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Revue d'Études Canadiennes en Europe Centrale

volume **12/13** ( 2018 )

CENTRAL EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR CANADIAN STUDIES  
ASSOCIATION D'ÉTUDES CANADIENNES EN EUROPE CENTRALE





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## **CENTRAL EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF CANADIAN STUDIES**

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## **REVUE D'ÉTUDES CANADIENNES EN EUROPE CENTRALE**

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**Contact/Contact :** [www.cecanstud.cz](http://www.cecanstud.cz)  
[ceacs@phil.muni.cz](mailto:ceacs@phil.muni.cz)

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# The Choreography of Words

## An Interview with Montreal Poet Endre Farkas

La chorégraphie des mots

Une entrevue avec le poète montréalais Endre Farkas

Interviewd by / Interrogé par Éva Zsizsmann

### Preamble

By way of introduction I propose a game: I would like to ask you to match a short text to the photographs. Let's call it *ekphrasis* or mixed media, to honour your preoccupation with text-image correlations.





## Corona

This one belonged to my poet/friend Artie Gold  
A Véhicule poet I travelled with.  
I took it without his permission:  
A remembrance of him  
A memento mori  
A beautiful piece of sculpture  
A reminder that words are made of letters  
And letters are concrete symbols of sounds

He painted poems with it  
The negative space as  
essential as the positive  
oh how he fought over spacing  
Oh  
how he fought for spacing ,  
for equality of space , the comma  
--The dash and the no  
period

I had an Olivetti Lettera 35  
and with it  
took pictures of my world  
like a poem proud papa

The typewriter made printers of poets  
who could now be mindful/eyeful  
of the final shape of their art  
design the page/the frame of mind  
of writer and reader.

I miss and don't miss the click clack,  
the stuck keys, the ink of ribbon on fingertips  
spilling black and red blood onto the white  
blank canvas  
the manual labour of the  
T Y P E W R I T E R.







## Puttin' on the Ritz

I imagine myself. This is my fascination with masks and the costumes of who we are. I am the haute couturier, dressing the stars. I am the poet who sits in his underwear in the sweatshop of summer stitching together a *wordrobe* that I wear to my *wordpremiere*.

\* \* \*

I first met Endre Farkas in April 2011, when he was touring Hungary and giving readings together with poet Carolyn Marie Souaid in Budapest, Szeged, Debrecen and Siófok. The poetry reading at the National Library of Foreign Literature in Budapest was more like a performance: they enacted excerpts of the video poem *Blood is Blood*, winner of the Berlin International Poetry Film Festival in the subsequent year. Dialogue, acting out conflicts, and saying the unsayable seem to be indispensable features of this poem. Breathing, rhythmic utterance, movement and gestures transformed print on the page into a choreography of words.

**EZ** Performance poetry or sound poetry has always been important for you. How do you see the transition from page to stage?

**EF** You have to remember that poetry originally was an oral art. So in a sense poetry first moved from stage to page. In prewriting times people would gather to hear the poet/storyteller. Later s/he would be accompanied by some form of music and, who knows, maybe even movement/dance.

The late nineteen sixties and early seventies were times of great change. Poetry was experiencing an escape from the universities where it was confined to the page. It was there that poems were being dissected to death. Young people wanted something more, a lively and relevant experience with poetry. Folk singers like Bob Dylan, Simon and Garfunkel, Leonard Cohen et al were combining poetic lyrics with music. Words in songs were important, relevant, mysterious and marvellous.

I saw what I started doing in the seventies as moving poetry back to its oral/stage origins. I was influenced by some of the readings I attended. Most of them were boring. Poets, usually, not the best readers, mumbled, bumbled their way through poems that were meant for a one to one private relationship (reader and poem). At the same time, I was also hearing poets like Allan Ginsberg and Ann Waldman (American beat poets) who sang, wailed and howled. I knew of poets teaming up with jazz musicians. Their poems were lively and performative. Canadian poets bill bissett and the Four Horsemen, sound poets/Dadaists, were chanting and performing.



Er Diagliev always problems one the ear the theatre something the so called don't I'm hateful  
 Er It's er hands able said: help was dancers to study narrow cochon work notoriety which  
 Er the er and er have I'm actually Dolin of interest dancers said benevolent suffering  
 Er today er is er Len er trades of C range. She shook; N is  
 Er for er comeback er Brute er it's er Yoko's muzak with record which death dancers  
 Er England er you Ange er outside er He er exp worse his with I  
 Er liner er cunning er celebrity er afraid er notes er help er Lenny me hand  
 Er John er non? er "A er dan er to er attend er the er the  
 Er of er the er things er Wells er the er dumb er have er er  
 Er country er and er with big er was er going er er er er  
 Er lay er simplicity er this er Rosario er they're er er er er er  
 Er Brucer er still er books er on er er er er er er er  
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 Ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ver ah his ah advantage  
 Ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah the ah depends ah althout ah this  
 Ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah used ah therein ah not  
 Ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah caught ah burst ah of  
 Ah ah ah dilapidated ah unaccountably ah search ah the ah when ah lot ah prescribed  
 Ah result ah Canada ah is ah reconstruction ah shots ah is ah streets ah filmed  
 Made ah version ah musical ah is ah presented ah shanty ah of ah panoramic prostitute  
 A ah source ah trouble ah direct ah and ah kicked ah and country sides education  
 Poiter ah into ah starring ah Johannesburg ah however ah that Absalom has son of Sidney  
 Dramatic ah money ah sequence ah of ah is first the laugh long Bnadway jail town effects  
 Staged ah to ah earn ah is so as something stations his whole the who to  
 And ah that ah often interiors for john good novel much mope studio film the lies  
 Og gone character out by version which uncle song has one the Kumalo salom script  
 Word ser of only d cobblestone contemporary the classic stalked body lementary the Dose is fried.



My other influence was a place: Véhicule Art. I joined Véhicule Art gallery, an alternative art gallery run by young artists who created exhibitions that included performances, installations and modern dance. I was drawn toward the dance, especially Contact Improvisation.

My early off-the-page-onto-the-stage works were concrete poems. Working on concrete poems, I became conscious of seeing the page as a canvas and letters and words as the positive space. But I also wanted the letters and words to sound, so I began sound explorations along those lines. This included writing poems that had sound components, stretched words – e.g. “soooooo loooong/soooooo oooh/loooong” – and playing with bridge sounds – e.g. my poem “er/ah” – which was also a collage of chance and cut up text.

When I collaborated with dancers, I wrote modular texts such as, “as/the breath/is/ the journey/ I/ move/and it is/imperceptible/as/is/the breath/just/breathed/in/and/ out”. The performance began with stillness and silent breathing that became audible and then became the engine/verb that moved the dancers. This text was repeated at different times during the performance. Because of its occurring at different times, the text came out sounding relaxed at the beginning, more laboured in the middle and exhausted at the end, so the text gained layers of possibilities. I created other pieces for other dancers/collective and in the last one, *It Runs in the Family*, I was one of the dancers.



I also explored choral text for voices (2 to 7). I even collaborated with a composer who connected me to multiple microphones and EKG patches which were hooked up to a computer. My breath, heart beat, brainwaves and muscles were amplified. Along with a text I wrote. It became a symphony of the body called *Close Up*. This was my “theatrical” debut.

Stripped to the waist and hooked up, I looked like a modern Frankenstein, but for me, the transition was a natural one even though the performance and results were anything but natural. For me, it was not a transition as much as an extension of my idea what poetry/poems/poet could be.

**EZ** Is it possible to bridge the gap between poetry and the public?

**EF** The gap has been there for a long time. It was made especially big when it became the domain of the universities. Page poetry (written mostly by educated white males) had become extremely complex that needed the university laboratory (manned by white males) to be fully understood.

We live in post-literate times. The public is performance oriented. The RAP and slam poets have bridged the gap. They’ve reached a large audience because they perform their poems, their poems are very direct (no hidden meaning) and they’re rhythmic. They’re stars (almost) like rock musicians.





RAP, which stands for Rhythm and Poetry, arose from the American Black culture and experience. They took poetry back to its oral roots. Actually, the first RAP poets were Afro-Americans in prison. It was their way of expressing the social and economic injustices that they were experiencing. Unfortunately RAP music has degenerated into a celebration of misogyny, violence and greed. Fortunately, RAP poetry hasn't.

**EZ** A.M. Klein, one of your favourite poets, writes of Montreal:

Grand port of navigations, multiple  
The lexicons uncargo'd at your quays,  
Sonnant though strange to me

What are your memories of the Montreal of your childhood? What was interaction between the different social and ethnic groups like? St Laurent Boulevard, "the Main," traditionally marks the division between the English and French part of the city. How about other divisions and stepping across the line(s)?

**EF** We arrived in December of 1956. My first memory of Montreal was that it was incredibly cold and white. There was more snow than I had ever seen. I didn't want to go out.

We lived on Park Avenue between Fairmount and St. Viateur about five blocks west of the Main. It was Richler country. The street used to be a classy avenue but by the time we lived there it had become an immigrant street.

I remember being a latchkey kid like most of the kids. A "latchkey kid" is a term that describes a child of working parents. I remember playing in alleys, exploring the streets on my own, looking in garbage cans for stuff, finding a toy cowboy pistol that elevated me from being an Indian to cowboy when we played Cowboys and Indians. I also remember finding and reading my first English book. *Candide* by Voltaire. Of course I didn't understand most of it but I loved the adventure story of the kid. I remember going to Fairmount elementary school along with other first and second generation immigrant kids. I remember going to Jewish school after school and getting kicked out for always forgetting my yarmulke. I'd rather have been playing soccer, so the forgetting might have been deliberate. I remember walking to the Fletcher's Field, opposite Mt. Royal, and playing pick-up soccer with kids of different nationalities.

Most of my interaction was with other immigrant kids, some with English-speaking kids and none with French until high school. Because of the educational set-up of the times, most immigrant kids ended up going to Protestant English schools. My high school, Baron Byng, the school of A. M. Klein, Irving Layton and Mordecai Richler, was 99% Jewish and immigrant. It was in high school I remember first encountering the French language. I remember being taught by a teacher from France who told us if we couldn't speak French properly then we shouldn't speak at all. So most of us kept



our mouths and ears shut. I remember failing grade eight because of failing French by one percent. I remember in grade nine, half the school was occupied by a French school, and the most beautiful and sophisticated girls I had ever seen. It was then that I tried really hard to learn French.

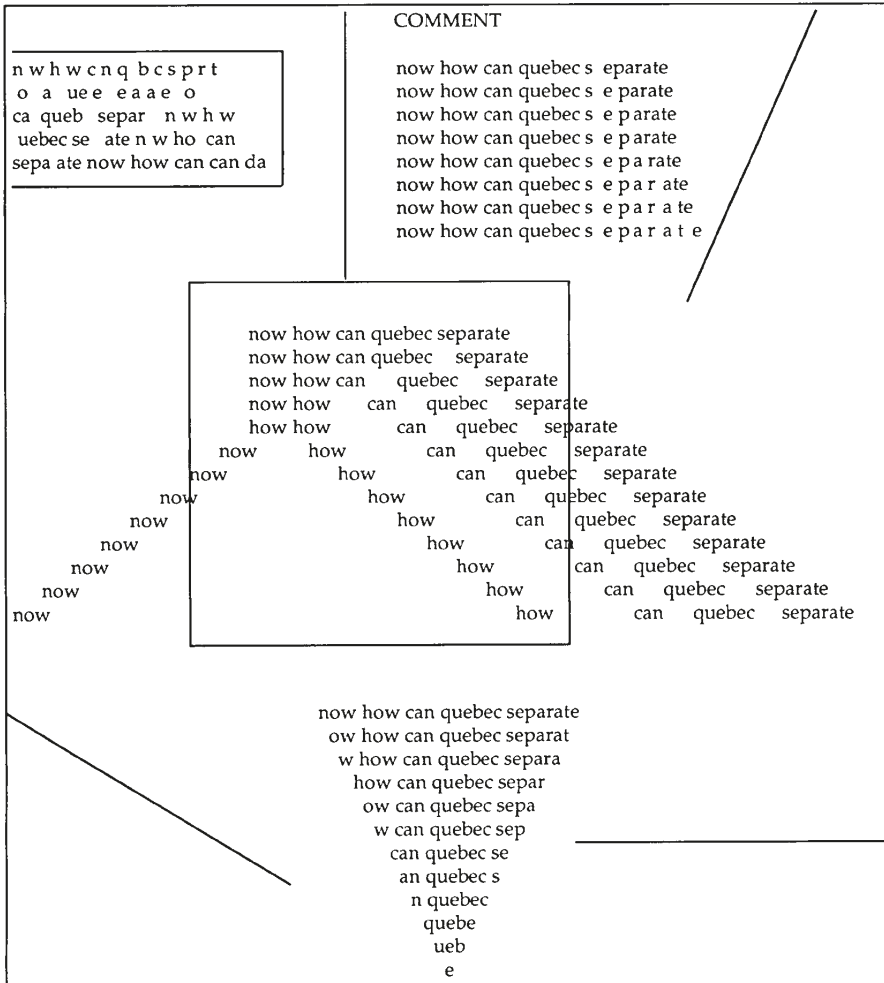
Most of our teachers were WASPS (White Anglo Saxon Protestants). There was really no attempt to be culturally or religiously sensitive. I remember Christmas Concerts. Imagine a 99% Jewish choir singing Christmas carols today. Nobody spoke out against it. In fact we were proud that our choirs usually won the citywide Christmas carol singing competition.

The division was language but it wasn't political as much as linguistic. Speaking it or not speaking it. Learning it was the bridge to cross the great divide between being Canadian or not being Canadian. The other divide was between those Hungarian Jews who came after the war and those who came in '56. The '56 immigrants were considered "greeners", a pejorative term for newcomers who didn't know how things worked here. I was too young to feel that divide but was told about it by my parents. Where I lived, there was a Chinese laundryman, a Polish milkman, Russian factory owners, Hassidic butchers and bakers. It really was a lexicon of Eastern European immigrants. The common language of the neighbourhood was Yiddish. Even the Chinese laundryman knew a bit of it.

The other divides were economic and religious. Both the English and French were suspicious of immigrants but for different reasons. The English were suspicious and wary of immigrants for fear of them moving into their neighbourhoods and class. It is for these worries that McGill put quotas on admission to certain departments (medicine & law) and clubs had a no Jews policy. The French were suspicious of Jews for religious reasons, reinforced by the Catholic Church. The Jews were the ones who killed Christ. The immigrants (Jews in particular, the ones I knew best) were suspicious and wary of both. Richler, Layton and Klein explore this relationship in their works. Of the three, Klein was the one who saw the connection rather than the differences between the Jews & the French.

**EZ** October 1970 marks the peak of the protest against English supremacy in Montreal, when francophone aspirations for independence were stirring. In the 1970s, English-language poetic focus shifted from Quebec to Ontario, Toronto in particular. As a member of the Véhicule Poets, what can you say about the English-language poetry scene in Quebec at that time? How does it connect to the second wave of Modernism in Canada, the poetry of Louis Dudek, Irving Layton and Leonard Cohen?

**EF** The shift to Toronto had a number of reasons. One of them was a reaction to the rise of nationalism in Quebec. It was matched by the rise in English nationalism in the Ontario literary scene with Northrup Frye's ideas in the poetry of Margaret Atwood



and Dennis Lee in particular. Also, most English publishing houses and media were in Toronto.

Ironically, there was a resurgence of English language poetry activity in Montreal at this time. It had fallen asleep after Dudek, Layton and Cohen. It was the Véhicule poets who woke it up. It's worth noting that Montreal English poetry was not very political. I think Tom Konyves and I (the two immigrants) were the only ones to write about it. Tom did a video, *SeeSaw*, whose opening line is "I saw my country in half..." I did a seven-voice piece called *Face Off/Mise au Jeu*. Which had the deconstruction of the phrase "Now How can Quebec separate" as part of it.





We seven poets did not appear as one but at once. We were very different kinds of writers. What we shared was the accidental coming of age together, the desire to write poems, the willingness to collaborate, and an interest in experimenting and Véhicule Art gallery.

We had different influences: Beat, New York, Concrete, Dada/Surreal and Jung. This variety of influences affected our styles and forms, which contributed to the revitalization of the Montreal poetry scene. Some members of the group had studied with Dudek, some had been influenced by Layton and most of us loved Cohen. But none of us wanted to be them. Dudek was the one we had the most contact with. He was encouraging, questioning, combative and saw in us the carrying-on of the spirit of his generation.

We started readings, magazines, presses, and experimented with the form and entered the multi/interdisciplinary world. The second wave poets were mainly page poets while the Véhicule poets were page, stage and video. We did create resentment among some of the other poets in the city, but I think that was a good thing as they began their own presses (Delta & Guernica), which got other poets to gather around them. We had very little interaction with the francophone poets at that time because they felt that association with Anglos was bad for their poetry business and they had plenty of things to do on their side of the divide. Later on, when tensions had cooled, there was interaction but most of it was initiated by us, the Véhicule poets (mainly Ken & I).

**EZ** You were the co-founder of Véhicule Press, founder of the Muses' Company committed to publishing emerging poets and curator of the Circus of Words. What was your motivation? How do you see these ventures in the ebb and flow of creative collaborations?

**EF** I wasn't a co-founder of Véhicule press but its first editor, along with Ken Norris and Artie Gold. I, along with Artie Gold, was running a reading series out of the gallery, and Simon Dardick, one of the founders of Véhicule Art gallery, was running an old printing press in one of the backrooms, printing posters and flyers. He was interested in starting a literary publishing house and asked me if I would be interested in being its editor. I knew nothing about being an editor so I said yes. On the condition that Artie and Ken would join me. He agreed. So it began. At that time there were no active presses in Montreal. We gave ourselves the mandate to focus on local poets, though one of the first poets we published was George Bowering one of the founders of *Tish* on the west coast. We did this for a few reasons; Bowering had been a visiting professor of poetry at Concordia University in Montreal, was a real fan of Gold's poetry and was a way in to the Canada Council funding program.

Our first books were by emerging poets (including ourselves) who were experimenting with content and form. *Vegetables* by Ken Norris was a series of poems about vegetables and had drawings of vegetables and a cover which included a seed packet



with seeds in it, *Honey* a book of sensual/erotic poems that had as its first poem/introduction “Advice to Poets / don’t leave the bed too soon-- / you can’t come with words” and *Murders in the Welcome Café*, by me; a series of 13 interconnected poems in the language of the hardboiled detective novel. We also put out the first English language poetry anthology in about thirty years. It introduced a whole new generation of writers to Montreal.

The Muses’ Company came about after I split from Véhicule Press over creative differences. I wanted to continue to focus on emerging, Montreal poets and experimental writing. I also wanted to hear the voices of the “other”. I published Mohamud Togane, a Somali poet, and Elias Letelier, a Chilean poet. Both were very fine poets and brought fresh perspectives to the Montreal scene.

*The Circus of Words les Cirques des Mots* was a public expression of my interest in interdisciplinary collaboration. Carolyn Marie Souaid and I invited francophone, anglophone and allophone poets to work with artists from different disciplines to create 15-minute performance pieces. I had a few goals in mind. One was to present poetry-driven performance pieces. Another to bring together artist from the three solitudes (English, French and “other”) writers in a multicultural evening. Finally, to expose students (I was teaching at a CEGEP) to a world of poetry/performance that they had not been exposed to before and may never again be. It was a continuation of the early Véhicule poets’ spirit of experimentation and collaboration.

**EZ** Signature Editions is the publisher of the video poem *Blood is Blood* (2010), *Language Matters* (2013), the collection of interviews with Quebec poets and your recent novel, *Never, Again* (2016). You seem to have a long-time collaboration with them. What was the starting point, the spark, and how do you see the role of editors and publishing houses in shaping an author’s literary career and the literary scene in general?

**EF** Signature Editions was originally NuAge publishing, begun in Montreal. Karen Haughian, now owner, was one of its cofounders. She and I became friends around the time I started The Muses’ Company. In spirit, she reminded me of me when I started The Muses’ Company except she wasn’t a poet and had a business sense. She was also tech-savvy and helped me out with my Luddite approach to the computer age of publishing. We also collaborated on a couple of projects, were co-presidents of the English language publishers’ association, presented briefs to the Quebec government, organised book fairs and spent many long nights in phone conversations about promoting Quebec English-language writing and bitching about the difficulties of being an English-language writer and publisher in Quebec.

As for the second part of your question, good editors are essential in making writers better, better writers good and good writers great. They keep you focused, grounded and honest. Good editors are your second critical eye (your own being the first).



Literary publishing houses are your access to an audience and the millions of dollars you won't make. They are the unsung, overworked, underfunded heroes. Small (literary) presses are the ones who take chances on unknowns; they are the foundation of a country's literature.

