils décident même de faire un enfant), Gaston étant plus accommodable que sa famille qui ne *veut* pas comprendre, plus sensé, plus tolérant. Pour le bien de Sébastien, Louise propose la coopération avec Mathieu et Jean-Marc avec une générosité assez surprenante, compte tenu de sa souffrance; mais on ne peut pas s'empêcher de lire dans son cœur une certaine jalousie devant l'amour de Jean-Marc et Mathieu:

« C'est toi qui dis ça, après tout ce que t'as enduré avec Mathieu...Comment tu fais pour pas nous haïr ... » Son sourire a

disparu tout d'un coup mais je n'ai vu aucune méchanceté sur son visage. « Des fois, j'vous haïs... » (387)

Beau à couper le souffle, intrépide et sans gêne à ses quatre ans, Sébastien manifeste ses sentiments spontanément, se laisse découvrir et comprend plus qu'on n'imagine. En rentrant chez lui après le week-end passé chez Jean-Marc puis Mathieu, il installe Sans-Allure, le chien jouet offert par Jean-Marc, dans la chaise de travail de celui-ci (dans le bureau qui avait été sa chambre), en lui disant de bien travailler:

« Ça nous avait étonnés, Mathieu et moi, mais Sébastien m'avait jeté un regard qui en disait long. Il avait non seulement compris d'où venait la voix, mais aussi que cette pièce était mon bureau, que j'y travaillais et que, donc, une partie de Sans-Allure y travaillait aussi ! » (242)

Sébastien avait beaucoup aimé Jean-Marc qu'il avait trouvé « gentil » et « comique », il avait même hâte de le revoir. L'enfant sait se faire aimer mais sait aussi respecter les autres, en jouant tout seul en attendant le réveil de Jean-Marc: il savait de Gaston que le samedi il ne faut pas le réveiller. Il veut des réponses à des questions vitales: « Jean-Mak... Pourquoi papa reste ici? », « Pourquoi y'a pas de maman ici? » (312-313), « C'est qui la maman? C'est-tu papa ou ben Jean-Mak? » (351).

Lorsque « toute la gang » est réunie, Sébastien est au comble du bonheur, il passe de l'un à l'autre « avec une gentillesse d'enfant comblé qui ne sait pas comment remercier ses bienfaiteurs: il faisait des caresses à tout le monde, nous disait de jolies choses » (336). Il veut rendre l'amour qu'on sent pour lui et qu'on lui montre, sans arrière-pensées parce que ce n'est pas un amour naïf, enfantin, mais un amour sincère et réciproque. Dans son petit monde, à la garderie, il remporte une victoire éclatante en bouchant un coin à Eric Boucher, la terreur, lorsqu'il déclare qu'il a trois papas. Marie-Ève Quintal lui assène pourtant le coup de grâce, elle qui était une de ses plus grandes alliées, discrète, admiratrice.

Elle dit, sans lever la tête de son pinceau, et sur un ton parfaitement neutre, comme si la chose avait été tout à fait naturelle:

« Moi, là, j'ai un papa pis trois mamans... »  
La garderie complète, même Éric Boucher, s'écria:  
« Hein? Chanceuse ! » (371)

Sébastien avait hâte que la garderie rouvre ses portes après Noël pour revoir Marie-Ève; mais, son amour est teinté de l'impatience d'affirmer, comme tout macho, sa supériorité. Après maintes réflexions, il allait lui annoncer une grande nouvelle. Marie-Ève, « belle comme un cœur, bronzée – une semaine chez ses grands-parents en Floride – et plus amoureuse de Sébastien que jamais » (404), s'élance vers Sébastien et l'embrasse. « Il lui avait rendu son bec – plus sec et plus discret – et lui avait dit, excité, en étendant les deux bras vers elle, les doigts des deux mains bien écartés: 'Moi là, des mamans,

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là, j'en ai...tiens...comme ça ! '» (405). Cette scène, après laquelle le mot FIN clôt l'histoire, est révélatrice. Je ne peux m'empêcher de penser que l'auteur, en s'attardant sur cet amour enfantin, a voulu nous conseiller, non d'adopter une attitude enfantine, mais d'ouvrir nos cœurs, que les esprits aussi vont suivre.

...c'est véritablement pervertir la notion même d'être humain que de nier le droit à la différence, à l'ambiguïté, à la singularité, bref, à ce qui fait de chacun de nous un être unique. Célébrer les différences plutôt que les combattre est un des principes mêmes de la démocratie. (Dorais, 159)

Pour comprendre et accepter, il faut tout d'abord aimer.

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**THE REPUDIATION OF OTHERNESS:  
ORPHIC AND NARCISSISTIC MOTIFS IN ROBERT  
KROETSCH'S *BADLANDS***

In *Labyrinths of Voice*, a detailed interview given to Shirley Neuman and Robert Wilson, Robert Kroetsch expresses his view on the notion of literature, myth and narration. He opposes the traditional view of myth and narration and, by declaring himself to be anti-Aristotelian, he advocates "the decentering rather than the centering function of myth." (Neuman, 130) The decentering function of myth offers the openness of a story and the possibilities of meanings. One way to achieve the openness and the varieties of meaning is to keep retelling a story. That's why many prefigured stories, some of them even mythical coming from the classical mythology, like the one of Narcissus and Orpheus, can be found in Robert Kroetsch's novels as well as in *Badlands*.

The Orphic and narcissistic motifs in the novel *Badlands* are closely connected and intertwined. William Dawe's life's quest for dinosaur bones, particularly the events surrounding his expedition by flatboat down the Red Deer River of Alberta, during the summer and fall of 1916, are narrated by his daughter Anna Dawe fifty six years later. Anna Dawe is engaged upon a personal quest for her father whom she knows only through the field notes of his expedition. The urge to know the father arises from the fact that William Dawe abandoned his wife and child in order to discover the "source" of origins. William Dawe's obsession with the dinosaur bones hidden deep in the Alberta badlands is his attempt to return to the origin of things, to dominate time and achieve immortality. But in order to achieve that he has to sacrifice certain values: love, humanity, the other "dark" side of his personality, the feminine aspect of his psyche.

The bones that William Dawe searches for in the novel carry a special symbolism and are part of his inner need. The bone hunt is, for Dawe, the search for the origin of things, for immortality and an attempt to reach for his historical self, to conquer and transcend time. Seeking the bones of "source", William Dawe attempts to preserve his historical identity. The bones represent William Dawe's obsession with the past: "And then even he, William Dawe, originator, financier and leader of the Dawe Expedition, was at a loss to explain his own compulsion to recover the past, his maniacal obsession: 'We are looking for the bones of the dead. We must find them.'"

(*B*, 7) The magical power of the bones add a new dimension to their symbolism: a return to “the dark self”, to “the other”, to “the dead”, to “oblivion”. William Dawe is not able to descend and acknowledge his dark self. Instead of descending, he creates a scientific justification of his inner drive. He makes field notes about his expedition and the bone hunt.

For Mircea Eliade bones are the embodiment of the past, the mysterious force, the shamanistic dream of descent and represent “the exit from time.” Eliade says in *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*:

Such a spiritual exercise implies the “exit from time”, for not only is the shaman, by means of an interior vision, anticipating his physical death, but he is finding again what one might call the non-temporal source of Life, the *bone*. Indeed, for the hunting peoples the bone symbolizes the ultimate root of animal life, the matrix from which the flesh is continually renewed. It is starting from the *bone* that animals and men are re-born. ... (Eliade, 59)

Therefore, the notion of source and the exit from time as well as the man’s animal irrational aspect of life are implicit in the bone symbolism.

William Dawe tries to control the mysterious aspect of the bones by keeping field notes. Dawe’s field notes are consistently narcissistic and represent an attempt to provide a historical record which is really Dawe’s heroic self-projection. The field notes are cryptic and technical and embody his approach to reality as are his maps “the emblems of his own conviction and intent.” (*B*, 16) Dawe uses field notes to classify and order the material world in a logical pattern. The field notes reveal little about William Dawe as Anna would explain: “He would accept and endure destiny, my father. It was chance he could not abide.” (*B*, 95) Dawe is afraid of the irrational force of life, randomness and uncontrolled phenomena. He struggles to maintain his historical self against the claims of human relationship and love and inability to connect with the other. His answer to the other is simply silence. When William Dawe writes in his field notes “I have come to the end of words”, he classifies himself as a post-modern Orpheus who “sings on a lyre without strings,” as Ihab Hassan would say. William Dawe exemplifies in an ironic way all the three aspects of the Orphic theme which Walter A. Strauss enlists as: 1) Orpheus as a singer poet (shaman); 2) the descent into Hades; 3) the dismemberment theme. (Strauss, 6)

The badlands are the land of the dead, the shadow land, where William Dawe wants to descend like mythical Orpheus in search of his Eurydice. The landscape they enter is primitive, nightmarish like Hades. The only settlements William Dawe and his crew encounter when they enter badlands is a stone ranch house and the mining town which represent an early stage of civilization where the surroundings is not consciously structured and which they try to adjust to. The primeval landscape is an inner landscape, a nightmare spiritual world of William Dawe’s and his crew’s inner psyche. They travel downstream and the river that they have to cross before entering

the badlands is the mythological river Styx which Orpheus crosses before entering Hades. The layers of rock are the levels of consciousness which they descend.

They were into the Badlands and high on the buttes the light poured extravagant and yellow on top of the red, on top of the orange; the buttes became layered, layered in brown and grey, then in green and purple, the colour going out of the sky and into the land itself. (*B*, 19)

Connie Harvey in her essay "Tear-glazed vision of laughter" points that Kroetsch uses light to emphasize the spiritual nature of the landscape and that "the variety of colours symbolizes the variety of human experiences and feelings that the men meet as they descend." (Harvey, 42) As mythological Orpheus enters Hades in search for his Eurydice, William Dawe enters badlands of his own psyche where his suppressed feminine values lie.

Any kind of involvement with the other, with woman, no matter whether it is a psychical or a sexual engagement like the one with Anna Yellowbird, Dawe's Indian guide during his expedition, distract William Dawe from the focus on his historical self and the past. He fears the sexual descent and the "absolute surrender" Anna Yellowbird requires. They make love in a tipi made of bones where Dawe fights against "the moment of descent that came to obsess him" in which Anna becomes "that sought darkness." (*B*, 167) "She made him loose the past. He began to hate her for that. Sullen, then, sullen, in the last clinging gesture, absurdly he unreeled to his mind's eye the field notes he had faked for the world from Web's reluctantly postulated observations." (*B*, 168) His field notes appear to be at the moment of descent and mysterious darkness he experiences, the "fake" record of his ambition and his historical self.

William Dawe's relationship to Anna Yellowbird as well as to other members of his crew (Tune, Grizzly, Web, Michael Sinnott) reveal his struggle against the dark descent and the shamanistic call. In the case of Tune, the boy they rescue from the coal mines of Drumheller, the Orphic has been destroyed by the narcissistic. Peter Thomas emphasizes that Tune "emerging from the underworld" carries an Orphic name and is "the son Dawe sacrifices to his own obsession." (Thomas, 88) Tune's name suggests that he represents a potentiality, just as a tune carries the potentiality of a song or a symphony. It is Web who finds Tune while searching for his lost woman and following the sound of music to a whore house: "the music, note by note, set free into the darkness, led him to the wedge of light, to the token light, the open door." (*B*, 72) When Tune is buried under rubble in the search for bones without an opportunity for regeneration, William Dawe puts down in his fieldnotes only: "Dead. Tune. Dead." (*B*, 192) Once again William Dawe, refusing the true descent, can not admit either love for a human being or the language of loss. His short and precise scientific statements end in silence. It is silence, isolation and loneliness that remain after the tragedy.

William Dawe's failure and the absurdity of his quest are completed with the figure of Grizzly in the novel. Grizzly has accepted his animal identity, as his name suggests, when he embraced a grizzly that entered his tent, symbolically at the high source of the river. His name and the story of its origin suggest that he has already undertaken the voyage into the psyche that Dawe is starting. Grizzly is the figure of self-sufficiency who is fulfilled and fulfilling. As his animal identity became his source self, he appears to be the most satisfactory of all Anna Yellowbird's lovers. Grizzly has turned out to serve as a foil to William Dawe and his absurd quest for his historical self. He is the man at the centre, a man of balance. As such, he is what Dawe could become: "Perhaps it was in the old man, in Grizzly, that he could imagine a balance; as he was able, at least at the time, to imagine that Grizzly had grown beyond the illogicalities of desire." (B, 95)

Unlike Dawe who struggles against the loss of time, refuses to surrender the self, resents and fears the mystery, Web has no time to lose. He denies history: "There is no such thing as a past .... There is nothing else." (B, 4) He possesses Dawe's inability to dig deep enough and as Peter Thomas says he is "hovering between the historical and the primordial." (Thomas, 4) He becomes a parody of shamanistic power by discovering the bones of *Gorgosaurus*. By finding the bones of the dead, according to William Dawe, he achieves "the impossible and uncontradictable and total victory." (B, 179) However, Dawe's narcissistic needs repudiate the Orphic dimension of the event, the acceptance of the natural mystery of the bones, and Web's bones are named Daweosaurus.

The urge for perpetuation and immortality is embodied in another character in the novel, Michael Sinnott. Michael Sinnott is a photographer who by taking photos and trying to perpetuate the present moment presents history as a series of "stills" caught at the expense of reality. He says: "Everything is vanishing here. Every form of life. The Indians. I have photographed the Blackfoot, at great personal risk." (B, 102) Sinnott's photographs match Dawe's "fake" field notes. Both try to record history and acknowledge their narcissistic needs. Field notes and photographs are evidence of time and are signs of man's victory over time. Still there is a difference between Dawe and Sinnott. Dawe resists Sinnott's camera and this resistance, according to Peter Thomas, stems from Dawe's wish to write his own story. William Dawe explains to Sinnott: "You make the world stand still. ... I try to make it live again. ... 'I recover the past,' Dawe said. Unsmiling. Adjusting his grip on the sweep. 'You reduce it.'" (B, 112) It is easy to recognize the action of self-love. The urge to make one's own story and thus create one's own identity leads to Kroetsch's famous statement that "we don't have an identity until someone tells our story." (Kroetsch, 3) It will be the task of Anna Dawe with the help of Anna Yellowbird to render her father's story and further explore the idea.

Anna Dawe's source for her "mediation", for her story, is her father's field notes and the woman Anna Yellowbird who had accompanied Dawe on his



journey. She explains in her initial commentary that from these field notes, she “imagined to herself a past, an ancestor, a legend, a vision, a fate.” (B, 3) At the beginning of the novel Anna Dawe seems to be neurotically attached and oppressed by her father’s vision. She has accepted William Dawe’s imposed perception of her: “He locked me up in the house I had inherited. Or was inheriting ... He locked me up in an education I might as well have inherited, it was so much mine before I realized it was given me ...” (B, 95) Anna has been locked in the fortress of Dawe’s concept of woman. Her virginity signifies that her inner nature has not been explored. She has created an identity for herself from “those cryptic notations by men who held the words themselves in contempt.” (B, 2) At forty-five, she finally realized that she is not part of Dawe’s vision. In order to find her own identity, she has to come to terms with the past and with her father’s perception based on his expedition into the badlands. Through her imaginative recreation of her father’s story, Anna comes to understand and accept her father and her past.

At the beginning of the journey, Anna meets the woman, Anna Yellowbird, an Indian woman who had accompanied her father on the expedition. The first paragraph introduces her as the person Anna is named after because she has saved Dawe’s life. According to Harvey, she represents the other aspect, the transformative spiritual nature. (Harvey, 36) Her last name suggests the counter sexual aspect of the men’s psyche. (Harvey, 36) Yellow refers to the colour of the sun and represents intuition and illumination while bird is a symbol of the human soul and its transcendence to the spiritual plane. Thus Anna Yellowbird represents the spiritual and the intuitive element of the psyche. Anna Yellowbird joined the expedition while searching herself for the valley of the dead and her late husband.

Searching for William Dawe’s past, two Annas, search for their own past. Anna Dawe experiences transformation from the set of values her father represents to a set of values Anna Yellowbird advocates. Unlike William Dawe, Anna Dawe is aware of the present moment and the time we live in. “We have only time to survive in, time, without either lies or mystery or suspense; we live and then die in time.” (B, 23) She doesn’t want to “exit from time” but to live in time. At the end of the novel, realizing that one doesn’t live in the past but in the present moment, celebrating the present moment, two Annas, at the source of the Red Deer River throw away all they have of Dawe: field notes, documents of the past and photographs. They walk away from the past and all it represents: men, history, immortality, the historical self, fame, order and discipline. And Anna Dawe concludes: “We did not once look back, not once, ever.” (B, 230) Rather than fleeing the past, they have reconciled it into their present vision.

Unlike mythological Orpheus who descends into Hades, but also ascends, William Dawe is unable to ascend. He remains fixed to the past, to his historical self. He does not succeed in reintegrating the feminine aspect of his psyche into the wholeness of his personality. After leaving Hades, Orpheus continues to sing, to act as a prophet, a shaman, preserving harmony in the

universe. There is no reintegration for William Dawe for he does not leave the valley of the dead and does not transcend his egotistic self. The narcissistic destroys the Orphic in William Dawe. However, Anna Dawe and Anna Yellowbird leave the badlands and ascend to the source of the river in the mountains. They continue where Dawe stops. They free from the male vision of themselves and do not feel oppressed any more by it. Succeeding in reintegrating their past and the male perception of themselves within the present moment, they achieve the self realization and a transcendent vision of their source self unlike William Dawe.