**EZ** You mentioned that researchers interested in avant-garde poetry and the story of Véhicule Poets approach you from time to time – what do you think about interconnections between literature (poetry or creative writing) and academic endeavours?

**EF** Well if there were no writers, there'd be no jobs for academics. (Of course we're talking literature.) Academics are like senators in a parliamentary system. They are the chamber of sombre second thought. Creators deal with that first fierce fire of creation. Academics are slower to dive into the fire. They usually wait till it cools or the author is dead. They are the reflectors of the embers. They poke around in the product that was forged in the smithy of the author's soul & mind. They are also bridges between the public and the creator. They reflect upon a work of art in serious tranquility and aid the reader to get a full understanding of the work. They give it context. One other important difference between artists and academics: academics get paid for their work.

**EZ** *Murders in the Welcome Café*, one of your earlier poetry volumes has recently been turned into a videopoem/film. What is the idea behind adapting a chapbook or book-length poem into a film noir set in the 1940s?

**EF** *Murders* was written during the time of my reading of Raymond Chandler's novels. He was the father of the hardboiled detective novel. His novels were set in the 1940s. I loved his hardboiled language, sentence structures and his detective's too-tired-to-care-but-cares-passionately tone. His hardboiled language and imagery became the tone, colour and sound of the poem. And the private eye became the voice. As a poet, I felt an affinity to a loner private eye trying to unravel a mystery. *Murders* was first a theatre/performance piece and then a video. It was the perfect metaphor for the loner poet trying to unravel the creative process. The poem was perfect for performance. It had characters, dialogue and plot. And besides I loved trench coats and fedoras and Veronica Lake.

**EZ** How do you relate to mixed media and returns to earlier works?

**EF** Mixed media is nothing more than the idea that you shouldn't be tied to one medium. Some poets are content to work only on the page. I'm not. I like to incorporate all possible forms that make the poems live. I also believe that a work is never finished until the creator is dead. Maybe not even then. So I have no problem going back and reworking or recycling my earlier work.



**EZ** Your book of poems *Surviving Words* was also adapted into a play, *Surviving Wor(l)ds*.

**EF** Again, it started out as a collection of poems. I wrote it around the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Holocaust. I wanted to write a book that celebrated my parents' survival of that horror. After its publication, I was approached by a theatre producer in Montreal who asked me if I had something that they could mount. I was intrigued. I had never written for the theatre. I adapted the poems for a seven-voice chorale. The director liked it but she felt that it was not a play. She worked with me and after many rewrites I converted the chorale into a theatre piece that used the chorale, dance, and dialogue. This is when I started to call my performative pieces the "Theatre of Poetry." It also became the basis of my novel *Never, Again*.

**EZ** You were eight when you left Hungary and, as you said, had only sporadic contact with the capital city or any other part of the country besides Hajdúnánás and the immediate surroundings. When did you first come back to Hungary, what were your subsequent visits like?

**EF** I first returned in 1965 or '66 with my mother to visit family. My only previous contact with Budapest was the Western train station. I remember arriving there when we were escaping in '56 and being amazed at the crystal palace of trains. When we arrived in '66, we had to rush through it to catch another train and as I was hurrying I kicked over and broke a "paraszt's" (I don't have an English equivalent for that word) bottle of wine. I turned and said "sorry" in English. The farmer yelled at me, "Not only did you break my bottle but then you shit on me"! ["sorry" sounds like "szar", the Hungarian for "shit" - EZ]. So that's my two remembrances of Budapest.

My subsequent visits to Hungary were filled with a mix of emotions. My early visits were during Communist times. The first thing that struck me during those visits was the very visible presence of soldiers. Coming from Canada, where there was no conscription and where I had hardly seen any soldiers (except during the October crisis but that was later), the feeling I got was not one of security but of being watched. Not of being served and protected but of being controlled. I also sensed this when I had encounters with family and friends. There was genuine welcome but they seemed to have a self-censorship mechanism. I got the feeling that they felt that they were being constantly watched. I was scared.

Post-Communist times were also interesting. It was when I was first invited to read and lecture. I had feelings of sadness and revenge. My family fled in '56 because we were not wanted and now I was being honoured and welcomed. It was also the beginning of new friendships and new beginnings. I liked that but it was also scary to see how intensely Hungary was becoming a hungry capitalist country. I was sad to see that. The last time I went back was in 2016 to observe the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of



the revolution. I didn't like the rhetoric that I heard. It had the feel and smell of the anti-other that my parents and I experienced in '56. The good thing was the sense that there seemed to be opposition (a bit splintered) to the xenophobia.

**EZ** What is your experience of today's Budapest?

**EF** Budapest is a beautiful city, a world-class city, a busy-busy city but too much like every other tourist city.

**EZ** What does home mean to you, how do you relate to the concept of home country?

**EF** Home is a place where you feel comfortable: physically, emotionally, spiritually and creatively. It is a place where you understand the language. I don't mean just what people are saying but how and why. It's a place where you feel safe getting angry, feel you have the right to complain and a place you want to contribute to. It is also a place you feel comfortable being buried. Having said all this and believing it to be true, I also feel that my nation is my imagination and at the same time I've always felt that my home has been exile.

**EZ** *Never, Again* is your first novel, set during the Hungarian Uprising of 1956. I find it fascinating the way you describe gestures, situations, the scent of time, as we could call it. The voice of a young boy interweaves with the perspective of the parents, Holocaust survivors. How did the novel come into being?

**EF** It started with my parents, mainly my father, constantly telling stories of the old country and their experiences before, during and after the war. Of course my own first seven years of my life was also something I drew upon. In a way, I started to write it when I wrote my first book of poems, *Szerbusz*, published in 1974 after my second trip back. *Surviving Words* – and of course *Surviving Wor(l)ds* – also dealt with themes and topics that became part of the novel. So it went through a number of metamorphoses. It seems to be part of my creative pattern. Now if only someone would turn it into a movie or an opera.

**EZ** It is always fascinating to listen to Hungarians who have long left their home country and preserve various stages and variants of the language, enclaves or layers of a palimpsest. How do you relate to your mother tongue, what does “language-influenced” mean to you?

**EF** Some of my writer friends have told me that I write Hungarian English. By that they mean that sometimes my sentence structures and rhythms don't seem to be naturally English. I was seven when we left so my fluency in Hungarian ended at that



point. After that came a learned language in which I am now more fluent than in my mother tongue but Hungarian words and phrases still pop into my head before their English equivalent. I am not sure how one has affected the other but I don't see how it could not. I do know that there are certain words in Hungarian that I find more authentic to the situation. For example, I have not yet found an English equivalent for "csikorgás" and "persze." I do know their English equivalent but don't find it as evocative or as "real". The same goes for "anyu" and "apu". My parents will always be "anyu" and "apu," not mother or father.

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**ÉVA ZSIZSMANN** / completed the English and American Literatures and Cultures PhD Programme of the University of Szeged. Her field of research covers Postcolonial Studies, Canadian Literature as well as place and memory in contemporary Canadian fiction, with a special focus on Alice Munro's short stories. In 2012 and 2013 she was a doctoral research fellow at the Wirth Institute, University of Alberta, Edmonton. She currently teaches ESP (English for Special Purposes) and translation at Corvinus University and the Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church, both in Budapest.





# Canadienne, américaine, francophone et/ou autochtone : quel destin pour la littérature québécoise?

## Canadian, American, Francophone and/or Indigenous: What Destiny for Quebec Literature?

**Peter G. Klaus**

### Résumé

L'année 2017, année de commémorations, est aussi une année de réflexion sur le sort et le passé douloureux des Autochtones du Canada, privés de force de leurs langues et de leurs cultures. Longtemps occultée, la présence des Autochtones est davantage visible publiquement. Le Québec littéraire a fait depuis la « Révolution tranquille », la découverte de son « américanité » et l'intégration des « écritures migrantes » une assez étonnante évolution. Par contre, l'existence d'une littérature amérindienne en français a été assez longtemps occultée ou simplement ignorée. Et maintenant le Québec se voit enrichi d'une présence littéraire autochtone de plus en plus remarquée : une jeune génération d'écrivains autochtones revendique sa place. Va-t-il falloir réécrire l'Histoire de la littérature du Québec ?

**Mots-clés :** écritures Autochtones, le Québec littéraire, écritures migrantes, américanité

### Abstract

2017 was a year of many commemorations and a year of reflection on the destiny and the painful past of Canada's First Nations, deprived by force of their languages and culture. The existence of Canada's First Nations, which has been ignored for a long time, is becoming more and more visible. The "Québec littéraire" has undergone an astonishing evolution since the years of its "Quiet Revolution," the discovery of its "américanité" and the integration of "migrant writing." On the other hand, the existence of an Amerindian literature in French has been simply overlooked. Currently, Québec is discovering the existence of an Amerindian literature which can no longer be ignored: a generation of young Amerindian writers have come to the forefront and claim their place in society, literature and the arts. Will the History of Québec literature have to be rewritten?

**Keywords:** indigenous writers, literary Quebec, migrant writers, américanité

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## Une année de moult commémorations :

En cette année de moult commémorations il est question du 150<sup>e</sup> anniversaire du Canada, du 375<sup>e</sup> de la fondation de la ville de Montréal et certains fêteraient aussi le 40<sup>e</sup> de la célèbre LOI 101 ou Charte de la langue française. Mais cette année ne thématise pas seulement les anniversaires, elle thématise également, et ceci à des degrés divers, la présence souvent occultée des Autochtones. Cette année 2017 est l'année des excuses, des demandes de pardon. Elle se veut surtout l'année de la réconciliation. Le 21 septembre 2017, dans son discours à l'Assemblée générale de l'ONU à New York, le Premier ministre du Canada, Justin Trudeau a souligné le retard qu'affichait le Canada par rapport au respect des droits des Autochtones.

Mais il y a d'autres détails, davantage symboliques, comme la modification du drapeau de Montréal qui inclut dorénavant la présence autochtone avec la représentation d'un pin blanc au milieu, symbole amérindien entouré des symboles des quatre ethnies qui composent sa population : la fleur de lys, la rose de Lancaster, le chardon (écossais) et le trèfle (irlandais).

On aurait d'ailleurs pu penser plus tôt à cette modification du drapeau de Montréal lorsque en 2001 on a fêté le tricentenaire de La Grande Paix de Montréal, événement historique, qui fait partie entre temps du patrimoine diplomatique de l'UNESCO.

Pensons le film *Hochelaga, terre des âmes*, qui représentera le Canada aux Oscars (*Le Devoir*, 26/9/2017), un drame historique du réalisateur François Girard. Le rôle principal est d'ailleurs tenu par le rappeur Samian (\*1983), de son nom véritable Samuel Tremblay, originaire de la Première Nation Abitibi, chanteur, rappeur, multitalent, artiste pour la paix en 2015. Ce jeune artiste jette ainsi un pont entre les Premières Nations et les Québécois.

Pensons aussi au film « KANATA : aujourd'hui la colonisation ». Ce documentaire est le cri d'alarme du jeune réalisateur Ian Jaquier. Le film est sorti en 2017. Il peut être visionné gratuitement sur Youtube ([ici.tou.tv](http://ici.tou.tv)). Le réalisateur Ian Jaquier est entré dans le monde des langues, des traditions et des cultures autochtones du Canada par hasard. C'est son amitié avec Quentin Condo de la nation Mi'kmaq de la Gaspésie (Québec) qui a été le début de l'aventure pour découvrir la vie des Autochtones du pays 150 ans après la création de la Confédération canadienne.

« Pendant 150 ans, les Premières Nations du Canada ont été victimes d'un génocide culturel à grande échelle. Alors que des milliards de dollars en minerais, bois ou pétrole sont extraits de leurs terres ancestrales, ce film rappelle qu'un partage plus équitable du territoire est nécessaire pour en arriver à une véritable réconciliation. » [bande annonce du film].



Aux vus des événements cités le Canada serait donc en train de rattraper un retard certain par rapport à la reconnaissance de la présence et de l'importance des Premières Nations.

Qu'en est-il du côté du Québec ?

Nous connaissons tous l'histoire récente du Québec, de sa lutte contre la « disparition » et pour la sauvegarde du français, sans parler des années de bagarres politiques visant une indépendance éventuelle de la « Belle Province ». Le Québec a quasiment eu son indépendance en 1977 via la « Charte de la langue française », autrement dit la célèbre LOI 101 ou BILL 101.

Nous connaissons tous et toutes l'évolution étonnante de la société québécoise depuis les années de la « Révolution tranquille » pas si tranquille que ça.

Nous avons été témoins de l'essor d'une culture et d'une littérature d'une rare audace. Nous avons assisté à l'éclosion d'une littérature qui a commencé à s'ouvrir au monde, d'abord au continent nord-américain, une époque où on a dit que le Québec découvre son américanité à travers une certaine réappropriation de l'histoire et de la géographie nord-américaines. Les références, au lieu d'être européennes voire françaises comme par le passé deviennent de plus en plus américaines. Jacques Godbout, Jacques Poulin, Nicole Brossard et d'autres nous ont montré le chemin avec leurs livres et leurs films. Mais nous savons aussi que le Québec et sa littérature n'ont jamais revendiqué une certaine « Canadianité » (notion réputée réactionnaire parce que créée par un certain clergé ultramontain autour du tournant du 19<sup>e</sup> au 20<sup>e</sup> siècle).

À cette tendance s'ajoute la prise de parole de plus en plus audible des femmes. Pensez au roman *Maryse* (1983) de Francine Noël comme exemple d'une émancipation par la langue, par la parole.

Et n'oublions pas l'émergence de ce que certains appellent encore aujourd'hui « écritures migrantes », ces voix venues d'ailleurs qui enrichissent et qui influencent l'imaginaire québécois par des greffes d'autres imaginaires qui prennent. Il est rare d'assister à l'émergence d'une telle richesse de création par des auteur(e)s venu(e)s des quatre coins du globe et qui font chanter le français dans des tonalités les plus diverses, du français haïtien créolisé via les voix latino-américaines, libanaises, chinoises, vietnamiennes et autres italiennes. Une véritable polyphonie qui naît à Montréal (et à un moindre degré aussi ailleurs au Canada).

Mais nous savons aussi que l'écrivain venu d'ailleurs n'a pas toujours été le bienvenu pour tout le monde, cf. Monique LaRue et *L'Arpenteur et le Navigateur* (1996), une voix discordante qui a trouvé son antidote dans le recueil *Les Aurores Montréalaises* (1996) de Monique Proulx de la même année, un premier hommage explicite aux créateurs venus d'ailleurs.

Car il faut le reconnaître, on est arrivé à un tournant. La préoccupation de la société québécoise et jusqu'à un certain degré de la littérature et du théâtre par le « national »



cède la place, au moins pour le moment, à une plus grande ouverture au monde. Les succès mondiaux des spectacles et performances d'un Robert Lepage et du Cirque du Soleil ou la Ligue Nationale d'Improvisation sont les signes les plus visibles.

La littérature québécoise, le théâtre du Québec ne sont plus cantonnés dans un certain régionalisme (ce courant existe aussi, mais il n'est plus déterminant), passé le « syndrome de l'enfermement ». Le Québec saute des étapes avec Régine Robin qui le propulse dans le postmoderne avec son roman-patchwork *La Québécoise* (1983). Les auteurs de la « relève » tels les Larry Tremblay, Nicolas Dickner, Éric Dupont ou autres Éric Plamondon - auteurs à succès actuellement - nous montrent le chemin. Leurs thèmes, leurs préoccupations sont tournés vers l'universel et non pas cantonnés dans une certaine « québécité » régionalisante.

Tout se dirait-il donc pour le mieux dans le meilleur des mondes possibles ?

Malgré tous ces développements somme toute positifs le Québec et l'institution littéraire québécoise a ou avait du mal à accepter et à reconnaître l'Autre sur son territoire, à preuve.

## ***L' Histoire de la littérature québécoise (2007)<sup>1</sup>***

Cet ouvrage monumental pas seulement par son volume (689 pages) et salué vivement par la critique, remplit véritablement une lacune. Cette première vraie histoire de la littérature québécoise prend la suite des ouvrages de Pierre de Grandpré et de Laurent Mailhot et les surpasse aussi bien par le contenu, la qualité des analyses que la diversité des méthodes. C'est la toute première histoire de la littérature québécoise qui mérite le nom d'histoire.

Cette monumentale ***Histoire de la littérature québécoise*** a ses atouts mais également ses limites. Elle se cantonne dans une certaine « québécité » dont on croyait qu'elle avait vaincu son « enfermement ». Elle cantonne la « **marge** » dans quelques pages. La « marge », vous l'aurez deviné ce sont comme par exemple les « écritures migrantes » (7 pages!!!) et les littératures des autres francophonies canadiennes (5 pages).

Les « écritures migrantes » auraient mérité mieux. C'est entre autres grâce aux écrivains venus d'ailleurs que la littérature québécoise a fait son entrée dans la modernité. Et consacrer cinq pages à des littératures ontarienne et acadienne somme toute aussi innovatrices que celle du Québec est plus qu'un oubli. Et pourtant, l'Ontario avec seulement 5% de francophones sur une population d'environ 10 millions vient de constituer un Ministère pour les Affaires francophones et la province va créer

1) Biron, Michel/Dumont, François/Nardout-Lafarge, Élisabeth. *L'Histoire de la littérature québécoise*. Montréal: Boréal 2007.



prochainement une université de langue française à Toronto. Il y existe déjà plusieurs universités bilingues. Mais pour revenir à l'Histoire de la littérature québécoise : il y a pire que ce que je viens de dire : vous allez le deviner, pas un traitre mot sur la littérature française des Autochtones du Québec ! Même pas une ligne !

Cette *Histoire de la littérature québécoise* est sortie en 2007.

Et la Renaissance de la présence autochtone dans les arts et les lettres du Québec s'amorce dès les années 1970, une année charnière également pour la littérature acadienne et ontarienne de langue française. Toutes ces littératures font d'une certaine manière leur « Révolution tranquille ». Et 1970 a vu paraître le premier roman d'un Inuk québécois du nom de Markoosie Patsaug (\*1942) intitulé *Harpoon of the Hunter*, écrit d'abord en inuktitut et traduit par l'auteur en anglais. Ce premier roman d'un Inuk du Nunavik [Québec] a été traduit en français et publié au Québec en 2011 (!), sous le titre *Le Harpon du Chasseur*.<sup>2</sup>

L'Autochtone du Canada, l'Amérindien du Québec reste donc plus ou moins invisible, il reste le « Tiers oublié ».

## Le Tiers oublié

« During the late 1960s and 1970s in Canada there was an outburst of writing by Aboriginal peoples. The *manner* in which First Nations and Métis writing came to the forefront of national attention has no counterpart elsewhere in Canada's literary history. » (McKenzie 2007, 33). Ce qui donne en français à peu près ceci : « Au cours des années 1960–1970 on assiste à une explosion de créativité chez les peuples autochtones au Canada. La façon par laquelle les Premières Nations et les Métis ont capté l'attention nationale n'a pas son pareil ailleurs dans l'histoire du Canada. » (C'est moi qui traduis.)

C'est un fait notoire que les États-Unis aussi bien que le Canada anglophone ont contribué depuis de longues années à la reconnaissance des littératures produites par les Amérindiens et ceci malgré toute la politique erronée et les mauvais traitements infligés aux Premières Nations des deux côtés de la frontière. Les noms de Tomson Highway et de Drew Hayden Taylor (pour ne mentionner que ces deux noms) sont souvent cités, les auteurs eux-mêmes invités dans des colloques internationaux en Europe et ailleurs.

Thomas King (\*1943), métis d'origine cherokee (entre autres) et souvent traité comme auteur canadien parce qu'il vit au Canada, a publié encore dernièrement un essai traitant de cette question douloureuse qui est la perte d'identité, l'acculturation,

2) [ en 2014 on annonce sa traduction en hindi et en marathi! ] [ projet de coopération entre l'Inde et l'UQAM, projet «Le Nord», Daniel Chartier].



la misère dans les réserves sans parler des problèmes sociaux et psychiques. Ce livre s'intitule en français : « L'Indien malcommode . Un portrait inattendu des Autochtones d'Amérique du Nord. »<sup>3</sup> Dans son livre, Thomas King découvre maintes falsifications de l'histoire entre Blancs et Indiens. Il découvre même des massacres entrés dans l'Histoire officielle qui n'ont jamais eu lieu. De même King raconte de quelle façon l'Homme blanc a démonisé ou romantisé l'Indien à sa guise, et ça de Georges Custer jusqu'à Louis Riel, le leader et héros malheureux des Métis de l'Ouest canadien.