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## LE MOI ET LES AUTRES DANS LES OEUVRES DE NÉGOVAN RAJIC: ASPECTS INTERTEXTUELS

Définie comme l'"interaction textuelle qui se produit à l'intérieur d'un seul texte", comme "la façon dont un texte lit l'histoire et s'insère en elle" (Kristeva, 1968, 312), l'intertextualité apparaît comme "un dialogue de textes" (Kristeva, 1969, 181-182) par l'intermédiaire duquel le sujet écrivant entretient des relations avec "sa mémoire, le réel et la littérature" et s'inscrit "dans le réel, dans l'histoire et dans la littérature", donc comme une possibilité de découvrir et d'exprimer son moi par l'intermédiaire du discours d'autrui, comme un moyen de présenter une image transposée de soi-même. "Je ne dis les autres, sinon pour d'autant plus me dire", écrit Montaigne, pour ajouter qu'il ne vise dans ses *Essais* qu'à découvrir lui-même (148). Les rapports entre le moi et les autres se dessinent à travers une série de références à différents auteurs et s'inscrivent dans le texte même. L'intertextualité se présente comme une des stratégies auxquelles un auteur recourt pour exprimer son propre moi, pour définir sa propre identité. Nous allons l'examiner dans les oeuvres de Négovan Rajic, écrivain canadien d'origine serbe, qui a assimilé la langue française sans pourtant oublier sa vie antérieure et le peuple dont il est issu. Il éprouve le besoin d'établir un pont entre son ancienne et sa nouvelle patrie en racontant aux gens de son entourage son expérience fondamentale, celle de migration et d'exil qu'il dépasse par son écriture, en opposant au sentiment de rupture la continuité de son refus de toute servitude et de toute répression. Mais, tout en étant inspiré dans sa création littéraire par son destin personnel, il ne s'enferme pas dans le cadre étroit de ce destin. Il s'efforce de mettre en avant ce qui a une valeur universelle, en utilisant parfois les mots des autres comme des points d'appui pour raconter son histoire et pour ouvrir les horizons de l'histoire complexe de son pays d'origine et en établissant non seulement un dialogue de textes, mais aussi, en quelque sorte, un dialogue de cultures.

L'inventaire des auteurs et des ouvrages auxquels il se réfère englobe différentes époques, de l'antiquité ("Moi seul en réchappai pour venir te le dire", le vers du livre de Job mis en exergue de la nouvelle "Les Treize"), en passant par le romantisme (Lamartine, Musset, Hoffman), aux temps modernes (Proust, Orwell, Jünger, Kafka, J. Conrad, I. B. Singer, Huxley, Camus), mais aussi différents espaces culturels, y inclu son pays d'origine auquel renvoient un nombre de références que seul un lecteur averti peut

identifier<sup>1</sup>: les évocations des contes populaires serbes "L'Empereur a des oreilles de chèvre", dans *Propos d'un vieux radoteur* (70-71) et "Le Tchardak ni sur la terre ni au ciel", dans *Vers l'autre rive. Adieu Belgrade* (163-165) et, au niveau de la langue, certaines expressions, comme "empêtré comme le poussin dans la filasse" (traduction littérale de l'expression serbe "zapetljan kao pile u ku}ine") ou la périphrase "la montagne des pins aux aiguilles d'or" qui désigne la montagne serbe "Zlatibor", ou bien le mot "~ardak", d'origine turque, provenant d'un conte populaire serbe, aussi bien que certaines références topologiques dans la nouvelle "Trois rêves", qui renvoient à Belgrade sans le mentionner ("Place de la Balance"<sup>2</sup>, "Avenue du Prince Analphabète"<sup>3</sup>, "Avenue du Général Voyageur"<sup>4</sup>, "Parc des Canonnières", "Musée de la Chasse, ancienne résidence du Prince Analphabète" et "le vieux platane"<sup>5</sup>). Cet inventaire englobe aussi les oeuvres de Rajic lui-même: dans le drame *Le Puits ou une histoire sans queue ni tête* l'homme du puits exprime le désir de retourner chez lui et de s'installer "tous les soirs devant une lampe en opaline verte et d'écrire des heures entières" (82), ce qui renvoie à *Sept roses pour une boulangère*<sup>6</sup> où le héros aperçoit, au cours d'une de ses promenades, "la fenêtre derrière laquelle l'inconnu lisait ou écrivait à la lueur d'un abat-jour vert" (78). Ces autoréférences renforcent l'unité d'une oeuvre qui raconte l'expérience de son auteur, mais aussi sa propre genèse.

L'intertextualité rajicienne est fondée surtout sur une relation de coprésence entre deux ou plusieurs textes. Les insertions des fragments des autres auteurs sont quelquefois invisibles et prennent la forme de l'allusion où le sens se dessine à travers un mélange d'occultations et de dévoilements et qui

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<sup>1</sup>Voir à ce sujet l'article de Mihailo Pavlovi}, 152-179.

<sup>2</sup>En serbe: "Terazije", rue qui se trouve au centre même de la ville (*Propos d'un vieux radoteur*, 176).

<sup>3</sup>Il s'agit de la rue de Miloch Obrenovitch, prince de Serbie qui a pris part dans la révolte de la Serbie contre les Turcs en 1804, menée par Karageorges. On dit que le prince Miloch était analphabète (Id., 197).

<sup>4</sup>Traduction littérale du nom du général serbe Radomir Putnik qui a commandé l'armée serbe pendant la guerre des Balkans (1912-1913) et la Première guerre mondiale et qui a donné le nom à un boulevard de Belgrade (Id., 199).

<sup>5</sup>Traduction littérale de "Topchiderski park" où se trouve la résidence du prince Miloch et le vieux platane (Id., 198, 200).

<sup>6</sup>Cette autoréférence devient tout à fait explicite au moment où l'un des deux personnages du drame, le visiteur du soir, rappelle son interlocuteur qu'il a déjà exprimé son "obsession" de l'abat-jour en opaline verte dans *Sept roses pour une boulangère* en décrivant "l'homme au complet marron" qui " monte la colline de Meudon et voit une fenêtre derrière laquelle un inconnu écrit à la lumière d'une lampe en opaline verte" (*Puits*, 83).

demande un travail de déchiffrement de la part du lecteur - dans *Propos d'un vieux radoteur*, l'allusion au conte du réaliste serbe Milovan Gli{i} "Quatre-vingt dix ans après" (64-67), qui fonctionne dans un contexte fantastique, et l'allusion à Proudhon qui prend un aspect parodique. Plus fréquemment ces insertions sont tout à fait explicites, sous la forme de références qui renvoient le lecteur à un autre ouvrage par l'indication de son titre (*Dance macabre* de Camille Saint-Saëns dans la nouvelle "Le 22 juin 1941" ou le chœur des soldats dans le *Faust* de Gounod dans *Le Puits ou une histoire sans queue ni tête*<sup>7</sup>), ou d'un de ses personnages (Joseph K, héros du *Procès* de Kafka, dans "Une soirée commémorative"<sup>8</sup>), et, par un procédé analogue, par l'indication des auteurs que leur état ou leur génialité séparent, de façon ou d'autre, de la norme, tels Joseph H. (Hayden), Ossip M. (Mandelstam) et Jacob B. (Boehme) dans *Les Hommes-taupes* (128), allégorie de la terreur, dont l'atmosphère n'est pas sans rappeler le roman kafkaïen où la frontière entre le réel et le fantastique disparaît.

Mais le plus fréquemment l'intertextualité dans les oeuvres de Rajic a la forme de citations, qui sont démarquées par des guillemets et souvent placées en exergue d'un livre ou d'un chapitre, et qui apparaissent comme des indices possibles du sens. C'est ainsi que le roman *Vers l'autre rive. Adieu Belgrade* s'organise autour de dix chapitres introduits par des épigraphes qui fonctionnent comme des noeuds de sens où se rassemblent les thèmes que l'écriture dissémine tout au long du roman, suggérant l'idée d'un monde dédoublé où l'altérité prend des aspects mystérieux. L'intertextualité a une valeur sémantique. *Propos d'un vieux radoteur*<sup>9</sup> a pour épigraphe la citation suivante: "Le vorace Roi des Rats n'avait pas trouvé à son goût le massepain fourré; mais il l'avait si bien rogné, de ses dents acérées, qu'il était bon à jeter". Il s'agit d'un fragment du conte fantastique du romantique allemand E.T.A. Hoffman "Casse-noisette et le Roi des rats", où les jouets, conduits par le Casse-Noisette, livrent bataille à une légion de rats conduits par leur roi, fragment par lequel Rajic introduit dans son récit les figures animales pour en faire des matérialisations des angoisses de son héros, le maître de l'Estrapade, dictateur appelé ironiquement "Bienfaiteur", qui perçoit les hommes comme des rongeurs auxquels il livre un combat sans merci, mais sans pouvoir les exterminer. Entre le texte cité et le texte citant s'établit une relation

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<sup>7</sup>D'après la déclaration de Rajic lui-même, la marche des soldats dans le *Faust* de Gounod éveille en lui le souvenir des années 1945 et 1946, lorsque, la guerre terminée, l'opéra avait rouvert ses portes. Il allait souvent entendre cette opéra et cette marche avait pour lui "une dimension symbolique" car "elle exaltait la liberté" et se présentait en quelque sorte comme "un défi" au monde dans lequel il vivait à ce moment-là (Gaudet, 177).

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Service, 29-31.

<sup>9</sup>Les renvois à ce roman seront désormais désignés d'une manière abrégée: *Propos*.

métaphorique où, pour employer les mots de Laurent Jenny, le "fragment textuel est appelé dans le contexte par analogie sémantique avec lui" (Jenny, 274), mais le fragment évoqué est arraché à son contexte premier, au système de pensée de son émetteur, libéré de sa fonction d'autorité ou d'ornement, pour être inséré dans le système de pensée de son récepteur où il renvoie à son histoire personnelle et à la situation de son pays d'origine, soumis à la "Grande Idée".

Cet effacement du sens premier est encore plus visible lorsque la citation est insérée dans le texte lui-même. En décrivant ses cauchemars nocturnes, le "Bienfaiteur" dit:

Devant le charme tranquille du crépuscule, il m'arrive d'oublier mon angoisse et l'envie me vient de m'écrier comme jadis un poète: 'Ô temps, suspends ton vol...', mais brusquement je me rappelle que la nuit est déjà là et alors la pire corvée du jour m'apparaît comme le plus agréable des passe-temps. (Propos, 10-11)

Le fragment démarquée par les guillemets, qui montrent qu'il s'agit d'une citation sans que pourtant la source en soit indiquée, est le début de la quatrième strophe du poème célèbre de Lamartine, "Le Lac", qui est lié à des circonstances précises, le rendez-vous manqué du poète avec la femme aimée, et qui exprime son angoisse devant la fuite du temps et son désir d'éterniser son amour par le souvenir:

*O temps, suspends ton vol*<sup>10</sup>! et vous, heures propices,  
Suspendez votre cours!  
Laissez-nous savourer les rapides délices  
Des plus beaux de nos jours!

Placé dans le nouveau contexte, le mal du siècle lamartinien se transforme en une expression de l'angoisse d'un dictateur du XXe siècle, en proie à la manie de la persécution, et obtient une connotation politique, marquée par l'ironie. Cette ironie est renforcée plus loin par l'évocation des contes des Mille et Une Nuits auxquels le "Bienfaiteur" renvoie pour montrer le côté "artistique" de la prison qu'il veut construire "pour instaurer l'ère de la Justice à l'Estrapade":

A partir d'une certaine hauteur, les barres verticales se courbaient comme des najas charmés d'une flûte pour se réunir au sommet et former une sorte de bulbe grillagé qui donnait à mes cages l'air de sortir d'un conte des Mille et Une Nuits. Je compris alors que tout peut devenir une oeuvre d'art... même la souffrance et la mort... pourvu que ce soit un artiste qui l'inflige ou qui la donne" (Propos, 73),

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<sup>10</sup>C'est nous qui soulignons.

dit-il, ce qui n'est pas sans rappeler *Le Jardin des supplices* de Mirbeau, où on est capable de "commettre un beau crime" (Mirbeau, 159) et où le bourreau qui torture les condamnés "aime son art" (241).

L'intertextualité fonctionne dans le contexte ironique de la nouvelle qui est, d'après la déclaration de l'auteur lui-même, "la parodie de la justice yougoslave, après la Seconde guerre mondiale", "justice fallacieuse, soucieuse des formes, mais dépourvue de substance" ("Vers l'autre rive", 6). Ayant décidé d'élaborer des lois, le "Bienfaiteur" se tourne vers les philosophes pour savoir ce qu'ils pensent de la Justice, mais il constate que leurs livres sont "bourrés d'inepties" car ils proclament "que les coupables sont innocents et que le seul coupable est la société, c'est-à-dire personne" et "un de ces imbéciles allait jusqu'à prétendre que la propriété c'est le vol, alors que c'est exactement le contraire: plus vous possédez, moins vous pouvez voler" (Propos, 75). C'est une allusion au socialiste français Pierre Joseph Proudhon, objet d'une sévère critique des marxistes qui l'ont appelé "socialiste utopique", ce qui donne à ce passage une connotation idéologique et renvoie, d'une manière tout-à-fait discrète et accessible seulement à un lecteur averti, au pays d'origine de l'auteur, qui indique l'année de sa mort (1865) pour mettre le lecteur sur la bonne voie. Dans *Qu'est-ce que la propriété?* Proudhon a dit que "la propriété c'est le vol", mais son idée n'est évoquée que pour être transformée par le raisonnement du narrateur et par la conclusion absurde qu'il en tire: "Que puis-je voler, sans me voler moi-même?" (Propos, 75). La transformation est faite dans une intention ludique qui caractérise la parodie

A cet aspect parodique se rattache un aspect fantastique introduit par les rats allégoriques aussi bien que par les références à certaines productions de la littérature serbe, telles "L'empereur a des oreilles de chèvre" où il s'agit d'un prince despotique qui condamne à mort ceux qui savent son secret et des pipeaux qui trahissent ce secret en chantant toujours le même refrain, ce qui correspond au contexte à la fois politique et fantastique de la nouvelle, ou le conte de Milovan Gli{i} "Quatre-vingt dix ans après", qui fonctionne dans le même contexte: dans les cauchemars du despote cruel, les rats qui le poursuivent se transforment en "êtres sans ombre" (Propos, 61), pour lesquels il ne sait pas si ce sont des spectres ou des produits de son imagination et qui suggèrent les "mystérieuses puissances souterraines" (71) dont il se sent menacé. Comme dans le conte de Gli{i}, il les tue par un pieu d'aubépine (64). Cette interpénétration du réel et du fantastique introduit la question de leur rapport. "Ces êtres sans ombre appartenaient-ils encore à notre monde? Mais où commençait-il vraiment et où finissait-il notre monde?", se demande le narrateur (61). Le monde dans lequel vit le dictateur qui se considère lui-même comme un bienfaiteur est irréel dans son absurdité. L'allusion au conte de Milovan Gli{i} apparaît également dans la pièce de théâtre *Le Puits ou une histoire sans queue ni tête* où le visiteur du soir demande à l'homme du puits depuis combien de temps il vit dans ce puit, et celui ci lui répond: depuis quatre-vingt dix-neuf ans (50), ce qui n'est pas sans rappeler le

vampire de Gli {i} qui sort la nuit de son tombeau pendant quatre-vingt dix ans.

Les exemples mentionnés relèvent du champ littéraire car il s'agit des fragments de textes. Mais l'intertextualité dans les oeuvres de Rajic relève aussi du champ de l'art. Il se réfère non seulement aux productions verbales, mais aussi aux productions picturales, en établissant entre le référent et le référé une analogie de contenu. Dans *Les Hommes-taupes* il évoque *Le Déluge* de Jérôme Bosch pour le transformer en un ressort de l'intrigue: le narrateur s'intéresse aux tableaux du peintre flamand que les autorités considèrent comme un appel à la subversion et, derrière ses "créatures hybrides, mi-hommes mi-bêtes", devine "une signification précise et profonde" (78-79), celle de sa propre aventure qui prend pour son persécuteur, gardien de la dictature, une connotation subversive. Dans *Sept roses pour une Boulangère*, la boulangère qui vend le pain aux réfugiés, figure féminine idéalisée, qui se présente comme une projection de la mère nourricière, autour de laquelle s'organise le récit, s'identifie à la figure du tableau de Botticelli *La Naissance de Vénus*. Représenté d'abord en page couverture, ce tableau renvoie dès le début à un sens qui va être révélé à la fin du récit par la référence explicite à lui: la fonction salvatrice de l'imagination et de l'art par une sorte de déréalisation de la réalité décevante. La pièce de théâtre *Le Puits ou une histoire sans queue ni tête* est située dans un décor qui "rappelle un tableau de Magritte" (Ecrire en français, 46). Ce tableau, c'est *L'Empire des lumières* où le peintre surréaliste a voulu montrer au même moment et dans le même lieu le jour et la nuit qui, dans la réalité ordinaire, se succèdent. La référence à Magritte, qui se propose de rendre la pensée visible, se rattache à celle de Jérôme Bosch qui a voulu "peindre les hommes non tels qu'ils apparaissent vus du dehors, mais tels qu'ils sont à l'intérieur" (*Sept roses pour une boulangère*, 91)<sup>11</sup>, en suggérant une logique qui contredit les lois de la perception ordinaire et donne au drame cet aspect irréel qui est propre à la peinture surréaliste.

L'intertextualité des oeuvres de Négovan Rajic transcende parfois le littéraire et l'artistique pour englober la réalité empirique qui a déterminé en quelque sorte son destin, la réalité de son pays d'origine soumis à la dictature du Parti, subissant le joug d'un régime répressif dont il s'est enfui, et évoqué sans cesse par des allusions géographiques, historiques et culturelles qui exigent la complicité d'un lecteur capable de comprendre à mots couverts ce qu'on lui fait entendre sans le lui dire directement: dans *Les Hommes-taupes*, la volonté d'effacer la mémoire de Jérôme Bosch, peintre des figures humaines grotesques et des animaux bizarres, rappelle la tentative des autorités

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<sup>11</sup>D'après la déclaration de N. Rajic lui-même dans une lettre à l'auteur de ces lignes, il a trouvé cette opinion chez J. de Sigüençã, en 1605: "La différence entre les oeuvres de cet homme et celles des autres, consiste, selon moi, en ce que les autres cherchent à peindre les hommes tels qu'ils apparaissent vus de dehors, tandis que lui (Jérôme Bosch) a le courage de les peindre tels qu'il sont dedans, à l'intérieur".



yougoslaves de faire disparaître toutes les traces de certains écrivains qui leurs semblaient dangereux et dans *Trois rêves*, les lettres du "Grand Moi" que les citoyens avalent au lieu de les lire renvoient à "cette fameuse lettre écrite par le Grand Serrurier<sup>12</sup> et envoyée *confidemment aux trois millions de membres* de l'Union socialiste", comme le dit l'auteur lui-même, qui ajoute:

Quand on sait que les médias yougoslaves l'avaient abondamment commentée sans divulguer son contenu, on reste perplexe. Comment les hommes avaient-ils pu à ce point rompre avec la réalité pour ériger un tel monument d'absurdité? Kafka avait raison de supprimer la frontière entre le réel et le fantastique! ("Vers l'autre rive", 6)

Il s'agit ici des relations transtextuelles dont parlent Daniel-Henri Pageaux qui considère la littérature dans ses rapports avec tous les autres domaines de la vie et du savoir humain et avant lui Gérard Genette qui emploie dans *Palimpsestes* le terme "transtextualité" pour désigner tout ce qui lie un texte non seulement aux autres textes, mais aussi à la réalité extra-littéraire (7, 10).

Cette relation entre le littéraire et l'extra-littéraire se manifeste aussi par un jeu entre fiction et réalité qui se nourrissent l'une de l'autre. C'est surtout le cas dans le roman autobiographique *Vers l'autre rive. Adieu Belgrade* où les faits qui se rattachent à l'auteur et à son pays d'origine se projettent dans la fiction. Il mentionne certains événements et certains personnages réels, mais cette référence à la réalité est insérée dans la trame du récit qui a à la fois un aspect mythique et un aspect moral et engagé. L'aspect mythique est suggéré d'abord par le tableau *Mon village à la dérive* du peintre naïf Dragan Mihailovi}, en page couverture, et par son titre même qui renvoie à un ailleurs promettant, opposé à la réalité inacceptable à laquelle le narrateur dit "adieu", et ensuite par la référence au conte populaire serbe "Le ^ardak ni dans le ciel ni sur la terre" qui s'inscrit bien dans ce contexte mythique: la gloriète du domaine de la famille du narrateur s'identifie au "~ardak" du dit conte, "détaché de la terre mais incapable de s'élever vers le ciel" (163) et perçu comme l'image du destin du peuple serbe toujours hésitant "entre un royaume céleste et un royaume terrestre". L'aspect moral et engagé du roman est suggéré par son épigraphe, le fragment de l'allocution de Vladimir Jankélévitch prononcée à l'UNESCO le 28 novembre 1964 pour le XXe anniversaire de la Libération: "Mais le passé! qui le fera revivre? Qui défendra ces martyrs, ces fusillés? Nous sommes ici pour cela même, n'est-ce pas?" (Jankélévitch, 69), fragment qui entre dans le même contexte que la citation de Gide mise en exergue des *Hommes-taupes*: "Je pense tout le temps que des événements si importants se préparent qu'on a presque honte de

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<sup>12</sup>Il s'agit de Josip Broz Tito, Président de la Yougoslavie (1944-1980) qui, d'après ses biographes, a été serrurier avant de s'engager dans la politique et la guerre de libération au cours de la Seconde Guerre mondiale.

s'occuper de la littérature". Entre le réel et l'imaginaire s'établit un va-et-vient constant par lequel la littérature se rattache à la vie même et l'art obtient une valeur morale: l'oeuvre de fiction dénonce une société de répression où l'individualité est écrasée et, en général, toutes les formes de violence, en suggérant une esthétique hétéronome, exprimée explicitement par la référence à Ernst Jünger qui constate dans *Les Falaises de marbre* que "la parole, la liberté et l'esprit ne sont qu'une seule et même chose" car la parole est une "épée magique" dont le rayonnement "fait pâlir la puissance des tyrans", et à Georges Orwell qui écrit pour démasquer "un mensonge", pour attirer l'attention sur "un fait", mais avec la conscience qu'il s'agit d'une "expérience esthétique" (Ecrire en français, 136). La littérature transcende le réel en créant une réalité autonome ancrée dans le vie vécue et fondée sur la puissance créatrice du verbe.

Construit sur plusieurs références, le texte rajicien se lit comme double, en suggérant un mouvement de séparation et de réintégration perpétuelles qui s'effectuent à travers une suite de dédoublements. Ce mouvement est le sujet même du roman *Vers l'autre rive. Adieu Belgrade*. Annoncée au premier chapitre, qui évoque la période de la Seconde guerre mondiale, par l'impression du narrateur que "dans la partie visible, s'agitaient, grouillaient et fourmillaient les révolutionnaires professionnels, les héros de la résistance", mais que "derrière ce monde visible se cachait un autre, secret et souterrain" dont "certains signes" permettaient de temps en temps d'entrevoir l'existence (23), l'impression qui est confirmée par quelques petits événements (la vue de "La Tour des crânes" à Niš et la rencontre du patron de la police secrète Ozn), l'idée d'un monde dédoublé est introduite dans le troisième chapitre par la phrase de Soeren Kierkegaard placée en épigraphe: "Derrière le monde dans lequel nous vivons, loin à l'arrière plan, se trouve un autre monde..." (49). Elle est ensuite développée par l'évocation de l'instauration du régime répressif en 1945 et la mort étrange de plusieurs personnages éminents, exécutés par les autorités qui se présentent comme des forces mystérieuses, chtoniennes, et qui obtiennent une valeur mythique correspondant à celle du titre. Il s'agit en quelque sorte d'une mythification de la réalité atroce:

Etait-ce à cause de ces souvenirs encore si vifs que l'automne 1945 me parut maussade, plein d'ombres et d'incertitudes? Parfois, j'avais le vague sentiment de vivre dans un monde dédoublé, comme si cette ville avec tous ses habitants en cachait une autre, souterraine et inquiétante, dont depuis quelque temps je soupçonnais l'existence, mais qui maintenant se dessinait de plus en plus nettement comme un arbre émergeant lentement du brouillard. (50)

Entre le texte cité et le texte citant, aussi bien qu'à l'intérieur de chacune de ces deux instances, s'instaure un jeu de miroirs par lequel les mots de Kierkegaard se trouvent motivés en profondeur et liés aux autres références et aux autres oeuvres de Rajic. La citation s'intègre à l'écriture du roman. Elle s'inscrit dans le réseau thématique centré sur certains aspects des rapports entre le moi et les autres, qui prennent chez N. Rajic le plus souvent la forme

de la confrontation de l'individu à un régime totalitaire: les médias présentent "un monde virtuel fait de carton-pâte et d'accessoires de théâtre", tandis que, d'autre part, l'individu subit dans sa chair "les meurtrissures" d'une réalité dont il n'a pas le droit de parler (130). Dans cette situation, la seule possibilité pour l'individu est, comme le constate Tzvetan Todorov au début de son livre *Nous et les autres*, de ne pas s'opposer vainement aux forces qui le dépassent, mais de se dédoubler en un personnage public, qui accepte apparemment l'idéologie imposée et un personnage privé qui peut garder sa liberté de pensée. Au dédoublement du monde se rattache celui du personnage. Pour éviter la répression et conserver son indépendance intellectuelle, le narrateur doit accepter de mener cette "double vie de citoyens ordinaires et d'êtres souterrains" qui est celle des "hommes-taupes" (*Les Hommes-Taupes*, 117), d'avoir deux personnalités, l'une publique et docile, l'autre privée, qui vit à sa guise en cachette, de se détacher de la réalité extérieure et de se retirer dans une sorte d'exil intérieur.

Cet exil intérieur, qui a aussi une signification plus générale et se rapporte à tout libre penseur, exilé éternel dans le monde où il vit, le narrateur a du mal à le supporter. Incapable de se "mettre en accord avec l'air du temps" (*Vers l'autre rive*, 24), de s'adapter à "cet ordre nouveau" (131), il décide de s'enfuir du milieu qui l'entrave vers "l'autre rive" de la liberté que constituent pour lui les pays de l'Occident. Le livre se termine par son départ, qui se présente comme son entreprise fondamentale, annoncée par son sous-titre (*Adieu Belgrade*). Ce départ est pourtant anticipé en quelque sorte dans les oeuvres précédentes de Rajic par un réseau de références aux écrivains qui ont éprouvé le désir semblable de quitter la réalité décevante, mais par rapport auxquels s'établit une distance ironique. "J'écris ces lignes de l'au-delà, sans trop me faire d'illusions. Ceux qui ont 'lu tous les livres' diront: 'Ah! encore des écrits d'outre-tombe!'", dit le narrateur dans la nouvelle "Les Dessous d'un fait divers" qui fait partie du *Service pénitentiaire national*<sup>13</sup> (35). Le premier énoncé mis entre les guillemets renvoie au début du poème "Brise marine" de Mallarmé, qui est une sorte d'invitation au voyage baudelairienne:

La chair est triste, hélas! et j'ai lu tous les livres<sup>14</sup>  
Fuir! là-bas fuir!...

Au détachement mallarméen de l'univers réel, provoqué par la recherche de l'absolu, correspond celui du narrateur, le prestidigitateur qui sent la dualité entre le monde et lui, en vivant "comme détaché du monde, comme un observateur un peu distrait de [s]a propre vie et de celles des autres hommes". Cette dualité s'estompe pourtant au moment où on annonce qu'il a gagné le

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<sup>13</sup>Les renvois à ce livre seront désormais désignés d'une manière abrégée: *Service*

<sup>14</sup>C'est nous qui soulignons.

premier prix au concours national d'illusionnisme et de prestidigitation et où, pour la première fois, il a l'impression d'atteindre l'absolu et de ne faire qu'un avec le monde extérieur: son invention, la machine qui permet de faire disparaître instantanément tout conférencier fastidieux abusant de la patience de ses auditeurs, le fait disparaître lui-même. L'allusion à Mallarmé est placée dans un contexte fantastique que l'auteur introduit souvent dans ses oeuvres pour poser la question du rapport entre illusion et vérité, question qui est au centre même de ce récit. Le narrateur raconte son histoire "de l'au-delà" où il s'est trouvé, "par imprudence et par vanité", à l'âge de 42 ans, et l'adresse du "royaume des ombres au monde des vivants" (35), comme une sorte de *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* qui rappellent Chateaubriand. L'évocation de "là-bas" et des oiseaux, qui exprimait dans le poème de Mallarmé le désir de partir, réapparaît en quelque sorte à la fin de la nouvelle dans l'image de l'océan et des oiseaux qui planent au-dessus de la ville basse et du port, ce qui pousse le narrateur à se demander "si la vie et la mort ne sont pas qu'illusions" (55).

A l'appel du large et au désir de l'au-delà qui hantent Mallarmé, correspond la volonté du héros du roman *Vers l'autre rive. Adieu Belgrade* de briser les amarres qui l'attachent à la réalité contraignante et de partir "vers l'autre rive" de la liberté, l'idée de "l'autre rive" ayant toujours une connotation de danger et de mort. Ayant quitté le sol natal, le sujet est en quelque sorte mort pour sa vie ancienne, mais il veut en éterniser le souvenir par son oeuvre qu'il écrit "de l'au-delà" de sa nouvelle patrie.

L'itinéraire que suit Négovan Rajic dans son développement intérieur est celui qui mène de la contrainte à la liberté, de la vie quotidienne à la création littéraire, de la réalité à l'art, mais cette littérature et cet art ne cessent pourtant de se référer à la réalité. L'allusion à Mallarmé se rattache à l'image du puits qui a donné le titre non seulement à sa pièce de théâtre, mais aussi à une de ses nouvelles, et qui apparaît aussi dans *Sept roses pour une Boulangère*<sup>15</sup>, comme une de ces "métaphores obsédantes" qui, selon le mot de Charles Maurron ouvrent la voie à la découverte d'un "mythe personnel". Enfermé dans un puits dont il ne peut pas sortir, le héros du drame *Le Puits ou une histoire sans queue ni tête* se considère lui-même comme écrivain "par tempérament" (65), c'est-à-dire que pour lui aussi le monde semble en quelque sorte créée pour aboutir à un livre, comme pour Mallarmé dont la présence est suggérée encore une fois par l'allusion à *Brise marine*, qui prend un aspect nettement parodique: "Ceux qui ont lu tous les livres n'écrivent plus rien", dit-il à son visiteur, pour déclarer plus tard qu'il racontera le destin tragique de son ami Dimitri au puits même où il est enfermé et que la paroi d'acier inoxydable aura plus de pitié pour lui "que tous ces lecteurs professionnels qui ont lu trop de livres, appris trop de choses et qui, installés dans leurs bureaux feutrés, auraient bâillé en lisant son histoire" (65). La

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<sup>15</sup>"Je me demande si je ne suis pas devenu un peu dingue. Vu l'existence que je mène au fond de ce puits, cela ne m'étonnerait guère" (*Sept roses pour une Boulangère*, 7).

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lecture en tant que source d'inspiration est rejetée au profit de la vie et le détachement mallarméen de la réalité au profit d'un engagement qui se propose d'établir la communication avec les autres en leur découvrant une vérité qu'ils ne connaissent pas.

Le rapport entre le moi et les autres se présente donc aussi comme le rapport entre l'écrivain et ses lecteurs, potentiels ou réels. Dans la nouvelle "Le Puits" Rajic se réfère à Albert Camus pour lier l'image du puits au problème de la position de l'écrivain dans la société et à l'incompréhension dont il est souvent entouré: "Un écrivain garde un espoir même s'il est méconnu" (Service, 99). A la damnation inhérente à l'homme de génie, capable de découvrir le sens caché de l'univers, mais incapable de vivre comme tout le monde, se joint la position spécifique d'un écrivain émigrant qui est en quelque sorte "condamné à vivre au fond d'un puits à parois d'acier inoxydable", mais qui garde l'espoir d'en sortir par l'intermédiaire de son langage littéraire. Le héros de la nouvelle décide de s'opposer au mauvais sort et d'établir "un pont" (La littérature et l'exil, 80)<sup>16</sup> entre son propre moi et les autres en acceptant le rôle de l'écrivain et en ramenant "à la lumière du jour [son] seul trésor, le souvenir d'hommes au destin estropié" (Service, 114).

Qu'elle soit mise en exergue ou introduite dans le texte même de Négovan Rajic, la citation y lance un réseau de thèmes et de correspondances qui lui donnent son épaisseur. Son sens premier est effacé au profit d'une nouvelle signification qui s'élabore au cours de son actualisation dans le nouveau contexte, souvent marqué par l'ironie. L'intertextualité rajicienne, qui se présente comme une forme de dialogue des individus et des cultures, agit au niveau thématique, et parfois au niveau linguistique, et confirme le sens fondamental de l'aventure qui s'inscrit dans le texte et qui mène de la solitude à la communication, du moi à l'autre, de la vie à la création littéraire qui obtient une fonction salvatrice: l'individu retrouve son unité perdue par "l'alchimie de l'art" qui établit une "résonance de l'âme et de l'esprit" entre le moi et les autres, entre l'écrivain et ses lecteurs (Ecrire en français, 138), la langue étant "une arme contre le mensonge", mais aussi "un moyen de communication" et de "communion fraternelle avec les hommes" ("Vers l'autre rive", 2), ce qui n'est pas sans rappeler cette "communion ininterrompue d'esprits" dont parle le prix Nobel Ivo Andrić, dans un de ses essais.

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<sup>16</sup>Pour un lecteur averti, auquel N. Rajic s'adresse le plus souvent quand il introduit dans ses oeuvres des allusions qui rappellent de façon ou d'autre son pays natal, le mot "pont" est un indicateur intertextuel qui renvoie aux ouvrages du prix Nobel serbe Ivo Andrić où le pont est une des métaphores essentielles.

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## LES IDENTITÉS DE NÉGOVAN RAJIC

Tout auteur québécois a des identités au pluriel: il est québécois, il est canadien, il est francophone. S'il est immigré, il garde aussi une partie de son identité d'origine. C'est le cas de Négovan Rajic.

La pluralité d'identités, que l'on pourrait comparer à la stéréophonie, est certainement une des caractéristiques de la littérature canadienne qui fait sa richesse et la rend si particulière. C'est pourquoi l'œuvre d'un auteur canadien est le plus souvent une œuvre polyphonique ou, si l'on préfère une autre comparaison, une sorte de palimpseste où l'on découvre aisément des couches d'écritures superposées.

D'origine serbe, appartenant à une famille orthodoxe traditionnelle, Négovan Rajic restera toujours attaché aux valeurs d'une société essentiellement patriarcale: l'honnêteté et la droiture. La fin de la guerre, à laquelle il a participé comme résistant de première heure, lui apporte une amère déception. Au lieu de se retrouver dans un pays libre, il est obligé de vivre sous un régime particulièrement oppressif: la Yougoslavie de Tito dans ces premières années de l'après-guerre est une des plus fidèles alliées de l'U.R.S.S. de Staline et imite en tout le système soviétique. Inscrit à l'Université de Belgrade, écoeuré par les exactions des militants du Parti Communiste, Rajic refuse d'adhérer à la Jeunesse populaire et décide de quitter clandestinement son pays natal. En 1946, à l'âge de vingt-trois ans, il traverse la froide rivière Mura à la nage pour gagner l'Autriche. Il connaît des prisons, des camps des personnes déplacées, exerce différents petits métiers avant d'obtenir son diplôme d'ingénieur en France où il restera jusqu'à 1969, l'année durant laquelle il émigre au Canada.

C'est au Québec, à Trois-Rivières, que Rajic commence sa carrière assez tardive, mais très fructueuse de romancier et de conteur. A l'âge de cinquante-cinq ans il fait imprimer son premier roman, un véritable petit chef-d'œuvre - *Les Hommes-Taupes* (1978) pour publier ensuite un recueil de nouvelles - *Propos d'un vieux radoteur* (1982), un récit - *Sept roses pour une boulangère* (1987), un autre recueil de nouvelles - *Service pénitentiaire national* (1988) et un roman autobiographique - *Vers l'autre rive* (2000).