Dans le film *Little Big Man* (1970, avec entre autres Dustin Hoffman), **Chief Dan George**, ce grand acteur canadien, chef de la tribu Burrard en Colombie britannique qui outre d'être nominé aux Oscars à l'âge de 71 ans, a été honoré par la «Human Relations Award» de la part du Conseil Canadien de Chrétiens et de Juifs , ce **Chief Dan George** a été aussi poète et dessinateur. Voici ce qu'il disait dans son livre *De tout mon cœur* (1979)<sup>4</sup> : « L'Amérique du Nord est ma terre natale. Au cours de ma vie, j'ai vécu deux cultures distinctes » (Chief Dan George 1979, 36 » et de continuer : « Les souvenirs de mon peuple plongent jusqu'au commencement de toutes choses. » [85]

Et il dit plus loin : « Bientôt il sera trop tard pour découvrir ma culture : l'assimilation nous guette et avant longtemps nous n'aurons plus de valeurs que les vôtres. Déjà plusieurs de nos jeunes ont oublié les manières d'autrefois. Le mépris et le ridicule les ont rendus honteux de leurs mœurs d'Indiens. Ma culture est semblable à un chevreuil blessé qui s'est traîné vers le cœur de la forêt pour y perdre son sang et mourir dans la solitude. » (41) C'est un ton très conciliant mais également assez désabusé qui va bien avec les tentatives de réconciliation entre Canadiens et Premières Nations.

**Au Québec, l'Amérindien ou l'Autochtone** reste un exclu, absent, l'éternelle mauvaise conscience des Québécois. Sa littérature reste donc également absente des débats. Mais cette constatation n'est peut-être plus tout à fait véridique, vu le nombre de manifestations, de dossiers de presse et de publications surtout en cette année faste 2017. Parallèlement aux initiatives du Premier ministre du Canada, Justin Trudeau, le Québec commence à faire ses excuses auprès de ces milliers de parents et d'enfants autochtones qui ont souffert du système des écoles résidentielles censées inculquer aux enfants qu'on a enlevé de force à leurs parents une autre culture et les priver en même temps de leur culture et pire encore de leur langue. Il n'est pas étonnant que certaines langues autochtones dont le mi'kmaq sont en voie de disparition et le huron-wendat qu'on essaie de réanimer s'est éteint il y a environ un siècle déjà.

3) [Montréal: Boréal 2014], titre anglais: *The Inconvenient Indian: A curious Account of Native People in North America*. Doubleday Canada 2012. Ce livre a d'ailleurs été traduit en français par l'écrivain ontarien Daniel Poliquin qui a obtenu pour la traduction le Prix du Gouverneur général du Canada.

4) En anglais: Chief Dan George .*My heart soars*, Saanichton (Columbie Britannique): Hancock House Publishers 1974.



Le quotidien montréalais *Le Devoir* a eu l'excellente initiative cette année de publier plusieurs dossiers concernant un assez grand nombre de langues autochtones parlées au Québec et dans les Maritimes. Les interviews menés par les journalistes nous mettent devant une situation de lutte pour la survie culturelle. Mais il y a des initiatives un peu partout censées réveiller l'usage des langues autochtones au moins sur le plan oral.

Lynn Drapeau, linguiste à l'UQAM avait passé plusieurs séjours dans la réserve innue (c'est-à-dire montagnaise) de Betsiamites pour finalement publier le tout premier *Dictionnaire montagnais-français*.<sup>5</sup> Elle a publié en 2004 une *Grammaire innue* aux Presses de l'UQAM, et en 2011 elle a signé un collectif du titre de *Les langues autochtones du Québec. Un patrimoine en danger*.<sup>6</sup>

On dit souvent (p.ex. pour le breton) que lorsque les universitaires s'occupent d'une cause comme d'une langue en voie de disparition c'est le signe de sa mort prochaine.

En ce qui concerne les langues autochtones du Québec et du Canada la menace est réelle vu le petit nombre de locuteurs. Mais on constate aussi que les langues et cultures autochtones se portent mieux lorsque les villages se trouvent loin des grands centres urbains.<sup>7</sup>

Un signe encourageant est le fait que de nombreux artistes et écrivains s'expriment dans leurs langues et que de plus en plus de publications, p.ex. de poésie, sont publiées dans des éditions bilingues. Nous connaissons les musiciens et chanteurs du défunt groupe *Kashtin* (Florent Volland et Claude McKenzie), qui chante en innu, de même que des groupes comme *Anishnabe* qui chante en algonquin.

Il a fallu le coup de gueule de l'auteure innue du Québec An Antane Kapesch (1926–2004) :

*Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse* (1976) et trois ans plus tard cette accusation *Qu'as-tu fait de mon pays ?* (1979)<sup>8</sup> pour attirer momentanément l'attention au fait amérindien. Car les deux titres mettent l'accent sur les plaies séculaires subies par les autochtones, le mépris de l'homme blanc par rapport à la culture amérindienne, les méfaits de la colonisation, l'acculturation. *Qu'as-tu fait de mon pays ?* souligne le véritable problème, celui du sol québécois qui devrait être partagé équitablement.

Dans son *Histoire de la littérature amérindienne au Québec* (1993), Diane Boudreau met en exergue les lignes suivantes tirées du livre d'An Antan Kapesch *Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse* :

5) Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec 1991

6) Québec: Les Presses de l'Université du Québec 2011. 222 p.

7) Les chiffres absolus de locuteurs sont très bas. Un total de 41 025 locuteurs toutes langues confondues parmi lesquels figurent: 2030 locuteurs d'algonquin, 5360 de l'attikamek, 13 550 du cri, 590 du micmac, 9470 de l'innu-naskapi, 90 du mohawk (donnée partielle) et 9740 de l'inuktitut, [Drapeau 2011, 23–25].

8) Ce livre a été écrit en montagnais et ensuite publié dans une version bilingue. An Antan Kapesch a été chef de la Bande Montagnaise de Schefferville. Elle a également écrit des livres pour enfants



« Je veux encore écrire, écrire pour défendre ma culture, pour que les Montagnais qui naîtront sachent que leur peuple a déjà vécu autrement que dans une réserve. » (Boudreau 1993, Introduction). Et An Antan Kapesch, elle-même, dit dans la postface de son essai : « Je suis très fière quand, aujourd’hui, je m’entends traiter de sauvagesse. Quand j’entends le Blanc prononcer ce mot, je comprends qu’il me redit sans cesse que je suis une vraie Indienne et que c’est moi la première à avoir vécu dans le bois. Or toute chose qui vit dans le bois correspond à la vie la meilleure. Puisse le Blanc me toujours traiter de Sauvagesse. » (Kapesch 1976,153) Et en 2003 Michel Noël, l’écrivain amérindien du Québec, disait déjà qu’il faudrait donner la parole aux Amérindiens parce que le développement du Québec ne peut pas se faire, selon lui, sans les Autochtones qu’il faudrait absolument associer à la marche du pays.<sup>9</sup>

Comme si cela était à prouver, la poétesse Éléonore Sioui (\*1925) disait en 1985 :

Le cœur de l’Amérindien  
Renferme l’essence  
Les larmes, les sourires  
De l’âme de la Terre Mère  
Fécondée du Soleil  
D’un bruissement de l’Esprit  
Encerclant son peuple  
Dans sa Re-naissance.  
(*Andatha*, 1985, 15)

Cette vision poétique de l’ « Amérindianité » trouve un aboutissement cruel dans ce qui suit :

Je suis l’Enfant Naturel  
De l’Amérique  
Passé  
Aux mains  
De l’Étranger  
(*Andatha*, 1985, 47)

Lorsqu’on entend ou lit ces vers, on est loin de ce que certains souhaiteraient peut-être voir dans une écriture amérindienne, c’est à dire un certain exotisme évoquant le Bon sauvage. avec plumes, calumet et tomahawk. Marie-Frédérique Desbiens écrit à ce sujet en 2015 :

9) Paroles recueillis par Ahlam Ben El Hantati, Christophe Parel et Madalina Zahara pour le magazine “franco fil”, Université Laval, 29 mai 2003, p.3.



Longtemps idéalisée, cette représentation des Autochtones semble connaître, dans la littérature actuelle, une métamorphose. Et celle-ci n'est pas étrangère à la récente prise de parole par les Autochtones eux-mêmes dans les années 2000. Louis-Karl Picard-Siouï, dans son recueil poétique intitulé *Au pied de mon orgueil* (2011), le proclame haut et fort : si les lecteurs québécois attendent de lui une image exotique (et donc rassurante), ils ne la trouveront pas. Et Picard-Siouï de continuer : « [...] en tant qu'auteur aborigène originaire de Wendake, cela aurait été sûrement plus rentable de jouer le jeu », c'est-à-dire de se présenter « comme un chaman de la poésie, ou alors d'aller dans la voie de la revendication et de la lutte anticoloniale. (Harel 2017, 52)

Finie l'histoire de l'Indien imaginaire.

Il est vrai que le Québec accuse un certain retard par rapport à la reconnaissance de cette autre littérature, de cette autre culture sur son territoire. Et pourtant, la littérature amérindienne, nous dit Simon Harel, pourrait nous livrer quelques réponses aux questions identitaires directement en français dans le texte. Rémi Savard le disait dès les années 1970 :

Force nous sera bientôt de constater qu'il y a du côté des Autochtones une créativité culturelle spécifique, dense et toute tournée vers l'avenir [...] et que cet imaginaire est au moins aussi porteur de solutions que ces conférences constitutionnelles toujours tenues en l'absence de ceux qui, depuis près de 50 millénaires ont fait en terre américaine des expériences inédites de relations entre peuples. (Harel 2017, 28)

Selon Diane Boudreau une écriture amérindienne prend son essor (prudent) seulement après 1970, tout comme en Ontario et en Acadie, tandis qu'aux États-Unis M. Scott Momaday a reçu le célèbre Pulitzer Prize en 1969 pour son livre *House Made of Dawn*. Au Québec, il a fallu attendre 1997, année où Bernard Assiniwi (1935–2000 ; de souche algonquienne et crie) a obtenu le prix France-Québec pour *La Saga des Béothuks*.<sup>10</sup> Ce même Assiniwi a consacré une histoire romancée à Pontiac, grand chef Indien du 18<sup>e</sup> siècle. Dans son roman *L'Odawa Pontiac. L'amour et la guerre. Une biographie romancée* (1994), le protagoniste a un rêve. Il voudrait « faire des siens des Français progressistes et prospères ».

Yves Sioui Durand, huron-wendat, s'est fait connaître aussi bien comme dramaturge que comme fondateur du seul théâtre autochtone du Québec, **Ondinnok**, théâtre qu'il a créé en 1985 avec Catherine Joncas. Déjà en 1992 lors du 500<sup>e</sup> anniversaire de la « découverte » des Amériques par Christophe Colomb, les Amérindiens ont protesté un peu partout, en Amérique latine, en Amérique centrale et en Amérique

10) Les Béothuks sont une ethnie autochtone de Terre-Neuve qui s'est éteinte suite à un véritable génocide et la propagation de maladies au début du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle.





du Nord contre cette appropriation de l'Histoire de leurs pays par les Européens. Yves Sioui Durand, proteste dans sa pièce *La Conquête de Mexico*, une adaptation scénique du *Codex de Florence* (1991), contre la perspective exclusivement européenne des découvertes et conquête.

On pourrait citer Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1742–1799), l'écrivain et physicien allemand du 18<sup>e</sup> siècle qui a eu ce célèbre aphorisme : « L'Indien qui a aperçu le premier Européen a fait une découverte lourde de conséquences. »

Et depuis quelques années Michel Noël (\*1944) s'est fait un nom comme conteur imparable, romancier, poète et dramaturge. Algonquin de père et de mère, il est ethnologue de formation. Un auteur autochtone incontournable.

Pourtant, il a fallu qu'un jeune chercheur italien, Maurizio Gatti, débarque au Québec pour y découvrir son enthousiasme pour la culture amérindienne. Résultats : la toute première anthologie de littérature amérindienne du Québec en langue française.<sup>11</sup> La préface du livre a été écrite par Robert Lalonde, grand écrivain et comédien québécois d'origine mohawk qui parle de vengeance des Indiens, une vengeance douce par la parole enfin entendue. (Harel 2017, 29). Maurizio Gatti ne s'est pas arrêté là. Entre temps il a publié un essai intitulé *Être écrivain amérindien au Québec*.<sup>12</sup> *Peu à peu et grâce à ce jeune chercheur italien, le fait littéraire amérindien du Québec se retrouve valorisé, répertorié, analysé. Mais il reste encore du travail à faire afin de vraiment arriver à une appréciation globale de la littérature autochtone. Car Maurizio Gatti nous dit aussi que les seuls cours universitaires consacrés à la littérature amérindienne du Québec sont dispensés à Toronto et non pas au Québec. Depuis les premiers livres de Maurizio Gatti des voix se sont levés, pas seulement dans des colloques qui réunissaient chercheurs et écrivains autochtones et québécois ou d'autres Blancs.*

Certains auteurs et poètes autochtones du Québec ont entre temps fait du chemin et sont de plus en plus connus, en partie grâce aux initiatives individuelles, aux colloques thématiques, aux co-éditions, etc. Il faut citer dans ce contexte le colloque organisé par Maurizio Gatti et Louis-Jacques Dorais de l'Université Laval à Wendake au village huron et qui avait pour titre « Littératures francophones autochtones émergentes ». Ce colloque réunissait des chercheurs et écrivains du Québec, des Berbères du Maroc et d'Algérie, des Polynésiens (Tahiti) et des Néo-Calédoniens. Le recueil qui en résulte porte le titre : *Mots de neige, de sable et d'océan*.<sup>13</sup>

11) Gatti, Maurizio. *Littérature amérindienne du Québec. Écrits de langue française*. Préface de Robert Lalonde. Montréal : Éditions Hurtubise HMH . 271 p.

12) Gatti, Maurizio. *Être écrivain amérindien au Québec. Indianité et création littéraire*. Préface de François Paré. »Montréal: Éditions Hurtubise HMH 2006. 215 p.

13) sous la direction de Maurizio Gatti [Wendake: Les Éditions du CDFM 2008]



D'autres initiatives ont eu pour résultat l'anthologie **Aimititau! Parlons-Nous!**<sup>14</sup>

Livre qui réunit des textes d'auteurs autochtones et québécois. Une première! Un livre - événement qui entame un dialogue entre écrivains québécois et autochtones

Dans l'introduction de l'anthologie Louis-Karl Picard-Sioui disait : « Nous avons besoin d'un dialogue franc et les artistes, guerriers et gardiens de l'imaginaire, sont sûrement des acteurs-clés pour y arriver. » (Morali 2008, 8–9)

Cette publication a connu une suite dans « Événement Aimititau! Parlons-nous! Festival international de la littérature » (27–28 sept. 2017, à Montréal, avec Joséphine Bacon et José Acquelin, Nakha Bertrand et Jean Désy, Isabelle Miron et Jean Sioui). Pour Simon Harel, il est impératif de faire une place aux littératures autochtones, parce que ces littératures « [...] ont beaucoup de choses à nous apprendre sur la qualité du sol québécois. [...] C'est toute la fondation symbolique du Québec, aujourd'hui dans une impasse (politique?), qu'elles nous invitent à réexaminer. » (Harel 2017, 7)

Harel voit une sorte de « renaissance » de la littérature autochtone dans les années 1990 qui se fait en français ou en éditions bilingues. Et il cite les noms de Rita Mestokosho (1966), poète, écrivaine et militante et de Joséphine Bacon (1947), les poètes innues les plus connus aujourd'hui. Leurs œuvres suivraient une démarche d'appropriation et d'affirmation identitaire (Harel 2017, 9). Joséphine Bacon, originaire de Betsiamites est poète et réalise des films documentaires. Souvent chez les auteurs autochtones on voit ce développement d'une carrière à plusieurs voies, influencée peut-être par des traditions d'une culture basée sur l'oralité.

Simon Harel constate une différence de taille entre les littératures autochtones en anglais qui se seraient plus tôt tourné vers les genres narratifs, tandis que les écrivains autochtones québécois privilégient surtout la poésie, une sorte d'oralité médiatisée. (Harel 2017, 11)

## La Relève : Naomi Fontaine et d'autres

Ces derniers temps, la maison d'édition Mémoire d'encrier, dirigé par le poète et écrivain Rodney Saint-Éloi, lui-même originaire d'Haïti, a eu le grand mérite d'ouvrir sa maison à des voix peu entendues jusqu'ici. Il faut saluer cette initiative, car il a ainsi porté à la connaissance du public des jeunes talents issus des communautés autochtones du Québec. C'est ainsi qu'il a publié dernièrement les deux romans de Naomi Fontaine.

14) Textes rassemblés et présentés par Laure Morali. Montréal: Mémoire d'encrier 2008, 324 p. « 29 auteurs ont été invités à entrer en correspondance avec un écrivain de l'autre culture, sur une période de neuf mois, pendant l'année 2007. Les jumelages ont été formés d'un écrivain québécois et d'un écrivain de nation innue, wendat, crie, mi'kmaq, métis, nippissing, dénée, tépéhuane ou kiowa. » (Laure Morali dans son introduction, pp. 8–9)



Naomi Fontaine a publié en 2011 son premier livre à 23 ans du titre de *Kuessipan. À toi.*<sup>15</sup> Le livre a obtenu un franc succès et a été tourné en film entre temps. Ce premier roman d'une jeune femme rappelle à certains critiques la puissance de l'écriture de quelques grands auteurs d'origine autochtone comme Tomson Highway et Scott N. Momaday (Pulitzer Prize en 1969). Cette comparasion met la barre assez haute et lorsqu'on lit ce livre on se trouve confronté à un récit bouleversant qui nous fait découvrir la vie quotidienne sur une réserve innue. Voici un petit échantillon :

J'aimerais que vous la connaissiez, la fille au ventre rond. Celle qui élèvera seule ses enfants. Qui criera après son copain qui l'aura trompée. Qui pleurera seule dans son salon, qui changera des couches toute sa vie. Qui cherchera à travailler à l'âge de trente ans, qui finira son secondaire à trente-cinq, qui commencera à vivre trop tard, qui mourra trop tôt complètement épuisée et insatisfaite. Bien sûr que j'ai menti, que j'ai mis un voile blanc sur ce qui est sale. » (Fontaine 2011, 11)

Certains critiques qualifient ce petit roman de chronique poétique de la vie au quotidien dans une réserve indienne. Dans sa très belle analyse Daniel Chartier vante les mérites de ce premier livre de Naomi Fontaine et il dit que cette œuvre « doit aussi gagner une place dans la littérature québécoise, puisqu'elle a contribué à en déplacer les frontières » (Dupuis/Ertler 2017, 182), mais en même temps qu'il hésite à voir dans ce roman « le début d'une littérature innue ou s'il s'agit de l'intégration des voix autochtones dans la littérature québécoise. »<sup>16</sup>

Et Daniel Chartier de continuer : « Selon Jean Désy, qui a accompagné nombre d'auteurs innues vers la publication, l'existence de deux corpus ne désigne pas une opposition, mais au contraire la possibilité d'une véritable rencontre qui doit survenir. » (Dupuis/Ertler 2017, 182).

Après des décennies de confrontation, de colonialisme, d'effacement culturel, d'ignorance réciproque, il est en effet souhaitable d'imaginer que la littérature - et au premier chef des œuvres comme celle de Naomi Fontaine - réalise ce que les autres initiatives n'ont pas réussi : occasionner une réelle rencontre. Pour que cela survienne, il faut que chacun se sente pleinement chez soi. Comme l'écrivait cet autre auteur connu de la Côte-Nord, à savoir Gilles Vigneault, originaire de Natashquan : « [f]aut être chez soi pour dire Welcome/ Un monde finit/ un autre commence. »

Le deuxième roman de Naomi Fontaine vient d'être publié il y a quelques semaines à peine.

15) Fontaine, Naomi. *Kuessipan. À toi.* Montréal : Mémoire d'encrier. 111 p.

16) Dupuis, Gilles / Ertler, Klaus (dir.) *À la carte. Le roman québécois (2010-2015).* Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften 2017.



Il a pour titre *Manikanetish-Petite Marguerite*.<sup>17</sup> Manikanetish ou Petite Marguerite est le nom de l'école où Naomi Fontaine a enseigné pendant trois ans. Roman très prenant qui se passe dans la réserve innue Uashat près de la ville Sept-Îles sur la rive nord du Saint-Laurent.

La narratrice, elle-même innue, est une toute jeune enseignante confrontée aux multiples problèmes sociaux et psychiques des jeunes adolescents innus, dont un jeune qui reste comme pétrifié devant la mort de sa mère, les jeunes filles mères entre quinze et vingt ans qui ont malgré tout assez d'énergie et de volonté pour retourner ou rester à l'école pour finalement décrocher un diplôme. Face à cet univers de problèmes (alcool, suicide d'une élève, grossesses) la jeune enseignante essaie de s'impliquer pour davantage motiver ses élèves et à les aider à s'en sortir. Elle réussit avec un projet assez surprenant : motiver les élèves à endosser les costumes et les rôles de la pièce *Le Cid* de Corneille ! À la fin du roman elle doit s'avouer qu'elle a cédé trop vite afin de vaincre sa solitude : mais elle fait face à sa grossesse aussi courageusement que ses élèves.

Un beau deuxième roman qui introduit le lecteur en plein dans un milieu qu'il croyait connaître de par les préjugés répandus comme quoi les Amérindiens seraient tous alcoolos, drogués et fainéants. Un roman qui illustre bien les problèmes identitaires ou de perte d'identité suite aux tentatives d'acculturation de l'Église catholique et des différents gouvernements. Les excuses des responsables faites aux Autochtones pour leur avoir fait subir l'enlèvement de force de leurs enfants qui par la suite ont perdu leur langue et leurs racines arrivent un peu tard. Au moins ça.

Dany Laferrière a dit ceci du roman de Naomi Fontaine :

C'est une invitation à une fête étrange : le simple déroulement de la vie quotidienne. La peinture est si directe qu'elle semble naïve jusqu'à ce qu'on comprenne qu'elle suit plutôt la vieille règle classique de la ligne droite. Des observations dures. Des joies violentes. Une nature rêche. Pas d'adjectifs. Ni de larmes. C'est le livre d'un archer qui n'a pas besoin de regarder la cible pour l'atteindre en plein cœur. Mon cœur. »<sup>18</sup>

En 2016 les Éditions Alain Stanké ont publié une autre publication qui mérite l'attention des lecteurs et d'un public important. Il s'agit d'*Amun*<sup>19</sup>, un recueil de nouvelles publié sous la direction de Michel Jean, journaliste et romancier d'origine innue. Michel Jean a réussi à réunir dans ce collectif « pour la première fois des auteurs autochtones de divers horizons, de différentes nations et de différentes générations. Leurs textes de fiction reflètent tantôt l'histoire et les traditions, tantôt la réalité des

17) Fontaine, Naomi. *Manikanetish - Petite Marguerite*. Roman. Montréal: Mémoire d'encrier 2017. 137 p.

18) Laferrière, Dany, sur les ondes de Ici Radio-Canada.ca, publié le samedi 23 septembre 2017.

19) *Amun* signifie rassemblement en langue innue, cf. bibliographie.



Premières Nations au Québec et au Canada. » (quatrième de couverture du livre)<sup>20</sup>  
Il y a donc de la matière à découvrir dans le domaine de la littérature autochtone du Québec.

## Éléments de Conclusion

La littérature québécoise joue dans ce concert des différents courants littéraires contemporains qui la caractérisent, certes, toujours le premier violon, mais elle ne joue plus toute seule. Au moins à Montréal la contrebasse anglo-montréalaise est de plus en plus présente et la flute de pan de ces „ voix venues d’ailleurs » sont devenues depuis quelque temps déjà une image de marque de cette nouvelle polyphonie. Cette polyphonie, dont il est question ici, il va donc falloir la compléter et y rajouter ces voix voisines et qui viennent de si loin en même temps, ces voix autochtones qui font résonner tout autrement ce concert littéraire qu’elles agrémentent des éléments d’une culture authentiquement « américaine ».

On a évoqué depuis les années 1980 l’américanité de la littérature et de l’identité québécoises : la littérature des Premières Nations est également une littérature « américaine ». En ceci, elle a droit au même qualificatif que la littérature québécoise. (Harel 2017, 72). Et Simon Harel termine son essai sur les littératures autochtones avec cet aperçu : „ Comment ne pas penser de nouveau à la prophétie de Rémi Savard sur l’imminence de la décolonisation des lettres ? J’ai le sentiment que, dans le domaine québécois, les littératures des Premières Nations sont appelées à faire trembler le territoire sur ses assises. » (Harel 2017, 117).

Il faut s’attendre à d’autres découvertes d’une jeune génération d’auteurs autochtones qui - sans complexes - revendiquent leur place dans un ensemble littéraire de plus en plus diversifié au plus grand plaisir du lecteur.

20) Jean, Michel (dir.) (2016), *Amun. Nouvelles*. Montréal : Les Éditions Alain Stanké. 164 p. Ce recueil réunit des textes de Joséphine Bacon, Natasha Kanapé Fontaine, Naomi Fontaine, Virginia Pésémapéo Bordeleau, Melissa Mollen Dupuis, Jean Sioui, Alyssa Jérôme, Maya Cousineau-Mollen et de Louis-Karl Picard-Sioui.



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Peter G. Klaus

**Canadienne, américaine, francophone et/ou autochtone : quel destin pour la littérature québécoise?**

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Romaniste et angliciste/américaniste de formation, **PETER G. KLAUS** (Freie Universität Berlin) a enseigné dans des universités américaines, canadiennes et françaises. Il est l'initiateur des "Études québécoises" à l'institut de Philologie Romane de la Freie Universität Berlin. Parmi ses intérêts académiques: des études québécoises/canadiennes, «écritures migrantes», et littératures francophones émergentes. En 2012 L'Association Indienne des Professeurs de Français a lui décerné son AITF Award. En février 2012 le Premier Ministre du Québec, Monsieur Philippe Couillard, l'a promu « Chevalier de l'Ordre national du Québec » lors d'une cérémonie à l'Assemblée Nationale du Québec le 12 avril.



## Tocqueville, Beaumont, *Democracy in America*, and (Lower) Canada

Tocqueville, Beaumont, *De la démocratie en Amérique*, et le (Bas)-Canada

Don Sparling

### Abstract

Though published more than 180 years ago, Alexis de Tocqueville's multifaceted analysis of the concept of democracy in *Democracy in America* continues to attract readers. This article examines some of Tocqueville's main conclusions, looking in particular at the positive/negative dichotomy that runs through the work, and places them in two wider contexts, that of the work of his companion on the visit to America, Gustave de Beaumont, as well as of (Lower) Canada, where Tocqueville and Beaumont spent a brief but significant part of their stay in North America.

**Keywords:** Alexis de Tocqueville's, *Democracy in America*, Gustave de Beaumont, Lower Canada

### Resumé

Bien qu'ayant été publiée il y a plus de 180 ans, l'analyse à multiples facettes du concept de démocratie que propose Alexis de Tocqueville dans *De la démocratie en Amérique* continue à attirer les lecteurs. Le présent article examine quelques-unes des conclusions du philosophe français, plus spécialement la dichotomie positive / négative qui traverse l'œuvre ainsi que la place de cette dernière dans deux contextes plus larges : d'une part, le travail de son ami Gustave de Beaumont sur son séjour en Amérique et, d'autre part, le Bas-Canada, où Tocqueville et Beaumont ont passé des instants brefs mais cruciaux pour eux lors de leur voyage en Amérique du Nord.

**Mots-clés :** Alexis de Tocqueville's, *De la démocratie en Amérique*, le Bas-Canada





In the course of a dramatic three days in the summer of 1830, France experienced its “July Revolution,” ousting the Bourbons and ushering in a new royal house in the person of Louis Phillipe, Duc d’Orléans. For two young French aristocrats, Alexis de Tocqueville and his close friend Gustave de Beaumont, this presented a problem. As magistrates, they were employees of the state. Though known for their liberal views, they also came from distinguished aristocratic families. Tocqueville’s great-grandfather, the eminent statesman Guillaume-Chrétien de Lamoignon de *Malesherbes*, had been guillotined in the wake of his defending Louis XVI, and his parents were only saved from the same fate by the fall of Robespierre and the end of the Terror. Many members of Beaumont’s family, too, had experienced complicated times during the previous forty years; his uncle Marc Antoine Bonnin de La Bonninière de Beaumont, who had begun his military career under Louis XVI (for whom he had served as a page), barely escaped death at the time of the Terror, went on to become a Count of the Empire under Napoleon, and finally was named a Peer of France by the ultra-reactionary Louis XVIII after the Restoration. But the new bourgeois regime under Louis Phillipe, the “Citizen King,” was “suspicious of aristocratic employees who might be covertly disaffected” (Damrosch, 11), and the two young men felt it might well be in their best interests to avoid being caught between the various political camps by absenting themselves from France for some time until the situation settled down and it was clear which way the wind was blowing. They came up with what today would seem the least plausible of ideas – going to the United States to investigate American prisons. At the time, however, these were considered the most humane and progressive in the world. So, having gained official approval for their proposal to draw up a report on the American penal system, the two men set off for the New World in April 1831.

Both were very young – Tocqueville 25, de Beaumont 27 – and they knew virtually nothing about the United States. Even their knowledge of English was at best mediocre. But in the course of the just over nine months they spent in America on their travels, they spoke at some length with hundreds of Americans and casually to thousands more, and visited 17 of the country’s then 24 states, with a brief side trip to Lower Canada thrown in for good measure. They were very diligent in pursuing their official task, which was to result in their two-volume publication *On the Penitentiary System in the United States and its Application in France* (*Du système pénitenciaire aux Etats-Unis, et de son application en France*), published in 1833, a year after their return to France. But Tocqueville’s real agenda lay elsewhere, in something he was deeply interested in personally – the concept of democracy, and particularly democracy as manifested in the United States.

It would be inaccurate to claim that Tocqueville was a fan of democracy, let alone any radical theory of democracy. He was too much a product of his aristocratic background for this. Rather, he was a realist: he believed that democracy was here to stay, that it



was clearly the form of government towards which societies everywhere were moving. He was also a pragmatist: if this was the case, then the task was to examine the concept itself and explore its nature – what principles it was based on, what benefits it could bring, what drawbacks it might entail, what trends could be anticipated, what factors would influence its development. And what better place to do this than the United States, the state where the democratic idea had advanced furthest, a country that could be considered a laboratory of democracy? What Tocqueville was engaged in was, to use a contemporary term, a SWOT analysis of the concept of democracy, conducted on the basis of what he saw round him in America, aimed at uncovering democracy's strengths and weaknesses, the opportunities open to it, the threats it faced. All of these aspects can be found in his magnum opus, *Democracy in America*, which he subsequently published in two volumes in 1835 and 1840.

This article will deal with only a few of the main features of democracy as delineated by Tocqueville – in particular features he saw most pronounced in the United States – and examine what he felt were its potential negative effects. In addition, Tocqueville's relation to Canada will also be examined. It is true that Tocqueville made only a brief eleven-day stop in Lower Canada, and that he did not deal with it in *Democracy in America* (though he made many notes during and after his visit there, and wrote about the colony in letters to members of his family). But he viewed North America as one space, and more than once he speculates on aspects of the future development of “Anglo-American” culture/democracy as a whole; as he states in a letter to his father, “Today the die is cast, all of North American will speak English” (Tocqueville 1973, 93). This was not an unreasonable assumption: huge numbers of English-speaking British settlers were moving into Canada, and they helped fuel the movement for greater democracy – a concern that had been present since the arrival of the Loyalists in the future Canada following the end of the War of Independence, one of whose first demands had been for representative, elected assemblies. In this they did not differ one whit from the rebellious kin they had left behind.

What then were the main features of democracy as defined by de Tocqueville? This is by no means easy to state briefly or definitively. First of all, this is a Big Book. The two volumes of *Democracy in America*, in the (admittedly heavily annotated) 2010 translation by James T. Schleifer, amount to just under 1300 pages. Second, though *Democracy in America* has been well received ever since its publication almost 180 years ago, the reasons for its appeal have differed over time and, in particular, from reader to reader: in other words, not everyone would agree on the relative importance of the various elements in the book. Third, Tocqueville was a lawyer, and his writing betrays this in many ways: he frequently lays out in great detail the case both for and against a particular feature, and it is not always clear what his final position is. There is a strong and paradoxical ambiguity to many of his pronouncements, almost



a sense of anxiety; in places he jumps in the course of a paragraph or two from high praise for a particular democratic feature to strong criticism of its possible negative implications. And finally, he was also writing within a long tradition of French prose, and the book is filled with grand-sounding generalizations. For example, the title of one of his chapters, “Why Democratic Peoples Naturally Want Peace and Democratic Armies Naturally Desire War” (Vol. IV, 1153), is certainly arresting in its aphoristic brevity, but not everyone will be convinced by Tocqueville’s subsequent elaboration of the theme. *Democracy in America*, then, is a slippery text to deal with; in some ways it resembles the Bible, in that readers tend to find there what they are looking for. It comes as no surprise, for example, to learn that in Britain the first volume was hailed by the great proponent of liberalism John Stuart Mill as “the first philosophical book ever written on Democracy as it manifests itself in modern society” and viewed by him as a profound analysis of its progressive nature, whereas the Conservative leader Sir Robert Peel sought to rally his party, in disarray in the wake of the expansion of the franchise brought about by the Reform Act of 1832, by pointing to Tocqueville and his warnings about “the tyranny of the majority” (Renshaw, xi).

Tocqueville’s starting point for understanding democracy, however, is clear, and comes in the very first sentence of the book. “Among the new objects that attracted my attention during my stay in the United States, none struck me more vividly than the equality of conditions” (Vol. I, 4). “Equality,” with all its ramifications and implications, lies at the centre of de Tocqueville’s concern, a concept he keeps coming back to again and again as being at the root of the phenomena he observes – features of the political system, economic issues, culture, religion. And he stresses his difference from other authors on the subject by claiming to be looking “farther” than them: “while they are concerned with the next day, I wanted to think about the future” (Vol. I, 34).

What is in fact striking in the work is the disparity between Tocqueville’s description of democracy now and his speculation about democracy in the future. American democracy in the present is described in both positive and negative terms. He is astonished at its dynamism; approves its concern for the welfare of the majority; asserts that “The laws of democracy tend, in general, toward the good of the greatest number” and “the purpose of democracy, in its legislation, is more useful to humanity” than that of an aristocracy (Vol II, 378); notes the benefits of decentralization; praises the manifold activities of citizens in civic “associations” (Vol III, 895–904) and at every level of public life; notes its ability, through elections, to correct bad decisions, and so on. At the same time, he points out what he sees as its shortcomings: its concern with the moment and lack of any “clear perception of the future” (Vol II, 363); the omnipresence of “politics” in public life; the heightened governmental instability that is endemic to a democratic order (Vol II, 407–9). Tocqueville’s genius is to show how these are two sides of the same coin, the balance between them being what drives the



society forward. When he turns to the future, however, his view is darker, less sanguine; his speculations on the implications of the logical development of “equality” in the country are often very negative. It is as though he fears the current balance will be lost, that he hopes these developments he describes will not occur but that he would not be prepared to wager on this; instead, the *égalité* at the heart of the American experience will blunt and dilute the *liberté* and *fraternité*. And the reason for this is that “equality” in a democracy – or at least in American democracy, in Tocqueville’s view – is rooted in “individualism” (Vol II, chapters 2 and 3 *passim*), a product “of democratic origin” (Vol III, 883). For Tocqueville, this is a very ambiguous virtue: yes, as individuals people have virtually unlimited free choice, but this has a dark side. It can turn into sheer selfishness, and become something that “at first dries up only the source of public virtues, but, in the long run, it attacks and destroys all the others” (Vol III, 882). Its levelling force hinders the creation of stable institutions, whether political, religious or others, with the rather paradoxical result that this leads to what is perhaps his most famous characterization of the life of democratic America: the tyranny of the majority. His analysis of this concept is brutal, leading him to the damning conclusion that “I know of no country where, in general, there reigns less independence of mind and true freedom of discussion than in America” (Vol II, 417). The “omnipotence” of the majority means that minorities and minority views have little chance of gaining favour, and every chance of being crushed. In this respect, as in so many others, Tocqueville’s future scenarios tend to be troubled and bleak.

So every reader sees something different in de Tocqueville; what is perhaps most striking to the reader today is this dark side of his vision of the future. And this for two reasons. First, when one reads Tocqueville, and then looks at the current state of the United States, it takes very little effort or imagination to see a great many negative phenomena named and anticipated by Tocqueville that are alive and well today. The unconscionable pursuit of riches? “I do not even know of a country where the love of money holds a greater place in the human heart” (Vol I, 85). American exceptionalism? “For fifty years it has not ceased to be repeated to the inhabitants of the United States that they form the only religious, enlightened and free people ... so they have an immense opinion of themselves, and they are not far from believing that they form a species apart from the human race” (Vol II, 600–01). America first? “You see [the American’s] national pride resort to all the artifices and descend to all the puerilities of individual vanity. There is nothing more annoying in the experience of life than this irritable patriotism of the Americans” (Vol II, 388). The dangers of populism? “Charlatans of all types know very well the secret of pleasing the people, while their true friends most often fail” (Vol II, 316). The steady retreat from talent in government? “Upon my arrival in the United States, I was struck with surprise to find out how common merit was among the governed and how uncommon it was among



those governing. Today ... we are forced to recognize that this [decreasing participation in public life by “outstanding men”] has occurred as democracy has gone beyond its former limits” (Vol II, 314–15). Quality of leadership? “The natural instincts of democracy lead the people to keep distinguished men away from power” (Vol II, 317). Mistrust of government? “In the eyes of the democracy, government is not a good, but a necessary evil” (Vol II, 324). Foreign policy? “Foreign policy requires the use of almost none of the qualities that belong to democracy” (Vol II, 370). Punitive justice? “In America, [the criminal] is an enemy of the human species, and he has all humanity against him” (Vol. I, 161). Whacky religious groups? “From time to time bizarre sects arise there that try hard to open extraordinary paths to eternal happiness. Religious madness is very common there” (Vol III, 940). The list could continue at length. The second reason that Tocqueville’s dark vision seems so pertinent today is that it inevitably – at least for a Canadian reader – leads to comparisons between the United States and Canada. Canada is an American country in the broad sense of the term, and much of what Tocqueville extols could apply equally well to Canada. And it is also an American country in the narrower sense of America as the USA: right from the beginning Canada has steadily absorbed much from its southern neighbour – people, institutions, religions, customs. Most recently, in 1982, there was the patriation of the Canadian Constitution, with its Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which radically rerouted Canadian democracy along American lines. Yet many, perhaps most, would argue that the many dystopian aspects of American democracy that have emerged in the United States in recent years, particularly in the social and political spheres, are, by and large, absent in Canada. In other words, today Canada can be seen as being closer to Tocqueville’s ideal democratic America than is America itself.

*Democracy in America* is a major achievement, and one can argue endlessly as to the degree to which Tocqueville “got it right.” One thing he did get spectacularly wrong, however, was his conviction that “if one portion of the Union wanted seriously to separate from the other, not only would you not be able to prevent it from doing so, but you would not even be tempted to try” (Vol II, 593). And in any case, in view of what he considered the uniformity of the “Anglo-Americans” and the mutual benefits of the interdependence of the North, the South and the West, he saw no logical reason for them to separate (Vol II, 582–596). The elephant in the room here is slavery or, more specifically, race, which is arguably the single most defining feature of American society. Of course Tocqueville condemned slavery unequivocally, and *Democracy in America* includes a chapter in which he writes movingly about its evils (as well as the pitiable state of the “Indians”). Yet his views on the Blacks as such are very much of his time:

If he [the “Negro”] becomes free, independence often then seems to him to be a heavier chain than slavery itself; for in the course of his existence he has learned to submit to



everything, except to reason; and when reason becomes his sole guide, he cannot recognize its voice ... So he has reached this depth of misery in which servitude brutalizes him and liberty destroys him. (Vol II, 518)

For Tocqueville, the inequality between the Blacks and Whites “seems to have its immutable foundations in nature itself” (Vol II, 552), and “those who hope that one day the Europeans will blend with the Negroes seem to me to entertain a chimera ... Wherever Negroes have been the strongest, they have destroyed whites; it is the only accounting that might ever be possible between the two races” (Vol II, 553). Given these views, which he states so firmly that one must assume he believed they were universal truths, it is understandable that he saw no “logical” reason for the Union to dissolve.

It might be argued that one could excuse Tocqueville as merely reflecting the attitudes of his time and class. However, this is to forget that Tocqueville’s travelling companion and close friend Gustave de Beaumont also produced a remarkable work originating from his experience in America, *Marie, or Slavery in the United States* (*Marie ou l’esclavage aux États-Unis. Tableau de mœurs américaines*). Appearing in the same year as Tocqueville’s *Democracy*, it had a mixed reaction and has only begun to attract serious attention relatively recently. This is partly because it challenges the usual genres: a social commentary, it takes the form of an essay on race intertwined with a prose narrative, a story dealing with the love between a young Frenchman and an American woman who appears to be White but turns out to have African ancestry. Beaumont himself realized what an odd hybrid this was:

I am well aware that in offering truth under the veil of fiction I run the risk of pleasing no one. Will the serious public not reject my book at the sight of its title alone? And will not the light-minded reader, drawn by its insubstantial appearance, give up in the face of its deep seriousness? I do not know. All that I can say is that my primary aim was to present a set of serious observations; that the core of the matter is true and only the characters are fictitious; that in fact I essayed to furnish my work with a less sombre surface in order to attract that part of the public that seeks in a book at once ideas for the mind and emotions for the heart. (Beaumont, II-III)

A kind of postmodernist text 150 years before the fact, it deals not with slavery as such, but – and this is utterly original for the time – with racial prejudice as social evil. Clearly an abolitionist work, it predates by seventeen years Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. It is curious that two such close friends, travelling together and having the same experiences, should produce such utterly different works, and with such utterly different views on race and the nature and the potential of democracy.