Les plus belles pages de ce styliste raffiné - le français de Rajic est absolument remarquable - sont consacrées à la description des paysages de montage de son enfance dans *Vers l'autre rive*; les pages les plus puissantes

se trouvent dans *Les Hommes-Taupes* dont l'action se déroule dans une cité mythique où l'on devine la ville natale de l'auteur. Si l'on y ajoute plusieurs nouvelles du *Service pénitentiaire national*, on peut constater que deux parmi les qualités dominantes de l'écriture de Rajic - la tendresse et l'ironie - prennent leurs racines dans l'enfance heureuse et les événements tragiques qui marquent sa jeunesse. L'expérience du totalitarisme reste sans aucun doute l'épreuve la plus puissante dans la vie de l'écrivain et domine son œuvre: le conte fantastique *Propos d'un vieux radoteur*, un chef-d'œuvre aussi, représente une vaste parabole de la dictature.

Si l'expérience yougoslave de Rajic s'avère plutôt négative malgré les doux souvenirs d'enfance, son expérience française n'est pas beaucoup plus heureuse, en dépit du profond attachement de l'auteur à la langue de Proust dès sa prime jeunesse. L'identité francophone de Rajic n'en est pas moins ambiguë: le narrateur de *Sept roses pour une boulangère*, que l'on devine proche de l'auteur, est une personne déplacée au bord du suicide, plus en raison du manque de chaleur humaine, qu'à cause de sa misère matérielle. Le héros de ce récit est un personnage tragique, un homme qui a quitté son pays natal pour choisir la liberté, mais cette liberté s'appelle humiliation. Tel Meursault de Camus, « il se sentait désespérément perdu dans ce monde étrange ». Moins nombreux que dans *Propos d'un vieux radoteur*, les éléments fantastiques dans *Sept roses pour une boulangère* (le puits métallique, le double) renforcent le sentiment de profonde tristesse et désolation.

C'est surtout par le biais de la littérature française que Rajic rejoint la grande tradition de l'humanisme européen, mais, de son propre aveu, il admire Kafka et, de toute évidence, trouve aussi son inspiration dans la peinture lorsqu'il brosse des scènes qui ressemblent aux tableaux fantastiques. Par contre, à notre avis, quasi aucune trace de l'influence des grands auteurs serbes. A-t-il lu, par exemple, les contes satiriques de Radoje Domanovic ? Très probablement oui, ils figurent dans la lecture scolaire obligatoire au lycée en Serbie, mais toujours est-il que l'écriture et l'ironie de Rajic font plutôt penser à la tradition voltairienne qu'aux diatribes de l'auteur serbe. L'épisode avec le laveur de vitres ou celui de la compagnie d'assurances dans *Sept roses pour une boulangère* font preuve d'un sens très subtile de l'humour noir (« Curieusement, les futurs assureurs de la *Vita aeterna* semblent manquer singulièrement d'assurance »).

D'origine serbe, ayant fait ses études et ayant vécu plus de vingt ans en France, Négovan Rajic est-il vraiment un auteur canadien ? La réponse est: sans aucun doute ! C'est le Canada qu'il a choisi pour y vivre et y écrire en français, la langue du Québec, c'est d'ailleurs au Canada qu'il a publié tous ses livres. Depuis plusieurs décennies une vaste production d'œuvres littéraires de haute qualité écrites par les immigrants attire l'attention du public non seulement au Canada, mais dans le monde entier. Le succès des écrivains aux identités multiples comme Négovan Rajic (qui est traduit jusqu'au Japon)



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consiste dans une variété infinie de thèmes et une grande richesse humaine et artistique.

L'œuvre de Négovan Rajic, dense, riche, variée, amère et puissante, reste encore relativement peu connue par rapport à sa véritable valeur. Il faut espérer que les lecteurs des pays ayant subi les méfaits des totalitarismes pourront découvrir un jour *Les Hommes-Taupes* ou *Propos d'un vieux radoteur*, ouvrages habilement composés et écrits dans un français exemplaire.



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### MARGARET ATWOOD'S OTHERNESS OF SELFHOOD

In a post-modern world the self is seen as a fragmented and unstable convergence of realities. Uncovering these factors of life that destabilize the self has become an important object of philosophical inquiry. Existential thought, though not specifically post-modern, has discovered multiple paradoxes that destabilize the self within the context of individualistic ontological reflection. It seems that "there is a need for a post-modern ontology that takes seriously both the destabilized self and the reality that humanity cannot avoid its encounter with the Other." (Macri, 1) The work of Emmanuel Levinas is based on phenomenological ethics that stresses the self-other encounter but does not provide an ontology that is adequate to the post-modern situation. That is why the existential theme of *anxiety* as a result of destabilization is shaped to cover a new reality: Otherness. A more complete ontology can emerge "through an examination of basic existential ontology, focusing on the paradoxes of death and freedom and the investigation of Otherness-of-selfhood derived from a radicalization of Levinas." (Macri, 1) It is concluded that such an approach to ontology "holds paradox as the primary destabilizing force, and claims Otherness is the most concrete vehicle of paradox for the self." (Macri, 1)

In his *Totality and Infinity* Levinas relies on the face-to-face encounter of the self with the Other, and when this happens, "when one meets the Other, they meet the Other entirely in their Otherness: *the Other is what self is not.*" (Macri, 4) In meeting the Other, one recognizes the Other not only as "simply the idea of that Other present to the self: the Other is precisely that which is *never* just the idea of the Other." (Macri, 5) In fact, this is how the Other transcends the self but in such a way that it "disturbs the self's selfhood because it presents the self with a self over whom they have no control." (Macri, 5) As a consequence, we reveal identity as absolute difference. Levinas discusses further the importance of an ethical realm where he presents the Otherness of the Other as an invitation to responsibility for the self. The self is forced in the encounter to take the place of the Other, recognizing its suffering. "In the ideal encounter, one comes across the Other as suffering, feels the immediate call to responsibility, and does not reduce the Other to an idea within the self." (Macri, 5) The self is confronted, almost assaulted, by the Other.

It is necessary to compare Sartre's approaches to this ontology of the self in *Being and Nothingness* by the self which recognizes that the Other is a self who regards the self as an object, believes Macri. The Other is respected only as the instrument by which the individual can understand itself as an object. Comparing the two understandings of the Other, will direct us to agree with Macri's conclusion that "Otherness is the understanding of the self that cannot be grasped by the self because the self is completely destabilized." (5-6) This paradox of the self-as-other is a pathway toward anxiety. It is a self who encounters the Other and is in conversation with.

It is also the self, the Otherness of selfhood, Margaret Atwood deals with in one of the Empson lectures she delivered at the University of Cambridge for the year 2000, titled "*Duplicity: The Jekyll hand, the hide hand, and the slippery double: Why there are always two,*" published in a book *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing*. In this essay Margaret Atwood starts remembering her childhood as a world of doubles, and concludes that the mere act of writing "splits the self into two," (Atwood, 32) and immediately asks a question about the relationship "the two entities we lump under one name, that of the writer" (Atwood, 35) By two she means "the person who exists when no writing is going forward", and "the other, more shadowy and altogether more equivocal personage who shares the same body, and who, when no one is looking, takes it over and uses it to commit the actual writing." (Atwood, 35) This Atwood's question imposes another question. Can the two Margaret Atwood's selves be understood as the Self and the Other who are negotiating their positions: the disturbed self and the Other waiting to be eaten, just the way she illustrates our desire to meet an author: "Wanting to meet an author because you like his work is like wanting to meet a duck because you like p ate'." (Atwood, 35) But, if we want the p ate', we must kill the duck, she concludes and wants to find out the person that does the killing? This conclusion leads to the most crucial question considering identity. Asking herself if she was then her "evil twin or slippery double," she concludes that she is a writer. This leads to another conclusion that she "must have a slippery double." (Atwood, 36) The very moment when Margaret Atwood discovered that she was not "who she was" (she grew up with a nickname) was the moment of revelation for her. Then she knew that she was "endowed at birth with a double identity, and that she caved in to fate." (Atwood, 36) The fact that she "embraced her doubliness, was a reason for her to make a strong distinction between the self and the Other." (Atwood, 36) This also enabled her to come to the final conclusion: "The author is the name on the books. I'm the other one." (Atwood, 36-37)

But Margaret Atwood is not lonely in her being the writer and the other. She simply says: "All writers are double," and reminds her audience of a "widespread suspicion among writers - that there are two of him sharing the same body, with a hard-to-predict and difficult-to-pinpoint moment during which the one turns into the other." (Atwood, 37) On top of all, "one half does the living, the other half the writing, and - if of a melancholy turn of mind - that each is parasitic upon the other." (Atwood, 37) There are many

examples around: the noble self-sacrificing substitute, as in the Brothers Grimm's tale "The Gold Children," the Kurosawa film *The Shadow Warrior*, and the Rossellini film *Il generale Della Rovere*, the sultan-and-beggar duo in Isak Dinesen's "A Consolatory Tale," and the two sisters in Christina Rossetti's poem "Goblin Market." (Atwood, 38-9)

Numerous examples of doubliness simply lead Margaret Atwood to ask herself about the roots of the notion of the writing self – whether the self that comes to be thought of as the author is not the same as the one who does the living. It is rooted in the fears from story tellers, from old were-wolf stories which owe something to *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*; then in some old stories about the *Doppelgänger*. More examples can be found in Africa and in some African societies which kill identical twins to ward off bad luck. Numerous examples of doubles lead Margaret Atwood to bring an uncertain conclusion: "perhaps such exact replication suggests to us a denial of our own uniqueness." (Atwood, 39)

Africa only serves Margaret Atwood to be reminded of twins and doubles as very old motifs in mythologies (Jacob and Esau, Romulus and Remus, Cain and Abel, Osiris and Set), and Patrick Tierney's book on human sacrifice, *The Highest Altar*, in which he claims that a "successful twin represents the living society, and the unsuccessful one his dark alter ego - the one who was sacrificed and then buried under the cornerstone in order to deal with the Underworld, propitiate the gods, and protect the city." (Atwood, 40) Twins continue to exert a fascination into the age of "literature," while Margaret Atwood is telling her story on the otherness of selfhood in this essay. She remembers Shakespeare's good Edgar and bad Edmund, then the two sets of identical masters and servants in *The Comedy of Errors*, and finally concludes that the role of doubles can be even more "dangerous." According to Scottish folklore, to meet your own double was a sign of death, Atwood informs us; then compares this superstition with the one which tells the ancient Greek story on Narcissus, and finally concludes, "What Narcissus sees is his own reflection - himself, but a self on the other side of the watery mirror - and it lures him to his death." (Atwood, 40) Even more dangerous was the concept of "spectral evidence," which was "the same legal status as more tangible exhibits in the Salem witch trials in 17<sup>th</sup> century New England." (Atwood, 41)

Romanticism was fascinated by folk-stories and folklore, which brought into literature a lot of doubles, Atwood continues telling us her story about doubles throughout history. It also brought in the atmosphere of delirium and terror and influenced such "double" films as *The Stepford Wives*, *The Other*, or *Dead Ringers*. In these "double" stories, like Poe's story "William Wilson" the main hero ends by killing the other William Wilson. In fact, he kills himself. Atwood explains: "like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, the two William Wilsons share their mortality, and one cannot exist without another." (Atwood, 42) Atwood's next example of a "double" is Henry James's story "The Jolly Corner" in which an American aesthete discovers that his "potential self is powerful, but he's a brute, a monster." (Atwood, 42) Then

she introduces Dorian Grey as the one “of the magic picture,” the one who makes her ask herself if it is “all because the artist who painted the picture put too much of something or other into it - himself?” (Atwood, 42) and warns us “if you’ve got a magic picture, don’t mess around with it. Leave it alone.” (p. 43)

But Margaret Atwood does not leave alone the Otherness of selfhood in this lecture so easily. Instead, she finds a lot of support in Jorge Luis Borges's text “Borges and I.” (Atwood, 44) What fascinates her is Borges's idea to take the Jekyll and Hyde theme and split himself-Borges-in two. She quotes Borges: “The other one, the one called Borges, is the one things happen to,” (Arwood, 44) that is the other one which begins the half that calls himself “I.” But, being aware of the paradox of losing his authentic self, Borges ends his story about doubles by explaining that he himself does not know which of them has written that page. Borges’s doubt sums up the self-doubts of this writer and inspires a lot of new questions. The crucial one Margaret Atwood wants to be answered concern the connection between the author and his work and the name attached to it, the identity of the writing “I”. Who, in fact, controls the hand at the moment of writing. This question leads to the final and most problematic one: “Which half of the equation, if either, may be said to be authentic?” (Atwood, 45)

Margaret Atwood leaves the questions unanswered, and in the second part of her Empson lecture discusses writing as a form. She admits that writing has greatly contributed to the syndrome of the writer’s anxiety about his other self, and to his suspicion that s/he has one. Then, she discusses the relationship between the writer, the book, and audience, and constantly points out the complexities and relativity of the relationship. At one point Atwood concludes that “to be a writer came to be seen as running the risk of being the invisible half of a double act, and possibly also a copy for which no authentic original existed.” (Atwood, 51) This means that the writer “might be not only a forger, but also a forgery. An impostor. A fake.” (p. 51) However, the writer has to take a risk as s/he cannot live without his or her double, Atwood concludes and illustrates her conclusion.

Thus the Author, capital A, and the person whose double he or she is. They alternate. They are attached head to head. Each empties his or her vital substance into the other. Neither can exist alone. To paraphrase Isak Dinesen, who said the same thing of life and death, man and woman, rich and poor, the Author and its attached human being are “locked caskets, of which each contains the key to the other.” (Atwood, 54)

But, Borges’s dilemma, expressed as “I do not know which of us has written this page,” (Atwood, 54) is also one more dilemma for Margaret Atwood's understanding of Otherness of selfhood. She simply asks: “What is the nature of the crucial moment - the moment in which the writing takes place?” (Atwood, 55) and immediately concludes that it is the question which has not a definite answer because writers cannot catch themselves in the very act, for

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it is hard to watch "ourselves in mid-write, as it were: our attention must be focused on what we are doing, not on ourselves." (Atwood, 55)

The magic answer to the crucial question "who does what" Margaret Atwood finds in *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, (although she takes it as a false analogy because Alice is not the writer of the story about her). She watches her at the beginning of the story on one side of the mirror - the "life" side- while the anti-Alice, her double, is on the other, or "art" side. Alice is a mirror-gazer: the "life" side is looking *in* the "art," the "art" side is looking *out*. Instead of breaking the mirror, Alice goes *through* the mirror; instead of destroying her double, the "real," Alice merges with the other Alice - the "imagined Alice, the dream Alice the Alice who exists nowhere." (Atwood, 56) But when "the "life" side of Alice returns to the waking world, she brings the story of the mirror world back with her and starts telling it to the cat." (Atwood, 7) The moment when Alice passes through the mirror is the very moment when the act of writing takes place. This is Margaret Atwood's conclusion, for "at this one instant, the glass barrier between the doubles dissolves, and Alice is neither here nor there, neither art nor life, neither the one thing, nor the other, though at the same time she is all of these at once." (Atwood, 57) This is a special moment as "at that moment time itself stops, and also stretches out, and both writer and reader have all the time not in the world." (Atwood, 57)

We will also have all the time of the world if we now turn to Homi Bhabha's analyses of the postcolonial condition and use them as one end of a theoretical bridge leading to Margaret Atwood's understanding of the Otherness of selfhood, and if we take as the other end of the bridge Emanuel Levinas's "facing of the other." Bhabha continues Levinas's endeavours to renew and revise more thoroughly the methods of philosophy after Heidegger. Bhabha in fact questions the notion of a 'unitary identity'; an anti-monolithic model of cultural exchange which negates the polarity of binary models of culture with elements that are, "neither the One, nor the Other but something else besides which contrasts the terms and territories of both." (Sim, 201) Bhabha deals with the same problem in theory Margaret Atwood discusses in this essay. Bhabha believes that there is a systematic ambivalence towards "that otherness that is at once an object of derision and desire." (Sim, 201) He challenges the rigid boundaries between the two binary oppositions –the One and the Other using a theoretical methodology that is pluralist and diverse, avoiding critical and theoretical exclusivity in the spirit of postmodernism.

Margaret Atwood does the same in this essay. She also challenges the rigid boundaries of the One and the Other by seeing Alice merging with the other Alice "the imaged Alice, the dream Alice" (Atwood, 57) the way Bhabha associates the colonized. The act of writing happens at the moment Alice passes through the mirror, Atwood concludes. This moment, which she describes as the moment when "the glass barrier between the doubles dissolves, when Alice is neither here nor there, neither art nor life, neither the one thing, nor the other, but all these at once" (Atwood, 57) is what Homi

Bhabha defines as "neither the One, nor the Other but something else." (Sim, 201) The rigid boundaries are challenged in the same way by both authors: the writer Margaret Atwood and the critic Homi Bhabha. The effect is the same: negotiation of the two merged sides which has just started, and has all the time of the world.

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**TO EAT OR TO BE EATEN**  
**(*THE EDIBLE WOMAN* BY MARGARET ATWOOD)**

Bearing in mind the consequences of the growing imperialism of the American age, Margaret Atwood writes her first novel *The Edible Woman* in order to rebel against the American consumer society. The question raised in the novel is what anyone – male or female – can do to maintain sanity and humanity in the plastic and over-pack of the late twentieth century. The nature of the consumer society is daringly exposed and the possibility of personal fulfillment is openly questioned.