But to return to Tocqueville, in the course of their stay in America, he and Beaumont made a brief stop in Lower Canada, visiting Montréal, Québec and a few small communities along the shores of the St Lawrence. The notes he made of his experiences there (which were not published in his lifetime) shed a surprising light on him and his views of democracy. Rather unexpectedly, it seems that Tocqueville was even less informed about Lower Canada than he had been about the United States: “not even six months ago, I believed, like everyone else, that Canada had become thoroughly English” (Tocqueville 1973, 87). So he was astonished to find a completely functioning Francophone society. “They are still French to the core; not only the elderly, but all of them, even the little toddler who spins his top” (Tocqueville 1973, 88). Because of this, there is immediate identification: “Like us [that is, the French in France], they are lively, quick, intelligent, sardonic, hot-headed, big talkers and very difficult to control once their passions have been set alight. They are fighters *par excellence* and love noise and bustle more than money” (Tocqueville 1973, 88). Elsewhere he characterizes them by such terms as “merry,” “eminently sociable,” “open,” “talkative,” “obliging.” These virtues of the French Canadians are even more striking when they are compared to the Americans. “[The peasant’s] welcome has the frank cordiality which the American lacks; he is polite without servility, and receives you on a footing of equality, but with kind consideration. We were struck by a certain distinguished quality in the manners of those we visited” (Tocqueville 1973, 79). Tocqueville does admit that the *Canadien* “race” appears inferior in learning than the Americans, but on the other hand claims it is “superior when it comes to the qualities of the heart” (Tocqueville 1973, 79). In any case, however, French Canadians can boast physical superiority: “The population seems happy and well-off. The race [*Le sang*] is notably more beautiful than in the United States. The race there is strong, and the women do not have that delicate, sickly look that characterizes most American women” (Tocqueville 1973, 71).

In writing about French Canada, Tocqueville also exhibits a curious Arcadian nostalgia. “In general the people are more moral, more hospitable, more religious than in France” (Tocqueville 1973, 84):

We felt at home, and everywhere we were welcomed as compatriots, children of *old France*, as they called it. In my opinion, this epithet is inappropriate. Old France is in Canada, new France back home. We discovered there, especially in villages at some distance from the towns, the ancient customs, the ancient mores, of France. (Tocqueville 1973, 87)

And even the traces of feudalism that still do exist – the rent for land that was originally granted by the seigneur, the legal requirement to have grain ground at the seigneur’s mill, the duty to hand over a portion of the purchase price to the seigneur





when the land is sold – are presented as being “so slight they are almost unnoticed” (Tocqueville quoting John Neilson, in Tocqueville 1973, 76). Social harmony reigns supreme.

An important aspect of this idealizing historicism relates to the Church. Tocqueville praises the central role of religion in the community and the learning and piety of the priests. “All those [priests] we saw were educated, polite, well behaved. They speak a pure French. In general they are more distinguished than most of the curates of France” (Tocqueville 1973, 84). “I met with several of these priests, and I remain firmly convinced that they are in fact the most distinguished people in the country” (Tocqueville 1973, 88).

However, not all is quite so perfect as these quotations might suggest. Tocqueville returns time and again to the theme of how the survival of the Canadians (that is, the French-speaking *Canadiens*) is threatened by “the English,” who are arriving in increasingly large numbers, own most of the wealth and dominate the public space. The French “live, as it were, as strangers in their own country” (Tocqueville 1973, 93). And one of the main reasons for this is the wavering commitment of the Francophone intelligentsia to the cause: “The instincts of the people are against the English, but many [French] Canadians of the enlightened classes did not seem as eager as we would have thought to preserve intact some part of their origins, and to become a distinct people. To us, it seemed many were not far from letting themselves be willingly assimilated by the English” (Tocqueville 1973, 83). The threat is clear:

We are reaching a moment of crisis. If the Canadians do not emerge from their apathy within two decades, there will no longer be time to do so. Everything proclaims the awakening of this people to be approaching. But if the middling and higher classes of the Canadian population abandon the lower classes in this endeavour, and allow themselves to be swept up in the English wave, the French race in America is lost. (Tocqueville 1973, 80).

Nevertheless, Tocqueville expresses a kind of quixotic optimism:

I cannot believe that [the English and the *Canadiens*] will ever merge, nor that an indissoluble union between them can exist. I still hope the French, despite the conquest, will one day succeed in creating on their own a beautiful empire in the New World, themselves perhaps more enlightened, more moral and happier than their forefathers. (Tocqueville 1973, 70)

Several things are surprising here. First, granted these are not elaborated texts meant for publication, they are nevertheless remarkably crude, very black-and-white. The subtle nuances of the arguments in *Democracy in America* are utterly lacking. Second, the highly Romantic image of Lower Canada that he presents is extremely





conservative, perhaps even reactionary, something unexpected from an author who viewed himself (and is usually regarded) as a liberal. The idealized picture he presents of the colony's inhabitants is very much in a "happy peasants (before the Revolution)" vein. And third, though he is aware that Lower Canada is also a democracy, having been granted a Legislative Assembly more than forty years earlier, and that Francophones play a strong role there – he notes that in the Assembly of 84 members, 64 are "French" and 20 "English" (Tocqueville 1973, 83) – he does not follow this up. It is as though the situation in Lower Canada has no relation whatsoever to "democracy in America." This is doubly ironic in that the original expectations in 1791, at least among the British legislators, had been that English would be the language of debate. However, at the very first session an important item on the agenda was – deciding on the language of debate. And it was agreed, by the Anglophone and Francophone members, that both were acceptable.

Despite his many shrewd observations, then, some very important things escaped Tocqueville's notice, among them the central role of slavery in the United States and the complexities of the Anglophone–Francophone relationship in Lower Canada. There is a curious parallel here to another visitor who turned up in North America only seven years later, Lord Durham. Sent out, like Tocqueville, to make an official report on a particular issue, he spent much less time on his mission (barely more than five months, from May to November of 1838); the report that resulted from his visit was made public some two months after his return to Britain. Alongside many desirable proposals, however, it included his famous characterization of the situation in Lower Canada: "I expected to find a contest between a government and a people: I found two nations warring in the bosom of a single state: I found a struggle, not of principles, but of races" (DCB) – an assessment proved utterly mistaken by the subsequent cooperation between the Canadian Francophones and Anglophones, working together on shared principles, that led only ten years later to the implementation of the very responsible government that Durham had recommended. Like Tocqueville in America, Durham had somehow got a basic fact of the Canadian scene wrong.

Can any moral be drawn from this failure? One is perhaps that "fact-finding" missions, even of nine months' duration, may well miss the wood for the trees. Another is that one's conclusions are inevitably skewed by the people one meets – in Tocqueville's case, to a great extent, types like judges, diplomats, lawyers, "the rich and locally famous" (Damrosch, 19); in Lord Durham's, a preponderance of Anglophones and opponents of the Patriotes. A third is that one carries one's prejudices with one. Yet a fourth might be that something essential about democratic American societies tends to escape the notice of European aristocrats. The list could undoubtedly be extended.



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**DON SPARLING** / attended the University of Toronto and Oxford University. After coming to Czechoslovakia in 1969 he lived and taught in Brno and Prague, first at language schools and from 1977 at the Department of English and American Studies, Masaryk University in Brno, where he was twice Chair. For nine years from 2000 he was Director of Masaryk University's Office for International Studies. Founding President of the CEACS, he is currently its Treasurer. His main fields of interest include Canadian literature (historical fiction), multiculturalism, Native studies and cultural semiotics.





# The Book Cover as an Artistic Statement and a Cultural Phenomenon – A Canadian Example

La couverture de livre comme déclaration artistique et phénomène culturel - un exemple canadien

Nikola Tutek

## Abstract

This paper deals with some basic features of postmodernist book cover designs, the application of the theory of multimodality in book cover design analyses, and, most importantly, the cultural aspect of creation and interpretation of book cover designs. My research and respective results are exemplified by short analyses of cover designs of three collections of short fiction by Alice Munro, which feature the artwork of the Canadian painter Mary Pratt. The focus of analyses is on the interrelations between the artistic and cultural features of both images and texts, and how these interrelations help in establishing the notion of Canadianness.

**Keywords:** multimodality, Alice Munro, Mary Pratt, book cover, Canadianness

## Résumé

Cet article traite de quelques caractéristiques de base des couvertures de livres postmodernistes, de l'application de la théorie de la multimodalité dans les analyses de conception de couvertures de livres et, surtout, de l'aspect culturel de la création et de l'interprétation des couvertures. Mes recherches et résultats respectifs sont illustrés par de brèves analyses de couvertures de trois collections de court métrage d'Alice Munro, qui présentent l'œuvre de la peintre canadienne Mary Pratt. Les analyses portent sur les interrelations entre les caractéristiques artistiques et culturelles des images et des textes, et sur la façon dont ces interrelations aident à établir la notion de canadianité.

**Mots-clés :** multimodalité, Alice Munro, Mary Pratt, couverture de livre, canadianité



## Introduction – A short overview of the development of book cover designs

There are three basic functions of the book cover, the first of which is a practical one. The book cover's function is to bind and protect the printed paper. The second function is artistic and cultural; the book cover should represent the artistic values and the semiotic features of the text it holds in its embrace, and it should make the observer able to identify with his or her expectations of what the book might be about. The third, and the last, is the advertising function. This function uses the second function to boost the sales of the book.

The first book cover designs created to attract “the attention of potential buyers” appeared in the 1890s (Drew 2005). Book cover designs flourished from the early twentieth century on, when the cover design became one of the essential elements of the visual identity of every publication. At the beginning, the objective of the book cover design was to anticipate and introduce the content of the book and to prepare and lure the reader to consume the text. In an attempt to accomplish that, book cover designs were strongly influenced by current artistic trends (i.e. artistic movements like Art Nouveau or Cubism had a strong influence on the choice of typography, the usage of colors, shapes and layouts, the usage of ready-made visual elements like photographs, and other creative choices made by book cover designers).

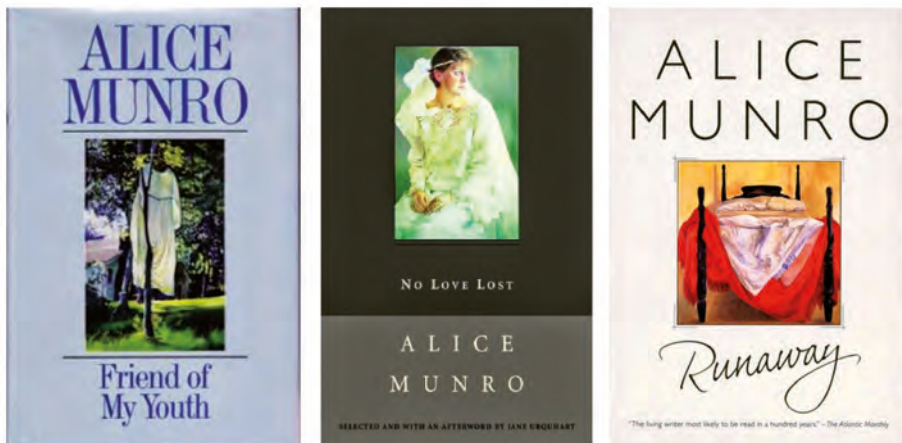
Book cover designs very much changed in the postmodernist period due to two main reasons: firstly, postmodernism as an artistic movement was no longer even closely monolithic and homogeneous, and, secondly, the sway of the needs of the market and the rules of the sales practices have pushed most of the artistic effort into the background. Book cover designs became semantically and structurally more loose, but they also suffered from uniformity which came as a result of the publishers' desire to please as many potential readers as possible.

Due mostly to the fact that the genre of the short story in Canada had become iconic by the end of the twentieth century, Canadian short stories analyzed in this article display cover designs (in Canadian editions) which both follow and defy the rules of post-postmodernist design. While the postmodernist book cover design typically features loose connections between fragments of design and the content of texts, and the design focuses on “subjective interpretation of signs” (Bruinsma 1997), the cover designs for Canadian short story collections remain either very much anchored in the Canadian cultural backgrounds, as in the case of Munro, or they reflect directly the content or the cognitive world of the texts by repetition of the visual artwork from the text on the book cover, as in the case of Margaret Atwood, Diane Schoemperlen, and Frances Itani, or they provide not so loose connections between the visual representation and the fragments of content, as in Bowering's case. However, all



of these book cover styles, in their miming or mocking reality, communicate their undeniable Canadianness to the readers, and in that way they play along with the rules of marketing.

Regarding the unquestionable Canadianness of the three analyzed book cover designs for Munro's short fiction, it is interesting to compare these Canadian book cover designs with their overseas counterparts. Canadian editions feature paintings by Mary Pratt, while the large majority of overseas Munro editions feature visualizations of everyday household objects, for example, cutlery. Although the imagery of overseas book cover designs is semantically similar to their Canadian counterparts, Pratt's paintings strongly communicate 'a very Canadian content,' which might not work that well outside of Canada. Overseas editions of Munro's books, in a way, play it safe by rendering book cover designs which communicate 'something to do with home, and domestic relations from a woman's perspective,' which is one of the main features of Munro's work. This overall homogeneity in creating book cover designs forced upon designers by the rules of a specific market is something that Kreider describes as "inbred design" (Kreider 2013), and neither the overseas nor Canadian book cover designs are immune to that. However, there is one important difference in the cultural function of the described design homogeneity: while the book cover designs of the overseas editions communicate writing usually assigned to Munro, Canadian editions do the same but from a very Canadian point of view, using essentially Canadian imagery.



**Figure 1:** McClelland and Stewart book covers for Alice Munro's collections of short stories featured in this short overview.



**Figure 2:** Overseas book cover designs for Alice Munro's collections of short prose: Czech, Spanish, Italian and Japanese.

## Multimodality and book cover designs

The theory of multimodality is focused on all types of human communication and all the meanings that these types of communication can carry. The theory of multimodality does not revolve around the dichotomy of verbal–visual, but considers forms of human behavior that, in a certain context, communicate meanings with other people. As such, this theory is highly applicable in analyses and interpretation of book cover designs.

In his article “A Multimodal Perspective on Composition” Van Leeuwen proposes three crucial aspects of composition in multimodal analysis, and these are *information value* (which coincides with the placement, or *mise-en-page* in intermediality), *salience* (which in the multimodal theory covers a wide range of terms, ranging from gesture of demonstration to the subjective cognitive process of every reader, which is predetermined by the reader's personal and cultural background), and *framing* (which more or less coincides with framing in multimodal theory) (Van Leeuwen 2003).

Considering the information value, Van Leeuwen states that the layout of a page is firstly divided spatially between the left and the right side; left being the *given*, associated with negative connotations, and the *right* being the new (information), associated with more positive connotations. The second division of the space on the page is vertical; the upper part of the page being the *ideal*, representing positive connotations (position of power, idealism, abstraction and contemplation), and the lower part of the page being the *real* which, in contrast, represents negative connotations (position of low or no power) or notions which are regarded to be based on more realistic attitudes (Van Leeuwen 36). The third, and the last division is that between center and margin. According to Van Leeuwen, those verbal and visual elements which are placed centrally carry more cognitive, semiotic, and



cultural importance; the more central the placing, the more significant is the image. Naturally, if the placing is more peripheral, also the significance of the image is less emphatic, and less disclosed (Van Leeuwen 41). However, this does not mean that the peripherally placed images lose their importance (that would go against the very idea of design) but they rather form a cognitive context for the ideas which are communicated as being the most important. The idea of salience, on the other hand, includes the reader's mind process, a complicated combination of cognitive experiences such as conscious and subconscious knowledge, adopted attitudes, intuition, cultural and personal background, etc., and it basically determines which visual elements of a book cover design are more likely to attract the reader's attention.

The theory of multimodality provides grounds for the interpretation of salience from the point of view of cultural and social studies. In my analyses, I vaguely apply Sarah Pink's (Pink 2008) conclusions drawn from her research into visual ethnography and her view of *place-making*. For example, salience of book covers of Alice Munro's short story collections which feature Pratt's artwork might almost function as postcards for Canadians: Canadian readers might perceive Pratt's image as highly salient because of the cognitive process which tells them 'this is Canadian'. On the other hand, if the same book cover is observed by a reader from a cultural background other than Canadian, he or she might perceive the salience in only one element of Pratt's painting, the one which he or she finds the most familiar, and in that way connect the space of the book cover with the space of their personal experience. To conclude this section, my analysis is based on the literary theory and the theory of multimodality applied in interpreting book cover designs, but it is simultaneously draws from the research practices of cultural and social studies.

## Pratt and Munro: United States of the Canadian mind

Three of Pratt's paintings were used as elements of book cover designs for Munro's short story collections:

1. *Wedding Dress* (1986) on the cover of the short story collection *Friend of my Youth* (1990)
2. *Barby in the Dress She Made Herself* (1986) on the cover of the short story collection *No Love Lost* (2003)
3. *The Bed* (1968) on the cover of the short story collection *Runaway* (2004)





**Figure 3:** Mary Pratt's paintings used as elements of design for book covers of Alice Munro's collections of short prose.

*Wedding Dress* and *Barby in the dress she made herself*, both created in 1986, and *The Bed*, one of her first renowned paintings, all feature some of Pratt's central themes: dresses, gowns, bedclothes, and clothes in general (all of which coincide with Munro's themes of female lives). Reproductions of Pratt's paintings are the most salient visual elements in all three of Munro's book cover designs (due to the shortness of this article, I will not go into details of multimodal analysis of each book cover design). All three book cover designs communicate the following: this is an intrinsically Canadian text, a typical Munrovin text, a text emblematic of Canada.

First I will shed some light on the features of Mary Pratt's artwork and its position in modern Canadian cultural experience. According to Sheila Perry, Mary Pratt has become one of Canada's leading artists, and she "is considered Canada's most illustrious female painter" (Perry 2013). Pratt's work is characterized by several main features. The first is the emblematic status of her work within Canadian culture; each and every painting features realistic scenes from the life in semi-rural Canada, and can easily be recognized by observers as being 'very Canadian'. The second important feature of Pratt's work is her adherence to the artistic style of realism while simultaneously escaping most historical and theoretical classification. The third important feature is the fact that Pratt's photorealism mocks reality by overexploiting 'the perception of the real,' and hence provides an ironic account of many aspects of Canadian life. This is a statement which could easily be applied in describing Munro's literary credo.

Munro's stories display the following important features that make her texts semantically, cognitively, and stylistically compatible with Pratt's paintings:



1. Thematic homogeneity: Munro's stories revolve around several dominant and recurring themes.
2. Pre-production recurrence: I have borrowed the term from the theory of film to explain recurrence in Munro's choice of her characters and locations. Characters recur physically, which is especially apparent in the cycle stories, but they also recur spiritually: many of the characters seem to wander through Munro's stories under different names and facing different existential situations but staying mentally and emotionally consistent with a typically Munroian character. As far as locations are concerned, most of Munro's stories are firmly set in Canada, as confirmed by Löschnigg (Löschnigg 21). Furthermore, the majority of Munro's stories are set in one particular part of Canada, namely, in Southern and Southwestern Ontario, and, more precisely, primarily around her native town of Wingham. Her writing is so deeply rooted in the fate of this part of Canada that it is often referred to as 'Munro country.' However, other parts of Canada are featured in her writing as well (especially Victoria, Vancouver Island), and those stories whose narration partially takes place abroad are always told from a Canadian point of view and are presented through the relation to the Canadian narration.
3. Pen-photographs: I found this term in Löschnigg's seminal work on the Canadian short story, where Löschnigg adopts the term from Nischik in her quotation: "From the beginning, Alice Munro has presented snapshots or 'pen-photographs' which constitute fragments of experience and refer to inherent possibilities rather than offering continuities from which truths can be elicited" (Löschnigg 19). Munro's writing style is very visual, and the mental images are presented like photographs whose meaning is not entirely explained. All this is connected to Munro's peculiar type of literary realism.
4. Deceitful surfaces: The Munroian narrative technique of 'constructing false impressions of reality' is well described by Löschnigg: "A hallmark of these long stories are extended introductions to places, which create an enhanced impression of 'surface' solidity [...]" (Löschnigg 23).

It is not difficult to identify numerous similarities between Alice Munro's and Mary Pratt's artistic creation on the level of content, style, and artistic approach. To further explain the interrelationship between the two artists and their work, I have created the following typology:

- a) Personal relation – Pratt and Munro are good friends in real life
- b) Geographical relation – they both emerged from one country and culture (even though they originally came from different parts of Canada – Pratt was born in Fredericton, New Brunswick)

- c) Ideological relation – they both in their own way talk primarily about the lives of women, and as such could be regarded as feminist
- d) Relation on the level of cultural representation – they are both emblematic representatives of Canadian art, culture, and mentality, and their work in more than one way symbolizes Canada
- e) Artistic relation – which can be observed directly: they share many artistic features, just in different media, for example, Pratt's 'faking reality' formally and semantically coincides with Munro's narrative technique often referred to as the pseudo-realistic style (shaken realism or reality deconstructed mainly by means of the 'Munrobian Switch'<sup>1</sup>), and indirectly (because the connection was established by the choice made by others): three of Pratt's paintings have been chosen by the third party to appear on the book covers for short stories by Munro.

The relation on the level of cultural representation is especially important for this short analysis. To exemplify this point, I will use a painting by yet another Canadian contemporary visual artist, Alvin Richard.



**Figure 4:** Alvin Richard's *Made in Canada* (2014).

From a first glance at his work we can see that he was heavily influenced by Pratt's art. One of his paintings I find especially indicative; it is titled *Made in*

1) Maria Löschnigg in her 2014 seminal work on Canadian short prose *The Contemporary Canadian Short Story in English. Continuity and Change*; Trier: WVT, writes about the 'Munrobian Pattern' (pp. 257–262) to describe the narrative technique of constructing false "impression of 'surface' solidity [...]" (p. 21). By 'Munrobian Switch' I am alluding to changes in narration typical of Munro's writing, which disrupt the impression of surface solidity and deceitful realism.



*Canada* (2014), and, using the an artistic style almost identical to Pratt's, it depicts the first edition of Munro's *Runaway*, the one analyzed in the text above, and on it and behind it, glass jars<sup>2</sup> similar to those that appear in so many of Pratt's paintings. Here we have an interesting combination of meta-referential meaning: the painting refers to Pratt's style, and to Munro's writing. The book depicted again carries one of Pratt's images. If we consider the title *Made in Canada*, everything becomes clear – Pratt and Munro, and the unity of their artistic production, become an emblematic projection of Canadian art, culture, and society. And this is the very essence of the interrelations between the art of Alice Munro and Mary Pratt.

In the final section of this short overview, I will write a few words about how Mary Pratt's paintings found their way to Alice Munro book covers. During my research I was extremely lucky to be able to make contact with the man who actually stood behind the two book cover designs analyzed in this article, namely, Douglas Gibson, the former president and publisher of the McClelland and Stuart Publishing House, a prolific author, and one of the central figures in the history of Canadian publishing. Gibson was the editor who first artistically merged the work of Munro and Pratt by choosing Mary Pratt's paintings for cover designs of the first Canadian editions of *Friend of My Youth* and *Runaway*. Gibson was not in charge of the selection of Pratt's *Barby In The Dress She Made Herself* for the cover design of the New Canadian Library edition of Munro's *No Love Lost*, but he wholeheartedly approved this choice.

In our e-mail correspondence during February 2017, Gibson provided me with the relevant historical insight into the Canadian book cover design practice. Gibson writes: "After the Canadian artists known as The Group of Seven rose to prominence after 1910, until roughly 1940, their art was routinely used for the covers of books that were to be signaled as 'Canadian.' Some artists, in fact, were encouraged to illustrate and design such books." Gibson, as the publisher of McClelland & Stewart (which at the time proudly used the sub-title The Canadian Publishers) "was keen to establish that same sort of link between these two Canadian art forms – superb short stories, and excellent magic realist paintings that were reaching great heights together late in the 20th century."

For the very first book by Munro that Gibson published, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, instead of merely hiring a book-designing artist to illustrate a scene from the book, Gibson "went out and expensively purchased the right to reproduce a very popular print by the magic realist artist Ken Danby. The combination of the title and the Danby portrait of a pensive girl sitting on the grass was very effective." In the time when *The Love of A Good Woman* was in its early stages, but with the title decided, Gibson "had visited the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and came across the 19<sup>th</sup> century painting

2) Mason jars were made in Canada by Consumer Glass Co., and are no longer in production. These jars were at one time an indispensable part of almost every Canadian pantry.



of a sleeping woman, *Le Repos*, by Paul Peel.” He had decided to use that painting for *The Love of A Good Woman*, “and that set the practice of putting realist paintings on Munro’s covers.”

Later Gibson has focused on the artwork of Mary Pratt because she was a distinguished part of the group of ‘Magic Realists’ which emerged in the 1970s and thereafter in Canada. He has chosen Pratt’s paintings for Alice Munro’s covers “because these two emerging arts – magically realistic short stories, and superbly understated realistic paintings – seemed to have supported each other.”

I will conclude this short consideration of interrelations between literature, book cover design and the construction of Canadianness with an illustrating claim from Gibson’s book *Stories about Storytellers*, in which the author reveals the following:

I did the odd useful thing, like finding wonderful paintings by people like Alex Colville, Christopher and Mary Pratt, and Paul Peel, to give the books the right, elegant look. I knew that we had succeeded when other Canadian publishers started using Canadian magic realist paintings on their covers, as if waving and shouting, ‘Hey, this author’s kind of like Alice Munro!’ without the embarrassing business of having to state the claim openly, in words. (Gibson 365)

## Conclusions

A successful book cover design efficiently draws viewers’ attention and establishes communication with potential readers. This communication is typically based on two features of the book cover design: the first is the aesthetic reach of the design which attracts attention with its visual layout that might be perceived as *beautiful, unusual, shocking*, etc., and the second is exploitation of elements of cultural and semantic imagery shared by the story-world of a book and potential readers. Canadian editions of the three collections of short stories by Alice Munro which employ book cover designs that use the artwork of Mary Pratt are an exceptional example of the latter group of book cover designs. The three analyzed book cover designs unite these two emblematic Canadian artists, who, each in her own artistic medium, create images of a typically Canadian life. Furthermore, Munro’s short fiction and Pratt’s painting provide interpretations of life, that is, a world-view, which is, in its approach, form and essence, truly Canadian. Basic features of that world-view expressed artistically are, on the semantic level, the exploration of identity issues, isolation and loneliness, the need for change, but also of the irreparability of the human existential situation. On the level of style, features of this artistic approach are the deceptiveness of the interpretation of reality and a particular type of sensitivity, which, usually in few



words, discloses the deepest and the darkest features of human existence. Such a stylistic approach allows Canadian art to often reveal the complexity by (often repeatedly) stating the obvious, thus producing a very specific humorous effect.<sup>3</sup>

The plethora of cultural, artistic and semantic interrelations between the art of Pratt and Munro empower the three analyzed book cover designs to further construct and define the modern notion of Canadianness. As such, these book cover designs are certainly one of the most successful in their communication with the readers and they provide grounds for literary research and analyses.

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3) In that sense, it is interesting to mention the short film *Canada Vignettes: The Egg* (1979), produced by the National Film Board (directed by Robert Bélisle and Jean-François Pouliot); in 60 seconds the film summarizes all that has been previously stated about distinctive 'Canadianness' in art and beyond. *Canada Vignettes* is available on-line at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Czwa-PEi8Gw>



**NIKOLA TUTEK** / is an Assistant Professor at the University of Rijeka, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of English Language and Literature. After graduating from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Rijeka, Department of English and Croatian Language and Literature, in 2003 he acquired a diploma in Hungarian Language at the Balassi Bálint Language Institute in Budapest, Hungary in 2005. In 2011 he started working as a foreign lecturer of Croatian at the Baltic Federal University of Immanuel Kant in Kaliningrad, Russian Federation. A year later he was employed as an Assistant at the Department of English (Sub-division English Literature) of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Rijeka. In 2018 he successfully defended his doctoral thesis at the Karl-Franzens University of Graz, Austria. The title of his doctoral thesis is "Verbal and Textual Interrelations in Canadian Short Prose." He is also the author various short stories and plays in Croatian, English, and Hungarian.





# Canada: The Inconspicuous Silent Dreamer on the Other-side of the Americas

Le Canada : le reveur silencieux et imperceptible  
sur l'autre côté des Amériques

Krisztina Kodó

## Abstract

Canada and the United States share a geographical continent and a history which reaches back to the British Monarchy as its earliest origins and mother country. The US creates and formulates its very distinct American Dream, already embedded in its constitution and its cultural narratives. Canada has its own set of blood-linked issues with the French (Acadiens), the siege of Quebec (the Battle on the Plains of Abraham), the War of 1812, the Métis Rebellion and the execution of Louis Riel, but no revolution or civil war. The historical echoes in this case are, however, muted, silenced, and the attention of the outside world is directed toward the extrovert neighbour, the US. Why? Canada is the silent and introvert partner on the northern side of the continent. What makes Canada more or less distinct from the Americas? How much of the Americas is embedded in the Canadian psyche? Where is the “Canadian Dream”? The article aims to examine various literary and artistic sources in order to establish how these cultures are “strung together then woven into a tapestry and the design is what makes us [Canadians] more” (Shane Koyczan).

**Keywords:** American Dream, Canadian dream, being Canadian, identity markers

## Resumé

Le Canada et les États Unis partagent un continent géographique et de une histoire qui remontent à la Monarchie Britannique, considérée comme pays des origines et mère patrie. Les États Unis ont créé et ont donné une définition du rêve américain bien particulière, incluse dans sa constitution et sa culture de la narration. Le Canada a ses propres tragédies sanglantes avec les Français (les Acadiens), le siège du Québec (la bataille sur les plaines d'Abraham), la guerre de 1812, la rébellion des Métis et l'exécution de Louis Riel, mais il n'a connu ni révolution ni guerre civile. Au lieu de cela, les échos du monde extérieur ont été dirigés contre les États Unis. Pourquoi? Le Canada est resté un partenaire silencieux et introverti au nord du continent. En quoi le Canada revêt une place plus ou moins à part aux Amériques? Dans quelle mesure l'idée des Amériques est-elle incorporée dans le psychisme canadien? Où se trouve « le rêve canadien »? L'essai veut examiner différentes sources





littéraires et artistiques aboutissant à ce que « strung together then woven into a tapestry and the design is what makes us [Canadians] more » (Shane Koyczan).

**Mots-clés :** Le rêve américain, le rêve canadien, être canadien, identité attributive.

The discovery and settling of the North American continent was a slow but gradual progress that presupposes surprising twists and turns during the course of history. The aim of this article is to examine when and where two great nations – the United States and Canada – that cohabit the North American continent evolved and how this development came to be as it is today. The American Dream has become a cultural narrative that still defines the American peoples, but does Canada have a Canadian Dream, too? And, broadly speaking, is Canada still considered the young adolescent and silent partner within this bizarre relationship that Canadian artists metaphorically envisaged? If not then how has Canadian identity come to define itself? Since multiculturalism and coming to terms with Canadian identity is still a rather prickly issue that remains on the agenda and continues to spark heated discussions.

Canada celebrated its 150th anniversary of Confederation last year just as Donald Trump became President of Canada's big southern neighbour. As a consequence, many have argued that the former "American Dream" since has moved north to become the Canadian Dream. The Canadian Dream has always been closer to what Jeremy Rifkin called the European Dream and hence he argues that Canadians are in the midst of a transatlantic debate: the American Dream of individual fulfilment (the "pursuit of happiness") versus the European Dream of community (Rifkin 2005). Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's (2016) speech in Davos also seems to support this. Justin Trudeau described Canada as "the first post-national state," with "no core identity, no mainstream" (Malcolm 2016) – which would lead us to the question: what defines a nation a nation in the 21st century?

Canada is, according to several international surveys, the most tolerant country in the world (CTV News). Canadians see themselves firstly as citizens of the world. In 1971 Pierre Trudeau, the current Prime Minister's father, described the Canadian being as follows: "There is no such thing as a model or ideal Canadian," continuing, "What could be more absurd than the concept of an 'all Canadian' boy or girl? A society which emphasizes uniformity is one which creates intolerance and hate" (Trudeau 1971). Many would disagree with this suggestion and argue that Canada does have a history of its own and values to support this image, as will be illustrated in what follows here.



Definitions of the Canadian being are many and varied, dating back to the decades before 1867 and up to the present time. The historical development of Canada goes hand-in-hand with that of the United States of America. Why? Simply because we are speaking of one continent, that of North America. Though the two countries have taken a manifestly different path during the course of history, its earliest origins are the same. In order to understand when and how the two countries began to diverge and create separate nations, in what follows I think it essential to provide an overview of the distant past.

The earliest immigrants to this continent were the Aboriginal Peoples, who are thought to have crossed the Bering Land Bridge some fifteen thousand years ago, or even earlier on the basis of archaeological findings, by following the migrating animal herds. These nomadic tribes did not create permanent settlements, but gradually dispersed and in separating continued their slow but gradual migration further north, west and south. These tribal Indian and Inuit nations lived virtually undisturbed until the arrival of the white man from the European continent in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

The great geographical discoveries began during the European Renaissance era. This age opened new horizons in the intellectual development of Humanism, education and the individual human world view. We all know some of the most noteworthy adventurers whose names and achievements have come to be identified with the discovery of the North American continent: John Cabot, Jacques Cartier, Samuel de Champlain, Giovanni da Verranazo, and, of course, Christopher Columbus. These men came not only to see and experience, but ultimately to claim the lands they have discovered in the name of the monarchy that financed their expeditions. These land claims by the great European monarchies laid the foundation not only for future settlements, but also for the oncoming power struggles that led to further conflicts, wars, revolutions, displacements and further immigration north and south within the continent.

The historical developments that constituted the settling of the North American continent clearly show a common origin. But by the end of the eighteenth century, with the War of Independence in 1776, the American colonists gradually diverge and the Canadian and American colonists move in opposite directions. According to James W. Dean and Vivek H. Dehejia, “Canadians are the original anti-Americans; the ones who rejected the American revolution, stayed loyal to Great Britain and continue to insist on their distinctiveness from their southern partner” (2006, 314). Loyalty to the mother country and the Crown is strengthened by the historical fact that tens of thousands of loyalists migrated to British North America between 1783 and 1784. Thirty thousand Loyalists settled in the Maritime Provinces alone (Canadian Encyclopedia). This sole fact illustrates that for many thousands,



regardless of their nationality, a symbolic attachment to the Monarchy meant security and stability.

The American colonies achieved independence and the Declaration of Independence (1776) comes to contain those Puritan ideas that are considered the root of the American Dream. The most significant part that is still retained in cultural memory is embedded in the opening clauses of the Declaration: «We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness». These thoughts represent America's creative destiny. "For the Founding Fathers the 'pursuit of happiness' meant action in the public and private spheres in order to create a better society" (Dean and Dehejia 2006, 365). How was the American Dream achieved? The historical facts themselves highlight this general optimistic improvement through the discovery and exploration, the settling of the frontier, and the major inventions (e.g. the steam engine, railroads, the automobile, building of bridges, the motion picture camera, space rockets, etc.) (Stiuliuc 2011, 366). This phenomena certainly influenced the average American and even added a further boost to his/her self-esteem. The American Dream came parallel with the tradition of conquering frontiers, first from Europe to America, then from the east coast to the Wild West, and from nature to that of civilization, enabling man to overcome his own limitations and boundaries (Stiuliuc 2011, 370).

Throughout the centuries the United States has been referred to as a melting pot for all its immigrants. According to James Truslow Adams the belief of the American Dream for the individual man "was not a logical concept of thought, [but] a religious emotion, a great act of faith, a courageous leap into the dark unknown" (Adams 1931, 198). In this simplified or simplistic narrative, Americans are clearly adventurers whose fearless endeavours in conquering the frontier produce outstanding heroes. How do the Canadians tackle the adventurous and reckless feature of their closest neighbour? Canada's sense of security was its connection with the Monarchy; nevertheless, sharing a continent with the US urged Canadians to create a constitution of their own, which was only achieved in 1867. The decades before and after 1867 stimulated Canada to establish its own identity and create heroes of its own making. And in the meantime they are simply worried onlookers in this silent game of power struggle as the US evolves into an ever growing power on the North American continent. As Robertson Davies said: "This is not a country you love, it is a country you worry about" (Gray 2016, Loc 62). Obviously, the insecurity that characterizes the Canadians in a general sense keeps them in check. This inevitably allows an inferiority complex to surface, namely, the notion of being second-rate beside the United States. No wonder the metaphorical analogy of Canada as an adolescent emerged of which perhaps the most popular example is Earle Birney's poem "Canada: Case History: 1945". Here,



Canada is metaphorically drawn as a “high-school land” highlighting the features that characterize a teenager as

This is the case of a high-school land,  
deadset in adolescence;  
loud treble laughs and sudden fists,  
bright cheeks, the gangling presence.  
This boy is wonderful at sports  
and physically quite healthy. (Birney 1977, 40)

But the irony continues as he gives prominence to the mixed family relationships with unmistakeable references to the US as the “Uncle,” his Quebecois “French mother” and “He’s really much more like his father” being an undoubted implication of England. Nevertheless, the overt message of a Canadian dream that Birney conveys is that “He [Canada] wants to be different from everyone else and daydreams of winning the global race” (Birney 1977, 40). But Canada needs to grow up first.

And has Canada grown up since? That is a matter of perception, naturally Canada has undergone many improvements and developments since 1867, and has “grown into its own” (Cohen 2015). But Davies also added that “we’re a rather plain-headed race on the whole as compared, for instance, with, probably, the Americans, but inwardly we’re all coloured bright red with big dobs of purple” (Drainie 1979, 177). Here, Davies is obviously referring to the “WASP stock” as being perhaps seemingly “plain” on the surface, but inwardly with a lot of zest and bravado. This certainly suggests that there is more to Canadians than meets the eye, something that according Davies even they do not seem to recognize: “we’ve got a fantastic sort of fossilized past here. We always talk about ourselves as a country with a great future, but we never talk about ourselves as a country with a sort of living past” (Cameron 1971, 75). Canada’s past, however, is hardly known outside Canada’s borders and this may be one of the reasons why Canadians constantly compare themselves to others. This notion of Canadian history being unknown outside Canada is also alluded to by Robert Cohen in his documentary, *On Being Canadian*. Pierre Trudeau’s famous comparison that “once likened Canada to a mouse sleeping with an elephant, who fears that the tiniest move of the elephant may crush him” reflects on the Canadian-American relationship (Dean and Dehejia 2006, 314). This metaphorical relationship of the two countries has been a source that many writers adhered to in the past decades.

The American Declaration of Independence gave the Canadians an added boost in wanting to secure their own territories; nevertheless it took almost a hundred years for this to take shape. In 1867, the “British North America Act sailed through



Westminster Parliament, and the Canadian Confederation became a legal entity” (Gray 2016, Loc 463). In London George-Étienne Cartier said the following:

We have founded a great empire which will extend from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean; we intend that all that immense territory will be well governed not merely as a selfish principle as applied to, but in order to add to the power and to the prosperity of the Mother country. (2016, Loc 464).

With Confederation Cartier achieved his goal and created a country, which was a “political unity where the different peoples could cohabit and protect their own culture” (2016, Loc 479). G. E. Cartier’s main concern was to see French culture, tradition and language given a firm and permanent basis on which it could strengthen and expand without any obstacles. In time this would become a template for federalism beyond Canadian borders. Interestingly, Cartier argued that the “unity of races was utopian,” therefore impossible (2016, Loc 485). This seems to suggest that Cartier saw the drawbacks of the American ‘melting pot’ system, and as a Frenchman, the idea of giving up his culture and language was inconceivable. Hence, Cartier wanted to ensure that French language and culture remain intact and not be “melted into” the WASP base stock of mid-nineteenth-century Canada. In 1867 the Dominion of Canada was still not an entirely independent country since the British Monarchy remained the Mother country. Canada had no say in its foreign affairs and remained in British hands until the Westminster Statute of 1931. And the country was a patchwork of English-speaking and French-speaking peoples, coupled with many and sundry marginalized Indigenous groups, and above all “had a neighbour that was waiting for the Confederation to fall apart” (2016, Loc 538). The *New York Times* stated that the Dominion will surely “fail” and when that does occur “a process of peaceful absorption will give Canada her proper place in the Great North American republic” (Gray 2016, Loc 542). The threat of an American expansion seems to have been an acute concern on the part of the Canadians, who felt the need to stabilize their political position. In this context, one crucial issue was the creation of the Confederation, which would circumscribe Canada and give it a legal format while, furthermore, providing the newly-established nation with its own set of symbols to enforce its individual status and also its symbolic links with the mother country, the English Monarchy. One obvious and unique symbol, according to Charlotte Gray, that was to be found everywhere from east to west across the Dominion, was a picture of Queen Victoria as a sturdy image of Canadian federalism (2016, Loc 546). This was obviously one of the most important differences between Canadians and Americans, and one image of the “fossilized past” that Robertson Davies refers to in his previous quotation. These emblematic features strengthened the ties with the Monarchy on the one hand, but on the other hand they



were essential for the majority of the WASP population to ensure that they in fact belonged and could identify with a greater symbolic establishment.