F.R. Leavis makes a similar point when he describes the contemporary society in which “more jam tomorrow” policy prevails. He describes a recurrent phenomenon of a successful man, with a career and two cars, who goes to a psychiatrist and complains of emptiness, apathy and a lack of will to live. However, the psychiatrist cannot help him: his mind is in perfect order, it is his imagination that has gone dry. He is trapped in the world he lives in, because he cannot imagine any other world or way of life. The price paid for success was too dear in a society where, in Golding’s words “it is better to be envied than ignored, better to be well-paid than happy, better to be successful than good – better to be vile than vile-esteemed.” (Golding, 130)

Being disgusted with the contemporary mode of living that is threatening to swallow the Canadian sense of identity, Margaret Atwood describes Americans as “friendly metal killers” in her novel *Surfacing* and observes:

Americans spread like virus, they get into the brain and take over the cells and the cells change from inside and the one that have the disease can’t tell the difference. Like the late show sci-fi movies, creatures from outer space, body snatchers injecting themselves into you dispossessing your brain, their eyes blank eggshells behind the dark glasses. If you look like them and talk like them and think like them, then you are them,.. you speak their language, and language is everything you do.” (Atwood, 1973, 129)

What is terrifying is, in Atwood’s opinion, that future generations may become so perfectly adjusted to the American age that they will not recognize it as an American age at all; the similar observation is stated by Jimmy, one of the characters in John Osborne’s play *Look Back in Anger*:

“...but I must say it’s pretty dreary living in the American age – unless you are an American, of course. Perhaps all our children will be Americans.”( Osborne, 17)

In this kind of society, people become stoical, numb themselves with chemicals, emigrate internally into fictions of past and future, because, as Adrienne Rich, an American poetess, points out in her collection of essays *What is Found There*, there is a complete estrangement from our genuine needs:

...our experience – our desire itself – is taken from us, processed and labelled, and sold back to us before we have had a chance to name it for ourselves (what do we really want and fear) or to dwell in our ambiguities and contradictions. (Rich, 2)

The essential theme of *The Edible Woman*, the theme of victimization, does not work only on the level of describing Canada’s exploitation by America that must be recognized and resisted, but is also repeated at another level – including the relationship between sexes. Margaret Atwood emphasizes “ the great wrong” on the part of our modern civilization that suppresses and marginalizes everything that is considered to be “ the other” – other races, other cultures, the other sex. She does not want to banish one sex and privilege the other; she simply warns us that “ this human universe is specifically human rather than male or female.” (Davey, 163)

The male characters that surround the heroine of the novel, Marian MacAlpine, appear to be “hunters”, threatening to devour Marian’s sense of identity and turn her into a mere victim. Peter, her fiancé, and Duncan, a graduate student of English literature, are the representatives of our destructive patriarchal culture that does not allow people to have an identity different from the socially prescribed one. Therefore, the novel abounds in images of “being eaten” and “being hunted” – people that surround the heroine willingly accept the socially imposed roles and are dwarfed by the consumer society and become non-entities.

At her working place she is surrounded by “the office virgins” since their only preoccupation in life is to get married and settle down. They are perfectly assimilated into their environment, and offer one of the possible choices in life. Marian does not accept it.

Ainsley, her roommate, seems to be a liberated woman; she is courageous enough to fulfill her deepest needs. However, she cannot recognize those needs on her own; books, magazines tell her what those needs are. For the authors that she finds acceptable, biology is destiny, and consequently, a woman can fulfill her femininity only by having a baby and having no husband. This second choice, offered by Ainsley, is also quite unacceptable for Marian.

Another possible choice for Marian is given by her best friend Clara, but this one is also not acceptable, because Clara's identity has been swallowed by her husband Joe's traditional preconception about the feminine role in the society: a woman should give birth to children, stay at home and look after the children.

The theme of victimization may also be observed from the perspective of an individual in relation to the consumer society. Margaret Atwood explores this theme through the subconscious rebellion of a woman who is torn between, on the one hand, the stereotyped roles provided by the external authorities of the society she lives in and, on the other hand, the modern feminist issues. The main question that permeates the novel is: how to preserve one's own identity and at the same time, to accommodate to the society we live in? Is that really possible? The answer given in the book is that though difficult it may be, yet it is not impossible to achieve it; in other words, "to fight the Monster, you have to know that there is the Monster, and what it is like" (Hill, 12), and consequently, each of us should find one's own way of coping with and resisting every day violence.

How does the heroine of the novel resist it? At first, Marian MacAlpine seems to be a fully emancipated modern woman, but in fact she is a woman with no tradition, no future, no freedom. Her position in Seymour Surveys company also reflects her position in the society: she is at a middle management position, she has to reformulate psychologists' expressions into simple questions in order for them to be understandable to people who will answer them. The questionnaire that she works on is about "Moose Beer" and its significance to men. It is obvious that the readers are presented, from the very beginning of the novel, with the most frequent consuming element in the American society – beer. Marian is rather indifferent to her job; she does not expect pleasure from it at all.

Her fiancé, Peter, a young lawyer, is a man who is utterly conventional and decides to marry because all his friends marry. He does not want to be thought of as "queer"; furthermore, his wife must be "useful" and he believes that Marian is a convenient person with whom he can fulfill his fantasies. Peter also represents the image of the male as a hunter, but not as a provider, but as a destroyer – he treasures a collection of guns and knives and always mentions his hunting adventures as a proof of his masculinity.

"I'd rather have you decide that", says Marian when Peter asks her to determine the date of their wedding. This voice is the voice of society, of its traditional expectations about woman's role that responds automatically before Marian's mind can act. From then on, the readers can clearly observe the heroine's subconscious dissatisfaction with her life. In a scene in which Peter forces her to make love in his white "medical" apartment, she has a vision of bathtub as a coffin in which she feels trapped, devoured and consumed. The images of male as a hunter and female as a victim are

presented in a scene in which, after an evening drink, Marian runs away from Peter, feeling threatened:

I was running along the sidewalk. After the first minute I was surprised to find my feet moving, wondering how they had begun, but I didn't stop. The rest of them were so astonished they didn't do anything at all for a moment. Then Peter yelled, "Marian! Where the hell do you think you're going?" I could hear the fury in his voice: this was the unforgivable sin, because it was public. (Atwood, 1987, 72)

Marian's sense of diminishment propels her to seek refuge under the bed in Len's apartment. The symbolic meaning of her hiding-place is that a heroine wants to discard her old self and to be reborn again as a whole, integrated person.

In spite of the narrowness and dust I was glad I didn't have to sit up there in the reverberating hot glare of the room. Though I was only two or three feet lower than the rest of them, I was thinking of the room as 'up there'. I myself was underground, I had dug myself a private burrow. I felt smug. (Atwood, 1987, 76)

The heroine of this novel, like Michael K. from Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K.* and Shamus Heaney in his poem *Digging*, wants to recreate the wholeness and totality of life again by going back to the embrace of the Mother Earth, to the period when woman was considered to be the "Great Goddess" as Ted Hughes would put it, because of her creative power to produce life. However, our "modern Goddess" cannot experience the wholeness of life again, because she still lives in the era in which T.S.Eliot's "the dissociation of sensibility" prevails. And the attempt to discard socially imposed roles turns out to be a failure – and even deteriorates into a comic situation in which Marian is stuck under the bed.

Marian subconsciously refuses to be reduced to a mere packed supermarket product. Therefore, she seeks for an alternative. Here, another male character appears. Duncan, a student of literature, seems to be everything that Peter is not. He is always presented in a grotesque way – it seems that he never changes his clothes, he is lost in his unfinished papers and meaningless books. He is a pure narcissist, a person who lies to inspire pity, who usually sits in the Laundromat watching clothes in the dryer (his substitute for television). This is how Margaret Atwood ridicules the powerful influence of television as one of the inevitable means of consumerism in the modern society. For Duncan, Marian is a listener who sympathizes and admires his cleverness, and only then a woman to make love to. In fact, he is a pure narcissist who is not able to make love to anyone else – the most important person in his life being himself.

The second part of the book begins when Marian's rational consciousness loses control, so that her life moves from order to disorder, from activity to

passivity, from conventionality to unpredictability. Her body rebels and changes its shape due to Marian's refusal to eat and her aversion to food. This is the result of her unconscious dissatisfaction with the existing social order. It becomes quite obvious that her psyche becomes divided into two parts, one trying to deny the other. Marian subconsciously identifies herself with all helpless, hunted, slaughtered creatures – for example, the steak is like a hunk of muscle, blood red and a part of a real cow that once moved and ate. By describing Marian's aversion to food, Margaret Atwood cleverly criticizes the commercial policy and shows that, for example, the reality of meat is hidden by its packaging. People are turned into consumers of supermarket products whose natural, genuine reality has been hidden behind their gaudy package.

The climax of the novel begins with Peter's party. Marian turns herself into a kind of supermarket product and presents herself in a "gaudy package". She gets the approval of Peter, who says she should always look like that. The image Marian sees in the mirror coincides with the images that Peter wants to recapture at his party by photographing everybody, hunting with his camera. However, during the party, Marian panics; she sees herself as a pray, and she tries to escape, because to be "shot" by camera means to die:

Peter was there...He had a camera in his hand, but now she saw what it really was...he raised his camera and aimed at her; his mouth open in a snarl of teeth. There was a blinding flash of light. "No!", she screamed. She covered her face with her arms. ( Atwood, 1987, 244)

So, she escapes to Laundromat and Duncan. It seems that she has completely released herself after the escape; however, the real freedom will be achieved later. Duncan offers her safety, a temporary refuge from Peter. The following morning she could not taste the food at all – it is then that she realizes that the night with Duncan was not a new beginning, but simply the end of one phase in her life – being free from Peter, Marian will have no need for Duncan. Now she also becomes free from the illusion that freedom can be experienced with Peter or Duncan. From this point on, Marian begins her recovery.

The recovery begins when Marian decides not to play the role they expect from her to play and to do something on her own. So, she begins to cope with the world around her by washing the dirty dishes and throwing away the spoiled food from the refrigerator. Not only does she clean her apartment, but also she prepares a kind of "reality test" for Peter – she bakes a cake, a traditional feminine performance, shaped and decorated to resemble a woman (with ruffled red dress, pink mouth, pink shoes, pink fingernails). This cake represents the image of Marian herself at her most artificial state as she prepared herself for the party.

The cake becomes a symbol of a woman as an object for male consumption within the destructive structures of the patriarchal society. Marian's refusal to eat had grown out of her unwillingness to be eaten; she had subconsciously

identified herself with the hunted, with the object of consumption. In John Lauber's words:

To be consumed means to be assimilated to the man's life and personality, to meet his requirements; it means to lose one's individuality, to make oneself into an object, and to be treated accordingly as the cake is. ( Lauber, 28)

The next morning Peter comes to demand an explanation for Marian's behaviour the previous night. She offers him a cake-woman as a substitute for herself. Peter quickly leaves, because he is embarrassed by the cake since he recognized its significance and in Marian's mind he is reduced to a kind of insignificance that deserves no attention on her part. Now, Marian starts eating the cake, and in that way, she symbolically regains her genuine self. Then Duncan appears; he is offered the cake, too. But he does not recognize the symbolism of the cake and it becomes quite obvious that Duncan deserves the cake as much as Peter.

At the end of the novel, Marian is aware of the fact that she is the member of the consumer society who has recognized the cultural disease and tried to find the way to cope with it. Margaret Atwood shows that the escape from this consumer society is indeed possible, by recognizing the forces that operate inside the existing system. The new recognition may come true only through the fundamental change within the character herself. Marian tries to change the shape of her life by trying to change the shape of her body. She declares war on the society by becoming anorectic. Here, as in almost all Atwood's novels, hunger signifies a desire for social change. In Atwood's words:

Anorexia is a phenomenon which threatens the stability of gender subjects because it takes the female subjects into a zone beyond social representation. In anorexia, hunger has contractual existence mediating between desire and the body. ( Humm, 139)

Once Marian perceives the symbolic relationship between woman and food, she can reassert her own hunger. By doing this, she does not reject the existence of consumption, but she consciously detects the cultural desire to shape and model any individual in a way to serve the needs of the patriarchal society in which everything is consumable, including people as well.

Despite the fact that Margaret Atwood puts an emphasis on Marian and her personal salvation, the relationship of other characters to the consumer society is also very important. However, the other characters do not stand up against it. Even the ones who are convinced that they are above it, for example Duncan and his roommates, are in fact unaware of the degree to which they are assimilated to the contemporary system of values. Ainsley's blackmail of Len fails, but Fischer Smythe, Duncan's roommate, is happy to provide the Father-image that is so necessary to Ainsley. In the end, everyone gets what they deserve – Fischer has his earth goddess, Ainsley her father-image, Duncan can go back to snow and solitude, Peter will probably get married to Lucy, one of "the office virgins", who accepts to be consumed –

however, they remain forever blind to the futility of lives they are living. "Living and partly living", as T.S.Eliot would say. These individuals experience a tremendous sense of isolation; they are incapable of love, of meaningful sexual relationships. They became non-entities, empty shells, "hollow men".

There is a beautiful poem belonging to Atwood's collection *Circle Games*, called *A Place, Fragments*. This poem deals with the theme of surface versus depths, which is further associated with mirrors and can be connected with the positions that the characters from *The Edible Woman* find themselves in. Mirrors reflect surface, whereas the truth hides in the depths. Modern people have lost the ability to go below the surface, to face up the truth about themselves, so it is no wonder why Margaret Atwood, the poetess, smashes the mirror out of the protest against the surfaces:

An other sense tugs at us  
we have lost something  
some key to these things

Something not lost or hidden but not found yet  
That informs, holds together in confusion,  
This largeness and dissolving:  
Not above or behind  
Or within it, but one  
With it: an  
Identity  
Something too huge and simple  
For us to see. (Atwood, 1983, 53)

People became the willing supporters of the system or they simply surrender everything they have to the demands of the society and are not able to recognize the social pressure. They are successfully playing their roles, like Woolfe's Mrs. Dalloway: when she takes off her garment for parties, she sees her naked, genuine self and is afraid of what she sees. So, she puts it on again and hurls into the false but secure embrace of the society. However, in Atwood's version of the same story, the heroine achieves victory over that part of herself that has been indoctrinated by the society.

Our culture failed to make a very important distinction between the material and spiritual values, since it gives priority to only one aspect, the material one – generic needs, the immediate product of which is the American consumer society that is threatening to swallow Canadian identity and creates people who cannot bear too much reality. That is why Margaret Atwood confronts us with the need for perceiving the truth and recognizing the cultural disease - in order for us to gain a more profound insight into the reality of things. The only way out for an individual is to perceive the cultural Monster, to

recognize the wasted potential in each of us and to reach one's personal salvation from within.

In other words, we cannot live a "noble savage" kind of life, as Rousseau would put it, we have to exist and function within the society, but we do not have to become the cogs in the machine of the system, we could refuse that, as for example Adrienne Rich refused it in her poem *Splittings*:

I refuse these givens the splittings  
Between love and action I am choosing  
Not to suffer uselessly and not to use her  
I choose to love this time for once  
With all my intelligence. (Norton, 283)

Margaret Atwood's heroine in *The Edible Woman* refused to be a willing member of the consumer society and rebelled against it. This does not mean that Atwood gives supremacy to woman over man in the fight against the cultural Monster. This novel was just an attempt of a modern writer, aware of the dangerous course our civilization is taking, to point to the possible ways of avoiding the final destruction that could affect the human race if it continued to blindly follow the uncompromising rules of the consumer society.

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GENDER AND GENRE IN  
MARGARET ATWOOD'S *THE HANDMAID'S TALE*

The story starts in the near future in the Republic of Gilead, formerly the United States. When a religious extremist right wing movement assigns women to the legal care of a male "guardian" and turns them into slaves defined by their roles – an important one is that of procuring children for couples unable to have their own - little remains to be said by the oppressors in this story. They have completed the process of naming, interpreting and taming the Other of their Western culture. There is, however, one account that lacks closure, objectivity and totality and still creates a sense of alarm and a heightened sense of authenticity. It is her-story.

Readers may be surprised to hear Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* labelled science fiction, but reviewers almost invariably find its place in the long tradition of near-future dystopias which has made up a large part of SF since the early 50s. The tale has often been compared to Orwell's *1984*, as the best known work in this tradition, and has obtained a handy tag - "a feminist 1984."<sup>1</sup> Like other handy tags this one is a partial truth. I will argue in this paper that Atwood's novel derives its literary vitality not so much from the dystopian tradition as from the ways in which it goes beyond it. For one thing, Atwood brings the quest-romance to that tradition, transforming it stylistically as well as thematically; for another, her critical rendering of the feminist debate makes her feminism more subtle and complex than can be indicated by merely noting the change in the protagonist's gender. This paper is a kind of a gesturing at these various ways in which this work "goes beyond".

Before I consider *The Handmaid's Tale* itself, it is important to explain my starting point briefly. Generic categorizations can tell us little of real value about the significance of a piece of literature. They, as structuralists are used to saying, reduce indefinitely many kinds of "literary structures or meanings" to a limited number of types. Whatever value there may be in trying to reduce such structures and strategies, the essential function of the literary text

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<sup>1</sup> "A Feminist 1984" is, in fact, the title of Cathy N. Davidson's review in *Ms. Arnold Davidson*, 113-21, asserts that *The Handmaid's Tale* has the "standard form of the dystopia", describing these characteristics on p. 116.

remains to be "one of revelation or disclosure." (Falk, 90) To claim the revealing function for the literary text is to express one's interest in the WHY at least as much as in the HOW of what is said, to express one's preference for the real instead of the illusory, for the authentic, significant mode of being, instead of the plurality of subject positions inscribed within language and for truth instead of the breakdown of meaning, to use the current idiom. A genuine realism of imagination, a sufficient degree of reality or truth in a piece of literature to be revealed or disclosed, is and has always been the defining characteristic of literature. So, there are no such special structures or meanings for those who recognize that the question of revelation cuts across all questions of modes and genres.

More useful than any trans-historical systematizing of devices, on which the genre theory depends, is the notion of literary tradition in the way T.S.Eliot uses it.<sup>2</sup> His idea of a literary tradition comprehends everything which is important in the ideas of literary devices, but at the same time it comprehends the idea of life, absent from structuralist or post-modern interpretations of literature, more concerned with the nature of meaning than with the definitional literary function of finding meaning. Art's true significance lies in our discovery of its unfolding meaning - it is precisely man's capacity to recognize and choose that art is trying to articulate, to preserve, refine, and keep in service of life. Margaret Atwood's treatment of the dystopian genre in *The Handmaid's Tale* is a good example of the educated, sophisticated and historically informed sensibility T.S Eliot defines. She clearly expresses her awareness of her predecessors (it is a persistent trait in her writing: the parody of the Gothic in *Lady Oracle* is a good example) when she calls *The Handmaid's Tale* "a dystopia, a negative utopia."<sup>3</sup> But the ways in which her novel goes beyond this genre show that her sensibility is equally prepared to rely on its creative imagination to make the best use of its education.

It is necessary for the argument to refer to the other label attached to this novel - the "feminist 1984". Contemporary discussions of art are not any more conceivable without important questions of ideology, social power and subversiveness of art. To explore the living structures of truth within a

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<sup>2</sup> T.S.Eliot's famous formulation gives us a view of tradition as something which has both weight and permanence, but which can and must be open to modification through every contribution from a creative newcomer: "Tradition is a matter of much wider significance...It involves, in the first place, the historical sense...No poet, no artist of any art, has his meaning completely alone...You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical, criticism. The necessity that he shall conform, that he shall cohere, is not one-sided; what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them..." (Eliot, pp. 14-15)

<sup>3</sup> See a 1985 interview cited by Freibert

culture, which is the essential function of art, is likely to mean the uncovering of profound ideological conflicts. Since these conflicts are the source rather than simply consequences of our political thinking, we should not be too quick to translate them into already-familiar political terms, feminism being one of them. Although *The Handmaid's Tale* is a kind of thought experiment (it attempts to imagine what kind of values might evolve if environmental pollution rendered most of the human race sterile), Atwood envisions the future by extrapolating from some tendencies in the present which she exaggerates to make their most negative effects. Two social controversies underlie the novel: the varying agendas of mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century feminists (the debates among these agendas)<sup>4</sup> and the traditional attitudes that are embedded in the thinking of the religious right.<sup>5</sup> What is new and significant in Atwood's novel is the way the author "deconstructs" the absolutes and abstractions both of the feminist debate over "essentialism" and of the ideology of the fundamentalist right, making clear the convergence of the two extremes, while yet distinguishing the two sharply. This insight makes the novel's feminism more complex than the label "feminist 1984" can convey.

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<sup>4</sup> During the early 80s debate raged (and continues to rage, on a lower level) about feminist attitudes toward sexuality and pornography in particular. Outspoken feminists have taken all kinds of positions: that all erotica depicting women as sexual objects is demeaning, that pornography was bad though erotica can be good, that although most pornography is demeaning the protection of civil liberties is a greater good which requires the toleration of freedom for pornographers, however distasteful, even that such a thing as feminist pornography can and should be created.

The sub-theme of this tangled debate which seems to have particularly interested and alarmed Atwood is the tendency of some feminist anti-porn groups to ally themselves with religious anti-porn zealots who oppose the feminists on almost every other issue. The language of "protection of women" could slip from a demand for more freedom into a retreat from freedom, to a kind of neo-Victorianism, or something even worse. After all, it was the need to protect 'good' women from sex that justified all manner of repression in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, including confining them to home, barring them from participating in the arts, and voting. Contemporary Islamic women sometimes argue that assuming the veil and traditional all-enveloping clothing is aimed at dealing with sexual harassment and sexual objectification. The language is feminist, but the result can be deeply patriarchal, as in this novel.

<sup>5</sup> The defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment, the rise of the religious right, the election of Ronald Reagan, and many sorts of backlash (mostly hugely misinformed) against the women's movement led writers like Atwood to fear that the antifeminist tide could not only prevent further gains for women, but turn back the clock. She examines some of the traditional attitudes that are embedded in the thinking of the religious right, which she finds particularly threatening.

However, to read Atwood's novel only as an attempt to "deconstruct" the phenomena she finds fearful in her culture would be an over-simplification. Atwood's going beyond our cultural limitations and beyond our living among the echoes of older literature is a symptom of her need to cure our spiritual condition rather than merely express it. The totalitarian state that the novel depicts, with its torture, suppression of liberties and rights (especially of women), execution and urban savagery obviously reflects the author's preoccupation with violence and emotional extremity. This preoccupation is neither new nor original: it is closely connected with the "crises of meaning" which goes back to writers such as Dostoevsky and Blake who recognized that modern violence and evil are in part generated by a repressive civilization which denies form to our instincts and therefore turns us over to unchannelled emotion.<sup>6</sup> But it is for literature to try to make sense of this condition by revealing possibilities within us which transcend the existing order. Herbert Blau said that when a phenomenon he finds contemptible occurs "simply to mock it, dismiss it, or cite it as a clear and present danger is not enough. All aversion registered, the bigots and know-nothings denounced, there may still be something else at stake." (Blau, 12) In its theme, its style, in the very structure of narrative, this novel justifies the author's intention to go beyond our limitations in order to re-connect us with the most central meanings of life.

The central meaning of life for Offred, the main protagonist of *The Handmaid's Tale*, is to retain her individual humanity. Thus, the novel can be read as a study in survival in which the main question is not only how to stay alive, but how to remain an authentic individual with her own thoughts and desires. In the absolutely controlled, ordered society Offred lives in, with the borderline of humanity blurred, or rather the very concept of humanity distorted, it is definitely hard to do. The only choice that the society-as-prison offers is the choice between happiness without freedom or freedom without happiness. The choice is an old one, presented not only by Atwood's Aunt Lydia, the trainer of handmaids and explicator of the regime's rationale for its oppression, but also by Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor or Orwell's O'Brien. The choice is such that it breeds the sense of paralysed powerlessness: the people are so manipulated beyond reality that they can only experience themselves as victims unable to act. Purged of diversity and individuality, based on sexism, racism, elitism and other "isms," this society makes Offred and other handmaids experience a feeling of being monitored, shadowed, chased, betrayed or manipulated so that their whole life becomes constant

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<sup>6</sup> "When action involves choosing between worlds, not moving in a single world," Iris Murdoch has argued, "loving and valuing, which were once the rhythm of our lives, become problems. Emotions, which were the aura of what we treasured, when what we treasured was what we unreflectively did, now glow feverishly like distant *feux follets*, or have the imminent glare of a volcanic threat. (Murdoch, 47)

fear: the fear of spies, the fear of betrayal, and the fear of losing their identities.

Loss of identity is an ever-present threat in a totalitarian world. All means are employed to destroy it completely. Gilead women have first been stripped of all personal possessions, stripped of their families and their memories. They have been turned into replaceable, categorized objects, made to wear uniforms and named to be defined in relation to man. The submersion of the self is represented by colour-coded uniforms denoting the status of the wearer, whether Inner or Outer Party member or Commander, Guardian, or Handmaid. The danger is real: Offred at times becomes subsumed by her category and thinks of herself as "we". The motif of the double is used throughout the novel to represent this threat. Describing another Handmaid walking away, Offred says: "She is like my own reflection, in a mirror from which I am moving away." (Atwood, 59, also 25,31,213) Besides, we never know Offred's real name, not only because her identity is subsumed by her status as Handmaid (and she is therefore, of-Fred, her commander, belonging to him as a prized commodity) but because that name is a link to her past, her unique individual self, which her society effectively tries to destroy.

Oppressors well know that "History may be servitude, History may be freedom," (Eliot, 41) or how incomprehension enslaves and blocks, and understanding gives power and brings release. The Handmaids recite the Marxist - from each according to her ability; to each according to his needs - having been told that it is from St. Paul (scriptural warrant being the basis of Gilead's social code). But, what a Handmaid, forbidden access to books, can prove otherwise? Harvard itself, the bastion of reasoned discourse, has become the site of torture and mutilation of the regime's enemies. Offred herself realizes that the next generation of Handmaids will be more docile because "they will have no memories of other possibilities" (Atwood, 151), their collective past having been rewritten and their present spent without alternatives. The epilogue to *The Handmaid's Tale* presents a final ironic example of dehumanization through faulty remembering: its satire on the academic habit of "distancing" and objectifying its subject shows Offred's story, two hundred years later, as food for pedantic discussions of tale's historicity, missing the meaning of Offred's individual experience by committing the historians' sin of viewing the individual as an example of the larger, more abstract, point.

Affection and love are, apart from memory, specially seen as suspect acts in the society-as-prison. "Love is not the point" says Handmaid's trainer Aunt Lydia (Atwood, 285), aware of the subversion inherent in private relationships. The desperate need to make contact goes through the whole novel: the Handmaids reach out between their cots at night in the gymnasium to touch hands and exchange names. This need to remember and make contact with others leads Offred's predecessor to carve out the Latin message of hope: *Nolite te bastardes carborundorum* (don't let the bastards grind you

down). However, the oppressors are not the only ones who know that knowledge of the past and a human contact can become a chance for liberation. So does Offred. And she makes the best of her memories using them to recreate herself, and out of that recreation to create her-story for which she becomes responsible, because, quite simply, it is her true life-story. It is also through love and affection, through an affair with Nick, as through her friendships with other handmaids, that Offred's recreated self desires and rebels.

This rebuilding of a self is precisely the point at which Atwood departs from the dystopian genre. *The Handmaid's Tale* gives us the descent to a nightmare underworld that is, as Northrop Frye reminds us, so central to the romance pattern whereas Offred's reconstruction of her self can be seen as a rebirth, a renewal similar to those in *Surfacing* or *Lady Oracle*. Offred must recreate herself, after being "erased" as a person, having been obliterated for those she loves, especially her family. After this obliteration, she rebuilds, recapturing her individuality by recapturing her past: she composes herself as the novel's fictive reconstruction composes the story of her struggle to do so. She creates herself in opposition to those who would construct her socially, as an object, a walking womb. The narrative itself, thus, becomes a demonstration of the healing effect of memory: through telling her story, Offred survives by making herself real, speaking her way out of invisibility into her humanity. Offred's quest for what makes life truly meaningful for the individual becomes a matter of choice between two radically different ways of life: that in us which surrenders to "living and partly living", as T. S. Eliot would say, and that which resists surrender and refuses to forget "the other way." Offred has opted for "the other way" which is clearly reflected in the structure of the narrative, as well as in the matters of style that become matters of substance.

William Blake's assertion that the artist paints "not Man in general, but most minutely in particular" (Blake, 465) and that - as contrasted with true imagination or vision - "Fable and Allegory are a totally distinct and inferior kind of Poetry" (Blake, 604) is confirmed again: it is through the insistence on a "felt" experience and on the fullness of minor characters that Atwood renders the novel's central theme. It is through imaginative or imagistic concreteness, not through abstractions, that she asserts the primacy of the individual human spirit. Offred's memories of the concretely experiential - the local and the embodied - become her primary means of access to reality. The concretely experiential was her life in the past: though not ideal, it was still filled with energy, creativity, humaneness and a sense of selfhood, a life that contrasts with the slavery and alienation in her present. (Aunt Lydia describes the pre-revolutionary United States as a society dying of too much choice, offering security and stability in place of that too-demanding freedom.) Offred's secret game of Scrabble with her Commander evokes the sensuality of now-forbidden language: "We play two games. Larynx, I spell. Valance. Quince. Zygote. I hold the glossy counters with the smooth edges, finger the letters. The feeling is voluptuous. This is freedom, an eye blink of it. Limp, I spell. Gorge. What a luxury. The counters are like candies, made of

peppermint, cool like that. Humbugs, those were called. I would like to put them into my mouth. They would taste also of lime. The letter C. Crisp, slightly acid on the tongue, delicious." (Atwood, 180) Not only do these memories celebrate a life of choices, of actions, thoughts, reading matters (even pornography), of ice-cream flavours, but also render a reality more vivid, more dear, more human than dystopias usually do presenting us with a world as dull and anonymous as protagonists who are inhabiting it. The evocation of daily life and the rich texture of setting are thematically significant: they celebrate personal experience from a lived-in and concrete situation.

This vividly felt reality emerges also in the secondary characters who take on distinctive voices: Offred's mother, a burner of pornography and marcher to take back the night, who desired a "woman's culture", much different than the one that has been created; the Commander, the victim of the society he has helped to create, robbed of his choices in the process of robbing others of theirs; Offred's friend Moira, a rebellious but sceptical woman, whom we last see as a prostitute in an illicit brothel. Aunt Lydia whose role is to train the handmaids for their new life warning them that 'Modesty is invisibility. To be seen, to be seen, is to be, her voice trembled, penetrated. What you must be, girls, is impenetrable. She called us girls.' (Atwood, 38) And, of course, most vividly rendered of all, Offred herself, at first unaware of coming catastrophe, otherwise passive except in her refusal to become a victim, undramatically heroic, struggling to hold on her sanity reciting banalities to herself, lusting after hand lotion, emerging through her loss and pain as a multidimensional character.

One of Offred's rebreed conversational fragments particularly seems to carry Atwood's central idea. The Commander tells Offred that "Women can't add", "For them, one and one and one and one don't make four" (Atwood, 240). At first it sounds as the customary condescending remark about women's mathematical ability, but the Commander's point, in fact, becomes a compliment for women, if unintended: women can't add one and one and one and one and get four with their sense of the irreducible value of the individual. They cannot think abstractly, says the Commander, quoting a well known absolutist maxim "you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs." (Atwood, 273) This episode, seen in the context of what has previously been said about the individual rendering of minor characters and the insistence on a felt experience, clearly shows the main focus in the novel: the emphasis is on the affirmation of individual human uniqueness in the face of those who are able to destroy it because they can abstract, forget that the omelette is made of broken eggs. Offred herself comes to that realization: "What the Commander said is true. One and one and one and one doesn't equal four. Each one remains unique, there is no way of joining them together. They cannot be exchanged, one for the other." (Atwood, 248) The truth of human individuality and, only through this individuality, human connectedness is one of the few absolutes in the novel. It is through the insistence on the absolute

of the individual that Atwood transforms the dystopian genre, so often populated in the past by one-dimensional demonstrations of the anonymity of the totalitarian state, in both its setting and its characters. She rejects the single vision of all ideological mathematicians of the world in the name of "a four-fold" vision of reality in which the value of the individual comes first by introducing necessary stylistic interventions that become thematically significant.

The major threat to individuality in Offred's society, as in ours, are ideological stereotypes. The novel examines the notion of "essentialism", the notion that gender distinctions denote some fundamental and crucial differences between human beings, by demonstrating the appropriation and corruption of this notion both by the ideology of the fundamentalist right and by feminists. It obviously gives little comfort to patriarchal rigidity and the desire for a return to "traditional values" and a genderized society. But it also gives little or no hope for feminist essentialism. The novel reveals a profound resemblance between these apparently polarized views. Each sees its opponents as "the Other", abstracting so that it may dehumanize. This abstracting is based on such notions of "feminine" and "masculine" that belie their various mixtures in the unique individual, or deny the possibilities of a life without such labels. The "woman's culture" Offred's mother envisioned has ironically been turned into the oppression she thought she was fighting in burning pornographic magazines. Offred also remembers telling Moira that "if Moira thought she could create Utopia by shutting herself up in a women-only enclave she was sadly mistaken. Men were not just going to go away." (Atwood, 203) When we last see Moira, Offred's radical feminist friend who believes that it is only in women that the submerged female energy is capable of resurfacing, ironically, it is at Jezebel's, a brothel where unassimilated females, professional prostitutes and lesbians end up - "butch paradise," as Moira calls it. This insight into the convergence of the apparent extremes makes this novel complex and more subtle than the label "feminist" can convey. By giving us the irony of "the woman's culture" becoming totalitarian nightmare, while leaving open a possibility of the minimal essentialism in the "women can't add" passage, Atwood participates in history, ideology and politics by offering evidence of the complex and ironic manner of life's category crossing.

I would like to conclude by referring to the much discussed post-modernism of Atwood's texts. In the Epilogue we find that the text is put together from a set of scrambled tapes by one historian: the novel is a reconstruction. Within the novel itself, Atwood gives us Offred reconstructing the novel's present at some future time, in the safe house in Maine, insisting throughout on the imprecision of the reconstruction. She laments her inability to tell it exactly: "It's impossible to say a thing exactly the way it was" (Atwood, 173), wishes for a less painful and less fragmented tale to tell, complains of her fading memory, even gives two versions of the beginning of her affair with Nick and then says that neither of them is true. This can be read in the key of the now-familiar 20<sup>th</sup> century obsession with the unreliability of language and



narrative, obsession with the self-reflexivity of the novel in our time.<sup>7</sup> But I think that the novel opens another possibility of reading it: an ambiguity and a tentativeness become the only possible way of expression and, ultimately, an act of rebellion once you are faced with the murderousness of those who are so sure of their righteousness<sup>8</sup> This distrust of certainty becomes part of the linguistic texture of the novel, as Offred ponders the multiple possibilities of language, cherishing the ambiguity that the regime is ultimately unable to control, at least in her own case. Multiple meanings reveal alternate possibilities, and Offred's willingness to risk the alternatives appears in her narrative's last lines. Unsure whether the route of escape is a trap, she nonetheless makes a leap: "And so I step up, into the darkness within; or else the light." (Atwood, 378) Atwood suggests that the risk is worth taking, because the novel presumes Offred's successful escape to the safe-house where she tapes her narrative. If Offred's rebirth is tentative (we are not quite sure if she makes it to the safety of Europe), it is such because her survival ultimately depends on the humanity found in others, which is always problematic and uncertain.