But there were other notable images with which Canadians could identify from the time of its earliest settling, among them, the distinctive features that defined the landscape, geography. The immense spaces highlighted and enhanced the physical strength and power of nature as a dominant feature of the landscape. The North, the Wilderness and the endless geographical spaces became a myth that man strove to conquer. This was, however, not the American frontier. The image of the sturdy Canadian, according to Margaret Atwood, is linked to survival, which she explained in the following:

our stories are likely to be tales not of those who made it but of those who made it back, from the awful experience – the North, the snowstorm, the sinking ship – that killed everyone else. The survivor has no triumph or victory but the fact of his survival. (Atwood 1972, 265–66)

The concept of sheer physical survival when confronted with the natural elements affirmed Canada's uniqueness in its depictions of its rugged landscape and the many references to the country as the "Great White North" or the "True North." These are references that came into being in the nineteenth century during the time of Confederation when an identification with the landscape was necessary in order to develop the image of a race of men with the strength of iron and steel (Berger 1966, 84). The depiction of a landscape that was empty, barren, and overpowering, in contrast to the well-tilled fields of Europe, urged artists and painters to approach their portrayal of the Canadian landscape from a different perspective that showed no evidence of an Indigenous presence and hardly any trace of urbanization or industrialization. Presentation of an empty landscape, therefore, helped to highlight the immense power and spirituality of the natural elements. Notable artists of the early twentieth century as Emily Carr and The Group of Seven were looking for that particular vision in their portrayal that would differentiate Canada not only from the Americans, but also from European trends and standards that were considered outdated. As historian Daniel Francis states, "The Group claimed to be creating not just art but a new national consciousness...In this respect, the Group perfectly matched the spirit of their times" (Francis 1997, 141).

These artists were in fact looking inward while providing Canada and the Canadians with an outward identity. Carr's images ideally reflected the huge dense, dark and sombre forests of British Columbia – such as *Tree Trunk* (1931), *Zunoqua of the Cat Village* (1931) or *Strangled by Growth* (1931) ("Emily Carr Expositions") – on the one hand, but later also gave way to portraying the vast, light, open skies



that virtually opened up to the universe as the *Edge of the Forest* (1935), *Strait of Juan de Fuca* (1936), and *Above the Gravel Pit* (1937) (“Emily Carr Expositions”). Each painting created an individually unique depiction of western Canada. The landscape portrayed by Carr and The Group of Seven, therefore, depicted the regional attributes of the country illustrating that there are different regions to this vast land. Carr’s home terrain was the great British Columbian forests, while The Group moved gradually northward to Algoma country (northern Ontario), north of Algonquin Park, above Georgian Bay and east of Lake Superior. Another region the artists enjoyed exploring and found inspiration was the north shore of Lake Superior. In their exploration of Lake Superior they were able to discover new sources of visual inspiration. The artists of The Group believed that nature was more than simply a visual feast of form and colour, and sought in their work, like other landscape artists of similar belief, like the English Romantics (J. M. W. Turner and John Constable), to transcend mere physical description of the outside world. They regarded nature as a powerful spiritual force. Through their art, the Canadian landscape and the natural elements were rediscovered and elevated to heights that clearly labelled nature and geography as a distinctive marker of identity. Paintings such as Emily Carr’s *Forest, British Columbia* (1931–2), Tom Thomson’s *The Jack Pine* (1916–17) or Arthur Lismer’s *September Gale, Georgian Bay* (1921), accordingly, became an expression of Canadian identity, a steadfast and unique depiction of the geography that defines this land.<sup>1</sup>

The movement from a physical space to that of a mental one, as illustrated above on the basis of landscape art, shows that space, as Atwood said, reflects the “state of mind, as the space you inhabit not just with your body but with your head” (Atwood 2004, 18). Atwood’s observation is an obvious distinguishing marker that highlights the differences that characterize Canadians and Canadian mentality. Furthermore, it is not only art that projects the state of mind but, according to Atwood, also literature, which “is not only a mirror; it is also a map, a geography of the mind. Our literature is one such map, if we can learn to read it as the product of who and where we have been” (Gray 2016, Loc 2690). The metaphorical “map” that Atwood alludes to defines the Canadian image with the intention of distinguishing it from other nations’ images, especially that of the United States.

These ideas illuminate the fact that Canadian identity is still considered a problematic issue, and has been ever since the time of Confederation when Canada made too much of an effort to try and define itself. How may one go about formulating the Canadian dream? Can we speak of it at all? We always speak and refer to the American dream, which we try to understand and define over and over again, and realize that it has developed different layers of meanings since the original seventeenth century ideological concept

1) To view paintings please see Works cited section for appropriate internet links.





defined as the “Protestant work ethic.” This is no surprise since each and every culture undergoes continual and constant change as it formulates itself.

In the case of Canada an interesting and thought provoking reference is Peter C. Newman’s quip, “This is the only country on earth whose citizens dream of being Clark Kent instead of superman” (2016, Loc 70). This idea suggests favouring the second rate, the insignificant, and even hints at hiding behind the image of a great figure, hence “superman” in this instance. And to continue this line of thought, Newman ironically points to the introvert feature of the Canadian compared to the extrovert American, hence the metaphorical figure of “Superman.”

Another analogy that may be linked to Newman’s reference is the Prufrockian image of T. S. Eliot’s famous modernist poem, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. Prufrock is the insignificant protagonist, who remains in the background:

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;  
Am an attendant lord, one that will do  
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,  
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,  
Deferential, glad to be of use,  
Politic, cautious, and meticulous;  
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;  
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—  
Almost, at times, the Fool. (Eliot)

And this is because of his insecurity, inferiority complex and low self-esteem. These are generally considered to be Canadian attributes. The image of “the Fool” in Eliot’s poem is, to quote from the poem, “politic, cautious and meticulous,” but also “at times ... ridiculous,” like the figure of the Fool who hides his uncertainty and mediocrity by presenting another face to the outside world (this is the funny and pleasant Fool).

Being funny, pleasant and humorous is also a Canadian characteristic, which may be linked to one of the questions raised in Robert Cohen’s film, *Being Canadian* (2015), namely, “what is it about Canada that creates so many funny people?” (Cohen 2015). Some of the major points brought up were that Canadians are altogether pleasant individuals, that they use humour at the cost of themselves, through humour they can strike back at the Americans, and to top it all curling is considered the national game, which is “cold, polite, and boring” (Cohen 2015). It is then no coincidence that Canada has produced some of the best international comedians,<sup>2</sup> in the past decades.

2) Just a few of the funniest Canadian comics and actors, who have won international acclaim outside their native country: Dan Aykroyd, John Candy, Jim Carrey, Leslie Nielsen, Mike Myers, Eugene Levy and Russell Peters (“Canadian comedians and comic actors”).





However, “Canada’s love-hate relationship with the United States” does exist (Cohen 2015). There is a strong sense of fear of being second rate, which is perhaps the reason why Canadians constantly compare themselves to others, hence mostly Americans (Cohen 2015). These are national character stereotypes, according to which “Canadians are nice, Americans are brash, the French are arrogant” (McIntyre). To what extent this actually represents the individual is questionable, but the usual answers are “as Canadian as possible under the circumstances,” or “we’re not Americans” (Cohen 2015). This also involves a certain stance with regard to the significant component of the other-side that overpowers and dominates. Hence the well-known analogies to Canada being a child or adolescent teenager, who still has a lot to learn about the ways of the world. To further enlarge the Prufrockian analogy, one needs to also mention a general attribute, namely, that Canadians from a standard, general view are considered boring and unimaginative compared to the ever active and agile Americans. With so many negative labels attached it is no wonder that Canadians have been more or less marginalized on the continent. But authors do tend to imply that there might be a definition of Canada if “we just got over our loser mentality and tried a bit harder” (2016, Loc 74). Canada, therefore, seems to defy definition, as it does not seem to have a “master narrative for Canadian history” (2016, Loc 74). And what Canada lacks must obviously be made up for by giving its identity, and soul greater attention.

This soul, however, as Elspeth Cameron argues, is to be found in the music, literature, painting, history and popular culture of this country (Cameron, back cover). The soul or souls that define Canada as a country are the outstanding individuals who may be defined as heroes or icons, or simply people who made and make things happen, those who search for a vision that changes and mould national identity. The list of great personalities is long; however, the names that are chosen in each case varies from author to author. Charlotte Gray in *The Promise of Canada*, chose for instance individuals who helped shape the country as George-Etienne Cartier (1814–1873), Samuel Benfield Steele (1848–1919), Emily Carr (1871–1945), Harold Innis (1894–1952), Tommy Douglas (1904–1986), Margaret Atwood (1939–), Bertha Wilson (1923–2007), Elijah Harper (1949–2013), and Preston Manning (1942–). The list is obviously subjective, nevertheless, well illustrates that Canada does have its set of heroes and icons whose individual stories highlight the evolution of Canada over the past 150 years.

Is Canada then the inconspicuous silent dreamer on the northern half of the North American continent? The word, inconspicuous, meaning invisible or hardly visible, is perhaps the most appropriate in this instance, because beside the extrovert US there really is no space left for two extrovert nations on the continent. And because there is an American cultural narrative, the American dream, should the Canadians as the



simple image of the “mouse” just copy the “elephant”?! Would it be worthwhile at all? In their outlook Canadians are similar to Western countries, but in the collective consciousness they require their individual heroes and the natural elements. This is what ultimately makes Canada what it is today.

Nonetheless, the idea that the “country might fall apart remains one of the few binding national myths” (Gray 2016, Loc 125). This emerged most strongly during the time of the Quebec referendums on Sovereignty in 1980 and 1995. As a logical conclusion of the above ideas I find that it is basically impossible to define the Canadian being and the Canadian dream, as both entities are in a continuous development and change. But the collective self is defined by the individual artists, writers, sports personalities, who are able to capture the momentum.

An initiative that was highly successful and focused on highlighting Canadian culture and way of life were the advertisements of the Canadian beer company Molson. The company launched two marketing schemes, the “I Am” (1993) and the “Rant” (2000) campaigns, which “highlights and refutes a number of characteristics stereotypically associated with American perceptions of Canadian life,” while simultaneously “represent stereotypically Canadian perceptions of Canadian life” (Wagman 2002, 85). The text of the “Rant” is simple, and very pointedly specifies the identity markers:

Hey. I’m not a lumberjack, or a fur trader... and I don’t live in an igloo or eat blubber, or own a dogsled... and I don’t know Jimmy, Sally or Suzy from Canada, although I’m certain they’re really, really nice.

I have a Prime Minister, not a President. I speak English and French, NOT American. and I pronounce it ABOUT, NOT A BOOT.

I can proudly sew my country’s flag on my backpack. I believe in peace keeping, NOT policing. DIVERSITY, NOT assimilation, AND THAT THE BEAVER IS A TRULY PROUD AND NOBLE ANIMAL. A TOQUE IS A HAT, A CHESTERFIELD IS A COUCH, AND IT IS PRONOUNCED ‘ZED’ NOT ‘ZEE’, ‘ZED’! CANADA IS THE SECOND LARGEST LANDMASS! THE FIRST NATION OF HOCKEY! AND THE BEST PART OF NORTH AMERICA!

MY NAME IS JOE! AND I AM CANADIAN!

Thank you. (Molson “Canadian”)

The advertisement begins with “Joe Canadian” acting somewhat shy and uncertain as he steps on stage, which seems to be a movie theatre. The Canadian flag can be seen



on the screen behind him. He begins listing the stereotypes, then gradually raises his voice and the tone becomes more forceful (this is marked with the capitalization of the text). When he reaches the “social” elements (“diversity not assimilation”) he becomes more demonstrative and the final elements raise the pitch of his voice to a maximum as he virtually screams the final words. After pronouncing his name and nationality Joe whispers “Thank you” and the Canadian beer cap, a stylized maple leaf appears on the screen (Molson). The popularity of the ad was awe-inspiring and brought Jeff Douglas, the actor playing “Joe Canadian,” astonishing fame. What did Molson achieve? It was a highly effective marketing strategy on the one hand, but also a “strategy of alignment with important signifiers of the Canadian way of life” (Wagman 2002, 87). The ad made Canadian culture visible and audible, the “fossilized past” Davies spoke of became a concrete cultural entity that identifies the Canadian being.

The Canadian dream as such, therefore, does not seem to exist, though many and varied expressions of the Canadian being do. A more recent example on identifying the Canadian is a piece by Shane Koyczan, a poet and spoken-word artist, who performed his poem *We Are More* at the opening ceremony of the 2010 Vancouver Olympics. This performance is still available on YouTube, in which the Yellowknife-born poet appeared on the Vancouver stage surrounded by literally thousands of people from all over the world. Then a few moments of silence followed and he began in a voice that was somewhat awed and mesmerizing:

But we are more  
than genteel or civilized  
we are an idea in the process  
of being realized  
we are young  
we are cultures strung together  
then woven into a tapestry  
and the design  
is what makes us more  
than the sum total of our history... (Koyczan *We are More*)

As in the previous example, the language is very simple and direct; Koyczan lists some of the main clichés and stereotypical elements of Canada, including the obligatory hockey, fishing, maple syrup, tree planting, and whale-watching. This stereotyping is so effective that by the time he reaches the final line the audience is roaring in ecstasy. The shared sense of national well-being that he was able to trigger was a rare moment for Canadians. This collective enthusiasm is extremely moving as



you watch the performance on YouTube. But the effect is again similar as it manages to magnify the major Canadian cultural entities. This straightforward poem is able to connect with each individual and trigger the kind of response in the Canadian collective consciousness that creates a strong sense of Canadian wellbeing. And this, in the end effect, goes beyond that of an American Dream.

## Conclusion

Canada, the “inconspicuous silent dreamer” has undergone many changes since 1867, in terms of what Canadian identity signifies, and perhaps even more than the Fathers of Confederation ever conceived. This country, then, cannot boast with a cultural narrative, like its southern neighbour, since it does not have a Canadian dream, a collective dream. However, based on the many and varied examples presented in the article tends to suggest that perhaps Canadians do not even require this at all. What is it that Canadians do have? They have their own individual dreams though these may be silent and inconspicuous dreams that reflect upon the individual cultural desires of the many cultures, which are introvert and basically indistinct to the outside world. These are the silent dreams of the individuals, who look inward and “derive their identity from their sense of self rather than the dominant culture” (Gray 2016, Loc 4724). And as Koyczan states, this is a “tapestry” of “cultures strung together,” a colourful tapestry that signifies the different cultures rather than blending them into one cultural entity, which distinguishes Canada from the US or any other country in the world. What makes Canada distinctly Canadian on the other-side of the Americas? The various bits and pieces of uniquely Canadian paraphernalia given expression through its art, literature, music, advertisements, etc. that are loaded with meaning for Canadians, and only Canadians. And this is what Douglas Coupland defines as the “secret handshake” conveying the singular history and self-image of Canadians (Gray 2016, Loc 4754). The inconspicuous silent dreamer on the other-side of the Americas has in fact become a force, therefore, that is able to create a bridge to the collective unconscious in order to raise a strong sense of togetherness, hence identity, in its Canadian peoples.



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**KRISZTINA KODÓ** / is currently full professor and Department Chair of the Department of English Language and Literature at Kodolányi University of Applied Sciences, Hungary. Her MA (1992) and PhD (2002) dissertations focused on Canadian literature, culture and the arts, which she received from Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. Her main field of research encompasses American and Canadian Studies (multicultural identities, the Northern myth, Native literatures, contemporary Canadian drama and poetry, regional literatures) and Irish Studies (multicultural theatre, cultural identities, contemporary Irish theatre). She wrote her "habilitation" dissertation in 2012 – titled *Variations on a Canadian Theme: Identities, Icons, Stereotypical Images and the Northern Myth* – and she successfully defended it in 2013, receiving her title in 2014.





# Constructing Diasporic Identities in Austin Clarke's *The Origin of Waves*

## Construction des identités diasporiques dans *The Origin of Waves* d'Austin Clarke

Tanja Cvetković

### Abstract

The paper examines how traumatic experiences shape diasporic subjects' identities in a host country and examines how other types of memory influence the construction of identity in a diaspora. By way of a close analysis of *The Origin of Waves*, a 1997 novel written by Canadian writer Austin Clarke, who was born in Barbados, the author shows that homeland experience is important for the formation of diasporic identity as life in a new environment play itself out against the memory of another environment. The experience is problematized when it is marked by trauma which results in a more complex and difficult integration in a host country. The paper shows how Clarke's novel challenges the fixed self and how the frozen and rigid identity becomes a matter of dynamic construction and self-fashioning through the process of migration.

**Keywords:** place of origin, nostalgic memories, narrative memories, cultural memories, colonial memories, diaspora, homelands.

### Résumé

Cet article examine comment les expériences traumatiques façonnent les identités des sujets diasporiques dans le pays d'accueil, ainsi que les autres types de mémoires qui influencent la construction de l'identité en diaspora. En analysant minutieusement le texte du roman *The Origin of Waves*, l'auteur montre que l'expérience acquise dans le pays d'origine est importante pour la formation de l'identité diasporique parce que la vie dans un nouvel environnement se déroule parallèlement à la mémoire de l'autre environnement. L'expérience devient problématique quand elle est marquée par un traumatisme qui a pour conséquence une intégration plus compliquée et plus difficile dans le pays d'accueil. La présentation de l'identité diasporique que Clarke a proposée dans son roman représente un exemple de transformation du soi diasporique, fait d'origines multiples, en un soi fluide.

**Mots-clés :** lieu d'origine, mémoires nostalgiques, mémoires narratives, mémoires culturelles, mémoires coloniales, diaspora, patries





The paper examines how immigrant experience in a diaspora shapes diasporic subjects' identities in a host country and how different types of memories influence the construction of identity in Austin Clarke's novel *The Origin of Waves*. In this novel Clarke presents how his fictional characters negotiate identity in a host country – Canada – as well as in their experience at home – in this case, Barbados. As Stuart Hall suggests in his article "Negotiating Caribbean Identities," "the stories which cultures tell themselves about who they are and where they come from" (Hall 1995, 3) are the best places to explore when defining people.

In "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," meanwhile, Stuart Hall states that we should think of cultural identity in diaspora not "as an already accomplished fact" but "as a 'production' which is never complete..." (392). What is evident in *The Origin of Waves* is the production and not the (re)discovery of identity. The production of identity is grounded in the re-telling of the past. According to Hall, there are two ways of understanding a diasporic cultural identity. The first defines cultural identity in terms of shared collective culture that diasporic subjects have in common. In Clarke's novel, cultural identities at work reflect the common Caribbean historical and cultural experience and Caribbean cultural codes underlying diverse imposed selves. In the process of identity construction, the characters face their Caribbean experience, which is just one phase in their process of creating fluid, drifting identities through narration. As Clarke introduces two major metaphors – the conch-shell and the inner tube – whose complex meanings reflect different layers of Caribbean heritage, the whole novel becomes the story about the construction of a diasporic identity. Ultimately, however, the identities in Clarke's novel are produced through narration based on the memory of diasporic subjects' lives in their homeland, which is actually the second, more common way of understanding cultural identity in diasporic texts.

Hall thinks of Caribbean identities as framed by two axes or vectors: the vector of continuity and the vector of rupture (1994a, 395). Caribbean identities result from the dialogic relationship between these two axes. The vector of continuity is grounded in the past, whereas the vector of rupture represents the discontinuity which diasporic Caribbean subjects experience when they leave their homeland, be it voluntarily or involuntarily. The rupture gives rise to feelings of trauma and nostalgia in a host country. The profound feeling of rupture from the past of the enforced separations from Africa is what the Caribbean people have in common, which is particularly formative for Caribbean spiritual life. The paradox is that the uprooting of slavery and the discontinuity with the past unified people in their new countries in spite of the differences their cultural identities carried with themselves.

Diasporic subjects in a host country feel an overwhelming nostalgia for "lost origins." In Clarke's novel, they continually return in their minds to the Caribbean, the islands of enchantment, thereby create imaginary homelands of plentitude.



The homelands of their imagination, their fictitious creations, belong to the realm of the imaginary order through which diasporic identities reproduce themselves and in which the fulfillment of return is deferred. It is a Lacanian symbolic order of representation where the subject, through an infinite memory of desire and search, produces a renewable source of narratives.