Satire, at one time hilarious, at another very pointed is obviously Atwood's strong point. Humour is in short supply, but the author's love for language play is a major feature of the protagonist of this novel. Offred's jokes are dark and bitter, but they are pervasive. However, Atwood's love of language play is not "affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, without origin", as Derrida would say. (Derrida, 121-122) On the contrary. It shows the author's resistance to any unitary ideological truth the same as Offred's dark jokes become a sign of her protest. But Atwood never brings into question the possibility of finding, or rather, constructing one's own identity, of taking on the responsibility for that creation and making a moral choice. When she said in an interview with Jan Garden Castro that "nobody can claim to have the absolute, whole, objective, total, complete truth. The truth is composite, and that's a cheering thought. It mitigates tendencies toward autocracy," she had in mind versions of other truths, un-lived or unliveable within a society-as-prison. Thus, in spite of the symptoms, Atwood is not a whole-hearted post-modern. Distance, ironic parody and open-endedness of

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<sup>7</sup> Catherine R. Stimpson, in her review of the novel, describes the distrust of language in the following way: "In part, she pays an obligatory homage to the weary modern awareness of gaps between the word and the thing; sign and meaning; culture and nature. Welcoming the death of syntax, Atwood is also paying the now equally obligatory homage to a distrustful postmodern awareness of the ability of the powerful to control discourse." On the reflexivity of the novel, see Robert Alter.

<sup>8</sup> Like the Puritan forebears whose "city on a hill" figures as a subtext in the novel's Boston setting; the novel is dedicated to Perry Miller and Alice Webster, the latter being an ancestor of Atwood's hanged as witch and the former Atwood's teacher and a prominent expositor of Puritan certainty.

her novel are not thematically decisive because they cannot change the fundamental truth disclosed in the novel: the memory of the authentic being biologically coded in all, only to be culturally erased in many, makes us capable of recognizing "other life", our stolen, potential being. In the novel's use of the access to this truth, Atwood gives the reader, if not the protagonist, the comfort of traditional form of truth. She gives her vote to the genuine, independent, imaginative, creative individual. Or as Offred would say - one and one and one and one does not equal the abstract four.

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## THE RECEPTION OF CONTEMPORARY ANGLOPHONE CANADIAN FICTION IN SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO

Canadian fiction has originated from Canadians inhabiting a field of national semiotics. Apparently, Canada has been predominantly divided between Anglophone and Francophone, west and east, centre and region. Nowadays, there is another issue about Canadian fiction-- the establishing of so-called "authentic universal literature" (a recognizable Canadian origin of a book but understandable worldwide--locally written, globally read). Canadian fiction therefore easily exceeds geographical and national borders. Readers in Serbia and Montenegro have been lucky enough to become familiar with the respected names of Canadian writing for decades.

If we make a comparison between Canada and Serbia and Montenegro, we can find several relevant similarities in their multicultural and multinational natures. As far back as the beginning of the 19th century, Pavle Solaric, the Serbian philosopher, linguist, poet and publisher made serious efforts to present Canada by translating several extracts taken from untitled geographical records. This brings us to the conclusion that translations, literal descriptions, newspaper articles and reviews have been appearing in this region for more than a hundred years.

But, in particular, we would like to draw attention to the reception of the Canadian Anglophone fiction from the 1980's till now. The first Canadian novel translated in the ex- Yugoslavia was *The Handmaid's Tale*<sup>1</sup> by Margaret Atwood, one of Canada's major contemporary authors. Unfortunately, this translation cannot now be included in our review since it was published in Croatia in 1988.<sup>2</sup> Atwood's texts derive from the traditional realist novel, where the female protagonist is often representative of an "everywoman" character and is victimized by gender and politics. In her stories, Atwood combines fantasy and social realism, myth and parody, poetry and pastiche. This style is obviously used in *The Handmaid's Tale* influenced by Orwell's classic *1984*. There is a heroine trapped in a dystopia (opposite

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<sup>1</sup> Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid's Tale*. Toronto: O.W. Toad Ltd, 1986.

<sup>2</sup> Atwood, Margaret. *Sluskinjina prica*. Translated by Nedeljka Paravic. Zagreb: Globus, Nakladni zavod, 1988.

from a Utopia) in which free expression is banned. The story is told in the first person by a woman whose name is never revealed. In this futuristic society, women are valued only for their reproductive capacities.

There has been a significant list, since then, of Margaret Atwood's fiction translated into Serbian. *Good Bones*<sup>3</sup> is a collection of twenty-seven very short stories translated by Velimir Kostov and Vesna Lopicic, an eminent professor of Canadian studies. The collection was published in Montenegro in 1995<sup>4</sup>. Atwood includes parables, monologues, prose poems and revised fairy tales. In small witty steps, the author deconstructs, everything from sexual politics to the very act of writing itself. There are remembrances of rejection in "Unpopular Gals" where the ugly stepsister muses on her doomed destiny. In "Making a Man", Atwood, noted for her feminism, offers several fanciful options from the traditional method, through the gingerbread method and the marzipan method. My favourites are "Gertrude Talks Back", an amusing adaptation of Shakespeare's classic *Hamlet* and "The Little Red Hen Tells All" containing several wise proverbs, as well.

Besides *Good Bones*, one can find a lot of Atwood's stories extracted from her collections, translated and published in various literary magazines, such as "Mostovi" (Bridges) No. 100, 1994. In this issue, there is a story, "The age of lead", taken from *Wilderness Tips*, about a long, unbreakable, unusual, unconventional friendship and love between a woman and a man. An excellent choice by the editor! "Pismo" (The Letter) is another magazine dealing with contemporary international literature where two of Atwood's stories have been translated in an inspiring fashion (No 29/30, 1992). The first one, titled "Polarities" focuses on the thin line between sanity and insanity. Another is the story about life's illusions and a woman's misery and desperation for not having a child of her own.

In less than a year there were translations of two powerful and brilliantly crafted novels by the same author, *Bodily Harm*<sup>5</sup>, in 2002<sup>6</sup> (promoted at the Canadian Embassy in October the same year) and *Cat's Eye* at the very beginning of 2003<sup>7</sup>. Both were published in Serbia, the former translated by the awarded novelist David Albahari who resides in Canada. *Bodily Harm* is

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<sup>3</sup> Atwood, Margaret. *Good Bones*. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1992.

<sup>4</sup> Etvud, Margaret. *Dobre kosti*. Translated by Velimir Kostov and Vesna Lopicic. Podgorica: ISM. "Oktoih", 1995.

<sup>5</sup> Atwood, Margaret. *Bodily Harm*. Toronto: O.W. Toad Ltd, 1981.

<sup>6</sup> Etvud, Margaret. *Telesna povreda*. Translated by David Albahari. Beograd: Filip Visnjic, 2002.

<sup>7</sup> Atvud, Margaret. *Macje oko*. Translated by Maja Kaludjerovic. Beograd: Laguna, 2003.

the story of a travel and pop-culture writer who tries to escape the traumatic experiences of her own past by going on assignment to the fictional Caribbean islands. She has just survived a bout of breast cancer and a painful break-up in Canada and is indulging in adventures and romance abroad. The author explores the lust for power both sexual and political, and the need for compassion that goes beyond the ordinary meaning of love. This novel is no different from Atwood's other books: it follows a character attempting to break free from her past and grasp a brighter and more promising future. But here we have a step further-- westernized culture with its actions is criticized and questioned, too.

*Cat's Eye*<sup>8</sup> is an in-depth account of Elaine, a controversial painter engulfed by vivid images of the past and its effects on the rest of her life. The book is an almost fictionalized autobiography of a woman's adolescence and maturity and it documents the forgotten corners of all our childhoods. The story is divided into chapters alternating between the main character as a child and an adult person. Despite her age, the older Elaine continues to struggle with the same feelings of loneliness, insecurity and inadequacy that the young Elaine struggled with. Atwood focuses primarily on the complex and delicate relationships among women, but we can dig into deeper issues: the formation and unique perceptions of a child's mind; the tyrannies of childhood friendships; male and female identity based on the traditional politics of gender; the exploration of a family against a specific time in history; finally, the compromises of stepping into adulthood and professional life. In 1990 Professor Ileana Cura wrote a review of *Cat's Eye* adequately titled 'An Appreciation'. I admit that this is my favourite book by Margaret Atwood and I've really enjoyed reading the author's observations and the rediscovery of the forgotten faded spaces that constructed our lives.

An excellent research study entitled *The Fall into Culture*, originally written in Serbian by Vesna Lopicic, was published last year in Serbia<sup>9</sup>, focuses on human nature as an elementary theme of Atwood's novel *Surfacing*<sup>10</sup>. The Canadian writer describes a young nameless woman's inner search and explains the essence of truth and lie. Sometimes the truth is unbearable, and we have to invent a story for ourselves simply to be able to go on living, simply to be able to survive. And, here comes one of the most significant points Vesna Lopicic's book: the price of lying to ourselves, of hiding the truth from ourselves is losing our wholeness, because deep inside us, there is a part of us that cannot be fooled, our unconscious. There are a number of

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<sup>8</sup> Atwood, Margaret. *Cat's Eye*. Toronto: O. W. Toad Ltd, 1988.

<sup>9</sup> Lopicic, Vesna. *Pad u kulturu: ljudska priroda u delu V.Goldinga i M. Ertvud*. Nis: Filozofski fakultet: Prosveta, 2002.

<sup>10</sup> Atwood, Margaret. *Surfacing*. Toronto: Bantam Dell Pub Group, 1973.

issues analyzed in this study: a woman's role in society; almost cruel but forgiving portraits of men; the encroachment of American culture and values on Canadian society; the state of the environment. In a post-colonial context and in the geographical context of Canada, Atwood asserts a feminist counter hegemonic discourse with and within a discursive framing of the Canadian national identity.

Like all great literature, Canadian literature not only explores the frailties of individual human existence, but it reaches beyond that into a greater sphere, helping to identify and question the larger aspects of our collective human existence. Great literature does this, and Margaret Atwood certainly does this extraordinarily well. Therefore we are eagerly expecting future translations of her books. The next one is *The Blind Assassin*<sup>11</sup>, awarded the Booker Prize in 2000.<sup>12</sup>

One of the Canadian bestsellers, an exquisite, melancholy novel causing deep emotions and discovering profound thoughts, *The Underpainter*<sup>13</sup> by Jane Urquhart, was translated in Belgrade in 1999<sup>14</sup>. The author won the Governor General's Award for the novel in 1997, so our publisher made a quick and right decision. The book is a portrait of Austin Fraser, an aging American minimalist painter and the people whose lives have been intertwined with his. He spends his life denying his personal life for the sake of his art--only to find his lack of commitment has made his art cold and lifeless. The novel is set in the 20<sup>th</sup> century dealing with Canadian mining history, World War I, the effect of war service on ordinary lives, fascinating details of china-painting, art theory and social change. The book was a tremendous international success and recipient of high-profile awards. One of the essential elements of all Urquhart's books, including this one, is the constant use of poetic language because she is a poet, too. But, Canadian literature is full of novelists who have begun as poets, such as, Margaret Atwood, Carol Shields, Anne Michaels, Michael Ondaatje. It gives a certain and particular tone to Canadian literature whose poetry frequently moves into fiction. And the truth is that the narrative fiction actually began with poetry in great epics or classical tales.

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<sup>11</sup> Atwood, Margaret. *The Blind Assassin*. Toronto: O. W. Toad, 2000.

<sup>12</sup> Atwood, Margaret. *Slepi ubica*. Translated by Goran Kapetanovic. Beograd: Laguna, 2003.

<sup>13</sup> Urquhart, Jane. *The Underpainter*. New York: Penguin Group (USA), 1997.

<sup>14</sup> Erkart, Dzejn. *Slikar skrivenog*. Translated by Ljubica Brajer. Beograd: Clio, 1999.

As mentioned, Anne Michaels belongs to the foremost Canadian poets and novelists, too. Her first novel *Fugitive Pieces* <sup>15</sup>, with its radiant and lyrical style, was written in 1996 and translated into Serbian in 2002<sup>16</sup>. The book traces the central character's life disturbed brutally in his early childhood. The story follows Jacob Beer, a seven-year-old Jewish boy miraculously rescued by an unexpected saviour, Athos Roussos, a Greek geologist. The child's parents were murdered by Nazi soldiers and his adored elder sister abducted. In Greece, Athos introduces Jacob to a new world of science and coaxes him to take an interest in life again. In Canada, an adult Jacob provides inspiration and spiritual regeneration for Ben, a younger man whose own family has been blighted by the Holocaust, too. The author manages to combine poetry, prose and archaeology in this incandescent, heartbreaking, but also, joyful book. Its vivid images and wisdom are unforgettable.

But not all the significant and awarded authors have had their books translated in Serbia and Montenegro. For instance, it was an unpleasant surprise to me when I discovered that only a few stories written by a brilliant writer, Alice Munro, have been published in Serbia. "Lichen" and "Eskimo" were translated in 1992<sup>17</sup> in Pancevo, a small town near Belgrade. The first edition of these stories was in her book *Progress of Love* in 1986. In 1992 Professor Cura wrote an excellent paper about two of Munro's books - the short story collection *The Dance of the Happy Shades* and the 'novel' *Lives of Girls and Women*. Nearly all of Munro's fiction is set in south-western Ontario but her reputation goes beyond the borders of her native Canada. Her accessible, moving stories explore human complexities in what appear to be effortless anecdotal re-creation of everyday life. There are no happy endings in Munro's fiction, only potential, small and partial redemptions. And the sole reward is having survived the hardest trip--the one into the interior.

In Serbia and Montenegro, during annual weekends devoted to Canadian literature, many eminent professors used to give lectures on major Canadian authors and their work: 'The Literary Work of Margaret Laurence' in 1988, 'Myrna Kostash: No Kidding' in 1991 (there is a foreword to the non-fiction tales titled *The Doomed Bridegroom* translated by David Albahari and published in "Mostovi" in 1997) and 'Mavis Gallant or the Other Coast of a Woman Writer' in 1992, all by Professor Cura. There is also a paper dealing with Margaret Laurence and a comparison between her work and the writing of a contemporary Serbian writer, "Alienation of Woman in the Novels *The*

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15 Michaels, Anne. *Fugitive Pieces*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1996.

16 Majkls, En. *Izbeglicki mozaik*. Translated by Zoran Vujnovic. Beograd: Narodna knjiga - Alfa, 2002.

17 Manro, Elis. *Lisaj: dve novele*. Translated by Velimir Kostov. Pancevo: Zajednica knjizevnika Pancevo, 1992.

*Stone Angel* by Margaret Laurence and *The Use of Man* by Aleksandar Tisma” written by Lidija Tonic and published in 1990.

The Faculty of Philology in Belgrade has several professors who have taken a great interest in Canadian literature. Professor Ileana Cura gave graduate lectures on Canadian studies from 1995 to 1997. Professor Tihomir Vuckovic was also fond of Canadian literature. He wrote an excellent review of *Downfall People*<sup>18</sup> by Jo Anne Williams Bennett, an anthropologist and writer. This review was published in *The Proceedings* of the Canadian Literary Weekends of the ex-Yugoslavia in 1987. The novelist was awarded the Seal First Novel Award for her book in 1986. The novel follows several simultaneous stories of Americans and their exciting experiences in West Africa, in the places where one can enjoy the essence of life and happiness.

Canadian women’s writing confirms a constant presence of a great number of female novelists and their numbers growing as time goes on. Their reputation is eminent, significant, popular and famous worldwide.

This part of the paper will explore Canadian literature written by men. Michael Ondaatje’s graceful novel *The English Patient*<sup>19</sup> was translated in Belgrade in 1997<sup>20</sup>. A shadowy mood dominates this widely acclaimed book that contrasts love, loyalty and confusion with the ugliness of fear and war. The story is set at the end of the World War II in an Italian villa and follows a small group of shell-shocked characters. There is a desert world invented which is both physical and imaginative. Time is suspended, but the characters move back and forth in their private memories, which are only guessed at by the others. A truly great post-war novel! Ondaatje’s fourth book, *Anil’s Ghost*<sup>21</sup> is in process of being translated in Serbia and is expected to come out for the International Book Fair in Belgrade in 2003<sup>22</sup>.

Novi Sad and its publishers have been active in translating in the late 1990’s.. One of the best choices was the novel *Generation X*<sup>23</sup> by Douglas Coupland

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18 Bennett, Jo Anne Williams. *Downfall People*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986.

19 Ondaatje, Michael. *The English Patient*. Toronto: Random House of Canada Ltd, 1992.

20 Ondaatje, Majkl. *Engleski pacijent*. Translated by Ivana Damjanovic. Beograd: Narodna knjiga-Alfa, 1997.

21 Ondaatje, Michael. *Anil’s Ghost*. New York: Random House Inc, 2000.

22 Ondaatje, Majkl. *Anilin duh*. Translated by Vanja Lesic, Mirjana Djukic-Vlahovic. Beograd: Narodna knjiga-Alfa, 2003.

23 Coupland, Douglas. *Generation X*. New York: St Martins Press, 1992.



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translated in 1997<sup>24</sup>. He has written a work of fiction that covers the lives of three friends, from the point of view of one of them, which details the media-saturated, self-aware (to the point of paranoid self-analysis), over-educated and under-employed plight of many of my generation. The characters tell "bedtime stories" to each other, and successfully build their own culture in reaction to the one around them in a particularly interesting, inspiring, and emotional way. They have fled society for the relative tranquility of Palm Springs. Coupland's irony is thick. His stories are often amusing, his characters are entertaining. *Generation X* is a book for anyone feeling alienated from today's shallow mass-market world.

In 1998 one more of Coupland's books, *Life After God*,<sup>25</sup> was also translated in Novi Sad<sup>26</sup>. It is a novel about people in their late 20s, early 30s, and their crises of faith and belief. Not always religious, a lot of them are just people who think reality is bleak. The novel consists of short stories with pretty simple line drawings on top of most pages. At the end of most of the stories, the main character – he is always a man - is off alone someplace and finds some kind of hope. (The last story is the one where he finds the most hope-faith). The "God" of the title signifies the missing palliative for human sorrow and might be replaced by "Meaning," "Community," or "College," depending on the experience and needs of the reader.

Despite nuclear paranoia, despite the dissolution of families, despite the disruption of communities, despite the death of God, despite the absence of meaningful work, it is our human ability to share experience in words, which bridge the abysses between us and fill the voids within, which is why this book offers temporary solace to anyone who thinks they are alone in fearing that the world is on its last legs.

For both books there are excellent reviews written by Professor Vladislava Gordic. She is also interested in Coupland's novels *Girlfriend in a Coma* and *Microserf* which she reviewed and translated the latter, too.

Coupland and his 'Generation X' has had a great influence on younger Serbian writers. One of them is the famous Vladimir Arsenijevic.

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<sup>24</sup> Koplant, Daglas. *Generacija iks*. Novi Sad: Solaris, 1997.

<sup>25</sup> Coupland, Douglas. *Life after God*. New York: Pocket Books, 1994.

<sup>26</sup> Koplant, Daglas. *Zivot posle Boga*. Novi Sad: Solaris, 1998.

David Homel's novel *Get on Top*<sup>27</sup> was translated in 2001 in Belgrade<sup>28</sup> and was a success among the younger generation. The book asks intriguing question about the Messiah's possible female sex and preaching moral license, not repentance. Homel's heroine, Sabbitha, is one of those male-fantasy, easy earth-girls. She is a free-love Messiah. Homel's notions of female power as almost exclusively sexual are more "disturbing" than his insights into religion.

Josef Skvorecky's famous book *The Bass Saxophone*<sup>29</sup> has been translated in Serbia, too.<sup>30</sup> The author believes that jazz, especially the bass saxophone, has the ability to communicate between nations without being limited by language or prejudice. The story is cantered in war-time Czechoslovakia. The Nazis have banned jazz music as racially inferior and decadent but a special musical group has a permission to play the prohibited music to the Nazis themselves. The main character joins the Image group with his Image instrument - the Bass Saxophone. Srdjan Vujica explored Skvorecky's position as a writer in exile and this study, entitled 'Skvorecky between two homelands', was published in 1989.

And now, here is a list of short stories translations. *The Black Queen Stories*<sup>31</sup> came out in Belgrade in 1994.<sup>32</sup> The collection was written by Barry Callaghan, the author of several critically acclaimed books and the son of a famous father, Morley Callaghan. These stories are the finest of contemporary North American writing. They explore the loneliness and deep aloneness while in another's arm, eased by laughter which is sometimes sardonic but sometimes dark. Besides the Serbian translations of his books, it is absolutely amazed to note the fact that he is also interested in Serbian poetry. As a result of his activities, there are two beautiful poems by a much-awarded poet Miodrag Pavlovic which were translated into English, "Singing in the Whirlpool" and "A Voice Locked in Stone".

Stephen Leacock is one of the founding parents of Canadian letters and literature. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, his reputation as a humorist and a political economist was not limited by the boundaries of Canada but has spread around

<sup>27</sup> Homel, David. *Get on Top*. Toronto: Stoddart, 1999

<sup>28</sup> Homel, Dejvid. *Osvajanje vrh*. Translated by Slobodan Drenovac. Beograd: Geopoetika, 2001.

<sup>29</sup> Skvorecky, Josef. *The Bass Saxophone*. New York: Random House Inc, 1979.

<sup>30</sup> Skvorecki, Jozef. *Bas-saskofon i druge price o dzezu*. Translated by Aleksandar Ilic. Beograd: Narodna knjiga-Alfa, 1998.

<sup>31</sup> Callaghan, Barry. *The Black Queen Stories*. Maryland: Daedalus Books, 1982.

<sup>32</sup> Kalahan, Bari. *Crna kraljica i druge price*. Translated by Jelena Stakic. Beograd: Rad, 1994.

the world. His reputation as a humorist has withstood the test of time. His kindly jokes still evoke laughter today. We were very lucky to read his stories collected and translated by the Serbian author, Vlada Stojiljkovic. The book is titled *In All Directions* and was published in 1986.<sup>33</sup> His *Literary Lapses* was explored in paper by Danka Djokic published in the *Proceedings* of the Canadian Literary Weekends in 1992. Two years later, the same author wrote another paper on Leacock's *Studies in Humor* posing the crucial question – is humour conditioned by everyday circumstances?

In the same year, *The Anthology of Canadian Short Stories*<sup>34</sup> was originally selected and published in Serbia. It was an excellent choice of all the major Canadian authors such as: Stephen Leacock (his comic masterpiece 'My Financial Career', the story of a young man seized by fear as he attempts to open his first bank account); Morley Callaghan, Alice Munro

('Wild Swans', where Rose, a repeat protagonist, is involved into an erotic game with a complete stranger); Farley Mowat, Helen Weinzwieg ('L'Envoi' – profound thoughts, deep emotions, love affairs); Mavis Gallant, a master of short story who breaks every rule of the form; Gwendolyn MacEwen, Leon Rook and many others. The Serbian editor made a significant list of the Canadian authors and most of them were Governor General Award winners.

Finally, I would like to say a few words about the Belgrade International Writers' Meeting held every year in our capital. We have been honoured to see a great number of famous Canadian writers: Barry Callaghan in 1983, Franck Davey in 1984, Josef Skvorecky in 1985, John Ralston Saul in 1986, Negovan Rajic (of Serbian origin) in 1988 and 1989, Myrna Kostash in 1991. When we talk about the literary world, we are proud to have such long and rich relations with Canada. These relations are becoming better and better. As a result of this progress, there have been two more fabulous books translated into Serbian at the beginning of this summer. Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*<sup>35</sup> is a magical book about a fantastic voyage, a tale of disaster at sea coupled with miraculous survival.<sup>36</sup> The book won the Booker Prize in 2002. The other novel is *Green Grass, Running Water*<sup>37</sup> by Thomas King, a Cherokee writer,

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33 Stojiljkovic, Vlada ed.. *Stivn Likok: U svim pravcima*. Beograd: Nolit, 1986.

34 Tomovic, A. dr Vladislav ed.. *Antologija kratke price Kanade*. Translated by Velimir Kostov and Borjanka Ludvig. Krusevac: Bagdala, 1986.

35 Martel, Yann. *Life of Pi*. Toronto: Random House of Canada Ltd, 2001.

36 Martel, Jan. *Pijev zivot*. Translated by Lazar Macura. Beograd: Naroda knjiga-Alfa, 2003.

37 King, Thomas. *Green Grass, Running Water*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993.

best known for depicting the complexities of Native American life in the late twentieth century.<sup>38</sup>

Serbia and Montenegro are looking forward to reading more translations of Anglophone Canadian fiction. I have had great pleasure in researching this paper because I have had these beautiful books in my hands.

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<sup>38</sup> King, Tomas. *Sve dok je trava zelena i vode teku*. Translated by Ivan Roksandic. Beograd: "Filip Visnjic", 2003.

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## NOTES TOWARDS THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF OTHERNESS IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S WRITING

Margaret Atwood has never allowed others to label her, nor has she allowed herself to be narrow-minded: neither a feminist, socialist, postmodernist - she is all this and more. Of all great Canadian authors she, perhaps, offers highest level of integration of diverse ingredients of Canadianism. Atwood understands otherness as not external but internal: the otherness within.

She has learned much from old fairy tales but also from native Indian myth and folklore. In a lecture delivered in Oxford, later published under the title "*Cannibal Lecture*", Atwood presents her own method of dealing with otherness, which is embodied in Wendigo, the symbol of the extreme other in Canadian writing. The 'many-faceted' Wendigo most frequently denotes a terrible, strange creature, a cannibal, residing in the Canadian North. Analyzing several works of Canadian literature, Atwood diagnoses the treatment of this fearful other as one's own projection of fear. (Atwood, *Cannibal Lectures*, 1995, 81)

When discussing her early life and career in another lecture, Atwood maintained that from her early childhood she developed "rudiments of the double personality so necessary for a poet", living between the "forest" and the "city". When grown up and already a celebrity, after her first published collection of poems and a novel, she soon became aware of the two dimensions of a public life of the writer:

Above ground the bourgeoisie reined supreme, in their two-piece suits and ties and camel-hair coats and pearl earrings...; but at night the Bohemian world came alive, in various nooks and crannies of Toronto, sporting black turtlenecks, drinking coffee at little tables with red-checked tablecloths and candles stuck in Chianti bottles, in coffee houses...., listening to jazz and folk singing, reading their poems out loud as if they'd never heard it was stupid, and putting swear-words into them. (Atwood, *Waterstone Lectures*, 1995, 2-5)

Having her own theory that "poetry is composed with the melancholy side of the brain", in line with Wordsworth's view that "Poets in their youth begin in gladness/But thereof comes in the end despondency and madness", Margaret Atwood avoided this by being "ambidextrous", as she calls it; namely, she writes novels, too.

The “double personality” of Margaret Atwood imagines the other not as something external and hostile to be excluded and eliminated, but as something ultimately internal, to be at least understood, if not encouraged, cherished and loved. She is in the first place interpreter of the Canadian other, but she is also herself that other. Otherness in Atwood’s writing exists in several forms.

In the domain of the *aesthetic* otherness, Atwood is the link between the traditional and the modern: she has reconciled Northrop Frye and K. G. Jung with post-modern strategies. She is among the few contemporary Canadian authors, especially women writers, who is not frustrated by Frye (Norrie Frye, as she calls him). (Atwood, 1990, 147) When asked if she had any interest in theory or postmodernist concerns, she categorically replied “No”. With her peculiar brand of humour she told an interviewer how she had for a long time tried to find out what deconstructionism was, but couldn’t, nor could anybody explain it to her. Except a fellow writer who summed it up: “Honey, it’s bad news for you and me”. (Atwood, 1990, 208) Yet she herself has deconstructed many notions so far taken for granted.

The *psychological* otherness in Atwood’s work relates the dark unconscious self to the conscious and the rational. In this respect she is among the feminist revisionists of Lacan, who insist on the “language that simulates a return to the Imaginary in its subversion of the (paternal) Symbolic order.” (Hengen, 30) Related to this is the notion of the *ethnic and racial* otherness as the place of the unconscious, “the place of the journey or the quest”, embodied in the Canadian North. The North is to Canada as Outback is to Australia, the sea to Melville, Africa to *Heart of Darkness*, says Atwood. “It is the place where you go to find something out”. The model of this quest is related to Eskimo and Indian practice: at a certain age you are expected to go off by yourself, to “struggle with the spirit.” (Atwood, 1990, 98)

In terms of *gender*, Atwood is a feminist with a difference. While she is aware that the original Women’s Movement came out of real oppression, she is equally aware that some writers “tended to polarize morality by gender”: “women were intrinsically good and men bad”. (Atwood, 1994, 5) “I am defining my feminism”, says Atwood, “as human equality and freedom of choice”. (Atwood, 1990, 142)

In the *religious* sense, her frame of mind is mythological. She rejects monolithically male religions, but believes in “myths to live by”. She herself creates “myths to live by”, to borrow Joseph Campbell’s phrase. It is not only Greek myths or Biblical myths that have been important in modern western society, but, according to Atwood, it is also fairy tales. She frequently returns to *Grimm’s Fairy Tales* in which women are not only central characters but win by using their own intelligence. She says that she is really a pantheist. (Atwood, 1990, 114-115)

Atwood’s *political* otherness is rooted in socialism, but she has also frequently been called a Canadian nationalist. She is against the view that

“what one does as a writer is apolitical”. It might be true only in contemporary America where McCarthy seemed to have scared people, but their classical tradition is political, starting with the Puritans and *Moby-Dick*. At one point Atwood calls Canada a socialist country, any way “a much more socialist country than the States”, (Atwood, 1990, 139) but at another, she warns of the lurking fascism everywhere in Canada and the world: “Scratch the country and it’s quite a fascist place”, for “If we got to a position where we needed some witches to burn, I’m sure we’d find some and burn them.” (Atwood, 1990, 122) She would like to believe that Canada’s “slightly but notably” different conception of economy sets Canada apart from the United States. (Hengen, 1-12) On the other hand, she reacts fiercely against the “purist leftism that defines itself as the only true religion”, and attacks her “fashionably radical, bourgeois individualism”. She quotes Rick Salutin who called her *Surfacing* a ‘a Marxist book’.

It would be wrong to consider all these phenomena of otherness separately in Margaret Atwood’s work. On the contrary, they frequently merge into a unique vision, the outline of which was already presented in her early masterpiece, *Surfacing*. In her later piece, *Cannibal Lecture*, Atwood gave a detailed account of the notion of otherness as presented in *Surfacing*.

She writes about Wendigo, “one particular incarnation of going crazy in the North”, as a peculiarly Canadian phenomenon.. Stories of Wendigo fall into the category of ghost stories and share with them a lot of features. This many-faceted creature is an instance of interaction between white people and native people in the north. In most folk tales it is represented as a cannibal with a heart of ice. Unlike the classical monsters in European myths and fairy tales, man cannot outwit this one. People fear it from two reasons: they fear either being eaten by one, or becoming one. This Wendigo is personification of winter, hunger, and spiritual selfishness.

It has become subject-matter of longer literary narratives where this “otherworldly” creature appears in one of three forms: 1) As a manifestation of environment, the spirit of the place that haunts you if you find yourself in a particular place; it has nothing to do with what you do or do not – encounter with Wendigo carries no moral weight. 2) In the second kind of story, this creature (ghost, spirit) has message for the protagonist, as Hamlet’s father’s ghost does; or is there to punish you for something you’ve done – the bearer of fate. 3) In the third kind of story, the otherworldly creature is a fragment of the protagonist’s psyche, his repressed inner life made visible. These are stories of human beings who have become Wendigo, “who have turned themselves inside out”. This other self “splits off from the rest of the personality, destroys it, and becomes manifest through the victim’s body”. These are tales of madness. This type is linked with the first type: you can go Wendigo in the bush, the forest, wilderness.

It is the third type of Wendigo that Margaret Atwood is mostly interested in, and that can be found in her *Surfacing*. Atwood coins a term Wendigoization

to suggest split in the psyche, which develops a life of its own and takes the protagonist over. It can be a destructive lust for power over others; or, it can be result of the desire to live in harmony with nature. In this case, comparatively rare, Wendigo is given a positive role. It is a character that has become Wendigo minus evil, reflecting “the hurt being inflicted, by human beings, on the wilderness, and the hurt they are therefore inflicting on the wild part of themselves.” (Atwood, *Cannibal Lectures*)

*Surfacing* is all about learning the other language. The nameless narrator-heroine embarks on a spiritual quest to the Canadian North. Initially she is in search of her father who disappeared in the wilderness. She is at first accompanied by friends, but she will eventually abandon them to continue her own way. She is haunted by her failed life in the city, by civilization that has cut her in two: body and head apart. The father left clues to be pursued: maps and mysterious drawings. The narrator searches the lake and the island to finally find out that the drawings represent Indian sacred places, the Canadian past, which her father, together with fellow-scientists, identified and described but did not understand. Thus he came to the end of reason and logic, and his daughter consequently gives up her pursuit of paternal heritage, in this way also rejecting whatever was “predatory and technological” within herself. (Davey, 60) Unlike the Indian past, the present is symbolically American, “Americanism” being a state of mind: technological, noisy, boisterous, violent, and destructive. Wishing to be neither a victim, nor a killer, the heroine will search for the (Canadian) third way. Atwood not only rejects duality but, to quote a critic, “establish(es) the presence of an all-inclusive dynamic process based upon connection and continuity between and among dichotomies.” (Vevaina, 20)

The narrator of *Surfacing* realizes just in time that her dead mother can help her find her third way, and starts looking for the clue – the gift her mother must have left her. That clue is her own childish drawing the mother left for her to find and interpret with deeper intuition when grown up: with that other language she has to learn. The drawing is a picture of a family, both natural and holy. With her newly acquired other language, the heroine imagines her future life: she stays alone on the lake after conceiving her own child (unlike the other one in the city imposed on her). She conceives in nature, with a man who looks least American, and nearest to a natural man, human animal, half-formed.

Her doors of perception now cleansed, the narrator-heroine has visions of both her mother and her father: the mother silently feeding birds like a saint; the father turned by his rationalism into its opposite, a kind of a yellow-eyed Wendigo. They now speak to each other in that other language. The heroine finally steps out of the mirror, of seeing herself, in order to become able to *see*. This is the return to the Imaginary in its subversion of the symbolic that psychoanalytic critics have so much dwelt on, and which one of the critics, Shanon Hengen, calls “progressive narcissism”. (Hengen, 20) The phenomenon has been identified by D. G. Jones as one of Canadian



archetypes, the peculiar "Canadian silence" that bears poetry. (Jones, 31) The form of the quest presented in Atwood's *Surfacing* – "descent into a more primitive but healing reality", Frank Davey compared with the healing exile into the "green world" in Shakespearean comedy. (Davey, 59)

The theme of *Surfacing* is ultimately the same as the theme of Canadian survival Atwood deals with in the book of criticism *Survival, a Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, published in the same year as *Surfacing*, 1972. The author calls the collection "a cross between a personal statement...and a political manifesto" (Grace, 1) of a specific kind. The specific nature of her political engagement is such that in an interview to the question "Am I a propagandist?" Atwood replies "NO", whereas to the question "Am I an observer of society?", her answer is "Yes". (Bouson, 3) *Surfacing* is even more topical today that 30 years ago when it was written. In her study of the Canadian cultural field between the 1950s and 1990s, Barbara Godard points out that unlike 1950s, in the 1990s Canada the might of the American capital is unchallenged. Its shadow penetrates more deeply than ever before reshaping Canadian culture to its market model. Few Canadian celebrities have succeeded to survive "under the logos of American multinational publishers"- "the Atwoods and Ondaatjes" as Godard calls them. Godard's concern for the survival of Canadian otherness is due to the fact that the conditions that enabled these great Canadian authors to establish themselves as writers – provided by the nationalist cultural policy – are rapidly changing, confronting younger writers with uncertain publishing opportunities. (Godard, 243) Financial opportunities being always related to the ideological paradigm shifts, the ability of the young authors to resist and transcend these shifts could be better appreciated through the study of the Atwoods' and Ondaatjes' methods of survival.

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