As diasporic subjects construct imaginary homelands while building relationships to a new place, nostalgia, as a sentimental longing for the past time and place with happy personal associations, plays an important role. The role of nostalgia, its significance for the past, is the subject of concern for many critics who belong to different cultural milieus, such as Dennis Walder or Salman Rushdie (whose ideas on the nature of nostalgia in postcolonial world I will briefly refer to). As Walder writes, “this recall and return to “lost times and places brings a kind of truth of the past into the present, reviving not merely the past moment, but the epiphanic experience of the past in its entirety” (Walder 2011, 8–9). It is Rushdie in *Midnight's Children* (1981) who explained postcolonial nostalgias as resulting from “some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt” (Rushdie 1991, 10). When nostalgia brings the past to the present through memory, it revives the present in a new colour and signifies the necessity of the reintroduction of the past when the subject is in the process of self-recreation.

In “Imaginary Homelands,” Rushdie, whose work is concerned with many connections, disruptions, and migrations between the East and the West, quotes a British novelist and a short story writer, L. P. Hartley, whose observation in *The Go-Between* that “the past is a foreign country: they do things differently there” (Rushdie 1991, 9) has become almost proverbial and reflects an exile condition in a true sense. Hartley uses the idea in a metaphorical sense, and merges a sense of time and place. However, for diasporic subjects the present is literally a foreign country, and the past is the home they came from, though there's a sense of loss. Rushdie adds further that since we cannot reclaim the thing we've lost, we “create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands” (1991, 10). By reflecting on the past and our homeland, we “deal in broken mirrors” (11) and make use of the remains, “the shards of memory” (12), from which we can reconstruct the past in a form of a narrative. Thus, Rushdie adds another dimension to connecting memory and narration to a homeland experience.

In her essay “Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern,” Linda Hutcheon discusses irony and nostalgia as the two sides of the same postmodern coin. Though the two components are opposites, they are two inevitable sides of the postmodern condition. By trying to define nostalgia, Hutcheon starts from its original meaning, namely the desire to return home (from the Greek roots *nostos* – “to return home” and *algos* – “pain”). Nostalgia is further defined in terms of the emotional “upheaval ... related



to the workings of memory” (Hutcheon, 3). In the postmodern society, nostalgia is often related to the immigrant condition as it seems to have been connected to the desire to return specifically to the homeland and for what is perceived as unified identity. In other words, the focus is on the immigrants’ sense of loss and mourning for the cultural unity and ethnicity that the immigrants once had. That sense of “lost authenticity” that the feeling of nostalgia represents means that the immigrant condition has a prominent concern with the past and the sense of remembering and forgetting. In that sense, nostalgia can be interpreted in relation to Clarke’s characters in the novel.

Clarke’s characters are exiles, the term he uses in his essays. The most defining aspects of exile experience for his characters are place and their identities (Callaghan 1996: “A Preface”). As exiles, they live in the space of the in-between: between the Caribbean and their new country. For an exile, the impossibility of returning home equals the impossibility of never arriving in a new place. Both Callaghan and Walcott explain that “the dilemma of *can’t return* and *never arrive* is both literally and symbolically what might be said to characterize Austin Clarke’s body of written works, both fiction and non-fiction” (ibid.). Clarke’s characters often act from “the location of residence” (ibid.), for this is the space from which “political demands and actions might be possible” (ibid.), which is very important for building up their diasporic selves.<sup>1</sup> But they return to their homeland, usually Barbados, as a locus of nostalgia that could be imagined, recreated, longed for, remembered through the diasporic imaginary (Anthias 1998, 577; Baumann 2000, 327; Clifford 1994, 310).

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The narrative of *The Origin of Waves* is based on two immigrant stories which John and Tim tell. After bumping into each other on Christmas Eve in Toronto fifty years after immigrating, they begin reminiscing about their lives as small children in Barbados and their lives as immigrants in North America. Their stories of remembering have a therapeutic effect. Though John is a successful psychiatrist in the United States, he seems to have missed out on life. Tim is retired and has been struggling with his immigrant past and his present loneliness. In order to connect the past and the present moment of their lives, they go to a nearby bar and spend the night spinning a narrative.

Tim and John, situated in time and space in their host country, are unavoidably involved in constructing a thread of meaning that enables them to know and

1) Austin Clarke was influenced by the Civil Rights and Black Arts movements in the United States and was well-known for his political activism and his great influence on the Caribbean cultural life in Toronto, such as the initiation of the Caribbean festival in Toronto. His works are often politically charged in their discussion of home and diasporic life in Canada.



understand who and what they are in the present, a meaning they construct through narrative. The memories of their past homes continue to live through their present narration as a sort of an impression the characters preserve in their minds. As many thinkers, from St. Augustine to Sigmund Freud and Antonio Damasio (Walder 2011, 6–7) believe, our consciousness is held together by a narrative of memory. Walder further cites the neurologist Damasio who, attempting to define a relatively stable self, “resorts to the language of narrative fiction” (Walder 2011, 7). Knowledge of the self springs to life in the story, or to put it more imaginatively and artistically, as famous Canadian author Robert Kroetsch says in *Creation*, “the fiction makes us real” (Kroetsch 1970, 60). According to Damasio, the core self is born as the story is told, within the story itself. In that way, the autobiographical self – as Tim’s and John’s selves are in the process of becoming – is always under (re)construction. The process is never-ending and, as Damasio concludes, our consciousness is expanded by structured thought processes which are best seen in language and narration, as the drama of the human condition comes into existence and the self is shaped.

John and Tim employ both narrative and traumatic memories in the text. Traumatic narrative is the way that John and Tim render their traumatic experience when they experience rupture from their homeland. Barbados continues to live through their memories as a sort of an idealized past, the paradise they left behind. The disconnection from the place is a traumatic event which disrupts their relation to their selves and the world (Bal 1999, 43). That trauma seems to be Tim’s problem; he cannot relate properly to other people and experiences terrible loneliness. After having lost Lang, the Chinese woman he was in love with, he is not able to reconstruct his identity. His conversation with John allows him an opportunity to articulate and transmit the story, to reconstruct the self from the scattered fragments of disrupted memory. Tim’s story also represents a way of “regaining lost cognitive and emotional capacities” (Bal 1999, 45).

Apart from being traumatic, Tim’s and John’s memories carry colonial influences from their lives in Barbados. They are proud of their British education and their inclinations both at home and in diaspora. The values that Tim and John cherish were instilled in them by the British education system in Barbados. Though unaware of “anything like colonialism” (Clarke 1997, 18), Tim draws on his memories of schooldays with John, hardly recognizing himself “as colonial[s], sitting on that sand, staring at waves that washed assertive and sullen strangers ashore, as if they were born like us, in the island, as if they were born here, to rule over us, here” (Clarke 1997, 19). Tim’s idea of an ideal home is based on the painting he saw in John’s mother’s room, which was a water colour of “an English cottage with a thatched roof” (Clarke 1997, 144) painted by an Englishman and entitled “home sweet home” (Clarke 1997, 144). In a similar vein, while describing his office in the States, John says that it has “fancy



telephones, those old-fashioned ones from England in the nineteenth century, like the ones you see in books, or in murder movies with Sherlock Holmes and Dickens, things you come across in a library book" (Clarke 1997, 73).

Though both John's and Tim's identities are influenced by British values they acquired in Barbados, they handle their colonial upbringings differently. Tim remains more attached to British standards of living and his memories of the colonial way of life, in particular by his view of his headmaster. In contrast, John fluctuates between different ways of life while living in different countries in Europe and North America. This fluctuation is clearly reflected in his accents: he imitates an English or an American accent, for example, or uses just his "broad and flat" Barbadian accent (Clarke 1997, 166).

Another type of memory employed in the novel is cultural memory, which results from the deeply relational nature of the self. Unlike John, Tim does not fluctuate between different cultural milieus and is dedicated to his immigrant neighbourhood in Toronto, which triggers vivid memories of being an immigrant and emotions of loneliness. Not being able to relate to other people, Tim is connected to events of his immediate surroundings only. These associations exemplify the influence of cultural memory. Cultural memory gives existence to people and the world both for Tim and his fellow immigrants as they experience the same existential annihilation of the place they inhabit in the foreign country: "And the snow has hidden all colour and life from the street, and the Christmas colours of green and red, silver and gold, from store and windows; and I am alone, and I can see nobody, and nobody can see me. There are only shapes; the shapes of people I hear ahead of me" (Clarke 1999, 21–22). This passage shows Tim's lack of human relations to other people and the resulting nothingness that Christmas can induce in immigrants, though their endeavour to build up their diasporic self still persists. In her essay "Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of the Self," S. J. Brison explains that people suffering from traumas experience nothingness and cites numerous examples of Holocaust survivors (Bal 1999, 43–47).

Tim's struggle to reinvent and recreate the self continues throughout the novel. Traumatic memory and the feeling of loneliness reoccur many times either through dreams, flashbacks, or as disconnected fragments of uncontrollable feelings of despair and melancholia. Tim underlines his feeling of not being able to relate to other human beings and the world: "[...] there is nothing, nothing that I see that has any bearing, any relation, any connection to me. Did you know that not *one* street in this city has a similar name to *any* street back home? So, I don't even see *that* connection" (Clarke 1997, 70). The feeling that Tim describes is reminiscent of the sense of loss he experienced in the past. Being unable to make any relation to other human beings, he is "nothing but a walking ghost" (Clarke 1997, 70). By comparing the place of the host country to his homeland, he tries to connect to the new place of residence.



Tim is imprisoned in his house, which still contains a two-year-old Christmas tree that denies the progress of time and divides the world into the inside and outside. He sits in his chair looking at the patterns in the carpet and kills wood-ants which threaten to eat through the foundations of the house and destroy it. Tim exterminates the black ants with a can of Black Flag. The words “Black Flag” which appear “in big white capital letters on the can” (Clarke 1997, 92) stand for Tim’s identity, while white capital letters signify the hegemony of the white society he lives in. Tim’s retreat from the outside world, which points to his inability to communicate in the host country, isolates him from the outside world.

Every day he walks down Yonge Street to Lake Ontario. The daily walk arouses memories of his happy times on the beach with John and colours his experience of the city with his immigrant emotions of loneliness and alienation:

Every day, at the same time, in any kind of weather, I leave my house and walk down Yonge Street leading straight for the Lake, and back from the Lake up again on Yonge Street and back to my house, walking the streets, seeing people passing, and sometimes, I try to smile with them ... (Clarke 1997, 69)

The passage highlights Tim’s invisibility in the metropolitan city. At the end of the novel, he spots an inner tube, real or imagined, in the lake which saves him from his immigrant condition of alienation because he associates the tube with the inner tube floating away on the beach from him and John in Barbados. The inner tube connects him with the new place in Canada, signals his acceptance of place and probably his final arrival in Toronto.

Relationships with women and place seem to be important for the construction of diasporic identities for the male characters in the novel. Tim’s and John’s relationships with women are crucial for the formation of their diasporic identities. Tim’s dream of paradise is related to the dream of a beautiful woman and unrequited love. The loss of love is similar to the loss of paradise, for he sees the two sets of being as identical. Lang is “a jewel” (Clarke 1997, 87), precious like life, the embodiment of Tim’s dreams and imagination. Tim feels that his love for Lang is like paradise regained. However, being more realistic about love, John feels that paradise is lost. As a dreamer, Tim imagines ideal love as “Life and Lang. Moving out of reach, like a wave in the receding sea. My experience in this journey is limited. Fantasy and poetry. I had to use imagination. I bite it. I eat it. But I lost it. And then it was morning. Morning came as a relief” (Clarke 1997, 84). Tim experiences that “dream and fantasy at [his] age are the same as fact.” (Clarke 1997, 87)

For John, with his matter-of-fact attitude to life, paradise does not exist. He does not believe in the ideal love and the story of Adam and Eve: “A simple question.



A question that was first axed in the Garden o'Eden. A question put to that stupid bastard, Adam, when Adam couldn't make up his goddamn mind to take a piece offa Eve, or take a bit outta the apple, speaking metaphorically, of course!" (Clarke 1997, 106) John has had relationships with several women in his life. Consequently, his relation to his home country is more the experience of nostalgia than the feeling of loss and annihilation that it is for Tim. While living with women of different ethnic origins (Italian, French, German), John accommodates to different cultures and ways of life and thus broadens his identity in a transnational way. As Frank E. Manning notes in the *Foreword* to the study *El Dorado and Paradise: Canada and the Caribbean in Austin Clarke's Fiction*, Clarke himself "rejects the popular myths of El Dorado and Paradise, but maintains his faith in the noble possibility of achieving social progress, racial harmony, genuine community, political decency, and an honest tolerance for human differences" (Brown 1989, x).

Clarke describes John in a comic way. He is primarily concerned with his relationships with women. In addition, the sense of having a family, of belonging to a family, is very important to John; these are the relationships that he cherishes. He has ten children from three women, although Tim doubts that all the children are John's. John's reason for coming to Toronto is to visit his wife and child who are staying in Sick Children's Hospital. Unlike Tim who has no family and who cannot properly relate to women, John believes that "every man have a family! Even if it's a rotten family" (Clarke 1997, 62).

While talking to Tim, John finally locates Tim's problem and poses a central question in dealing with the immigrant condition and Tim's loneliness: what kind of women does Tim like? As a psychiatrist, John believes that the cause of his loneliness is sexual deprivation. Tim has no answer to the question. John points out to Tim that all he needs is companionship: "All. You. Godamn need. Is. Female companionship" (Clarke 1997, 113). Suggesting that one's relationship to others is the relationship to one's real self, John gives a piece of advice to Tim: "I mean living alone without anything like an anchor to tie-you-down, or anchor-you-back to your real first living. With no strangers you grew up with, only strangers, people you meet after you come here, strangers who, because of something in this place and in this time, turn into friends. But not the real friends you grew up with, in the island" (Clarke 1997, 110). Unlike Dionne Brand, whose characters maintain fluid identities to the point of rejecting any kind of anchor from the past and perform at the level of global and transnational identities (as in *What We All Long For*), Clarke challenges the notion of fixity by questioning the importance of the past, place, and human relationships as well as nostalgic feelings for the construction of diasporic self. In other words, he relies to the memories of the past experience and place in order to create a fertile ground for the creation of the fluid identity.





John's immigrant condition is less devastating than Tim's, a fact which rests on his making up stories. He even begins his story with "Once upon a time ..." several times in the text. Describing his life as "a bed o' roses" (Clarke 1997, 74), John asserts: "I tried to practice the profession of a psychiatrist in the States. The States is a big place that likes big people, big ideas, and that take big risks. I am a big man. I live big" (Clarke 1997, 72). His story about life in the States is that of the promised land, where he has carried out his dream of success as a professional, as a husband and man, and as a parent who takes care of his children and wives: "I am an Amurcan. A Yankee. You seen my gold credit cards, when I showed you my family, didn't you? A man can live there" (Clarke 1997, 74).

While listening to John's story, Tim begins to doubt the truth of his narrative. He notices that "the language he has retained from the countries he visited is not a real language, not a true language" (Clarke 1997, 166), especially when John uses "an honest, native, broad and flat Barbadian accent" (Clarke 1997, 166), without any trace of French, Italian, German, which he said he spoke.<sup>2</sup> That's why Tim is confused: "I am beginning to wonder how much of his talk he expects me to believe, how much he expects me to trust, out of all his stories which have me laughing and sad. But I know he expects me to trust all of them. We both know that time erodes truth and memory; doubting and accepting" (Clarke 1997, 166). Tim's point here is that an event from the past narrated in the present is not true anymore; it is time that harms both truth and memory. Some theorists (Bal, for example) explain that "the presentness of memory implies that "the past is adopted" as part of the present (as object of its narrative activity)" (Bal 1999, xv) and as such has a problematic role in truth telling. The narration of an experience from the past includes the reconstruction of events which can be fabricated and hence narrative memory is fraught with issues of falsehood and truth.

Since the past no longer exists the way Tim and John experienced it a long ago, Tim's narration becomes a fiction, a pure fabrication of his mind, a fantasy, which is evident when he says:

Perhaps what I just described to you is a dream or a fantasy. Dreams and fantasy at my age are the same as fact. Something like being able to make an imagination come true, like wanting to be with the woman from China. Perhaps what I just narrated is nothing more than what my mother call a "friction" of my imagination. I use it to light the loneliness I live with. The boredom. Nothing so good in real life has ever happened to me. Not even in a dream. (Clarke 1997, 87)

2) As for the language of the novel, please see my article "Traces of Caribbean English in *The Origin of Waves*" which is coming out in the conference proceedings by the Faculty of Philosophy, Niš (2018).





The truth about his life has been turned into a story, a fiction. It is a means for healing the self by way of memory.

Unlike Tim, who turns fact into fiction, John turns fiction into fact. John's story in the text, a little bit exaggerated and pompous, is pure fiction. John fabricates the truth of his experience of immigration in order to impress Tim and to hide the boredom and mediocrity of his life in the States. Whereas John recreates himself through fiction, Tim heals himself through fiction. Tim's healing starts at the very end in the novel when he gives a hug to John that re-establishes a connection to another human being. Walking by the lake, Tim hears the footsteps of another human being behind and stops being anxious any more. He only feels uncertainty about "warning of attack or of approach" (Clarke 1997, 244). A touch upon his winter coat resolves the doubt like a miracle. Tim connects to another human being, and after the night he spends in the same room with another man, his ordeal of loneliness begins to disappear. It is the moment of success for him, giving him "the hard-earned bountiful rewards of the sea" (Clarke 1997, 244), or of life.

Tim's and John's real or imagined relationship to their homeland, mediated through memory, reflect both African heritage and European colonial heritage. The network of transnational relationships that exists between different cultures and places gives rise to hybrid places and identities. As Hall argues, if identity is contingent on establishing origins, it is impossible to locate a single origin in the Caribbean (Hall 1995, 5). Caribbean identity has already undergone a process of hybridization on the islands, and when it migrates and settles in new locations, Caribbean cultures and identities are exposed to complicated processes of negotiation and transculturation. Thus we see Tim who, throughout the novel, negotiates his identity with the new place of Toronto he inhabits and the way he accepts place both psychologically and socially adds a new aspect both to his self and the place he inhabits and opens up the way to hybridization. We also see how John quickly changes places and then adapts to his new surroundings, which creates a path towards a hybrid identity. Consequently, the places these Caribbean people live are twice diasporized: both at home and in a host country where they are forced to negotiate the expectation and policies of social life in a place where they do not have any socioeconomic power.

While distant from their homelands, Tim and John envision new homelands of their past. Clarke disputes the assumption that distance provides objectivity and critiques a sense of place as viewed from distance. As John explains to Tim, the meaning of an island/place can be assessed truly only after leaving it: "And anything surrounded by water is a place you really don't know the size of. Like you have to swim – way far from it, and then you would know the measurements of the place" (Clarke 1997, 17). This passage demonstrates Clarke's tendency to portray Barbados from Canada, but this



time he emphasizes how immigrants' relationship to their homeland influences their life in Canada.

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Two central metaphors – the conch-shell and the inner tube drifting in the sea – epitomize a special meaning of the novel. The novel opens with the description of the conch-shell which Tim and John notice on the beach in their native Barbados:

We were sitting on the sand. The sand on the beach was the same colour as the shell of the conch. The conch was empty, dead and old. [...] On this afternoon, we just watched the conch-shell, as the waves came in and covered it, and changed its colour for just one moment, and then the waves hid it from our sight two times. (Clarke 1997, 1)

The image of the sea as a symbol of life contrasts with the description of “an empty, dead and old” conch-shell whose taste was once sweet. The picture of paradise as place is immediately violated by the image of a dead shell, which anticipates life in its later phase affected by time and experience and what is to come in the text. The author announces immediately the vanishing of paradise and the upcoming tragedy of migration. The beach is the place where John and Tim dream about distant lands, the past and the history of their Caribbean African ancestors as well as their British colonizers. The sea waves that erase their footsteps in the sand arouse both positive and negative recollections as they wash ashore memories of drowned fishermen who did not survive the crossing of the Atlantic, as well as memories of beautiful scenery with a bounty of food and pleasure for the two boys.

The sea's history is closely related to the metaphors of the conch-shell and the inner tube which carry with themselves the meaning of the Caribbean history and contemporary experience as well. According to Heike Harting, “the conch-shell already carries the characteristics of an imagined cultural belonging and originality” (Beneventi et al. 2004, 107). The metaphor of the conch-shell does not have a single origin, however. It represents different cultural and ethnic meanings and reappears in diverse contexts in the novel. Being displaced on the beach, the conch-shell bears traces of Tim's and John's memories such as the death of Tim's uncle, fear of drowning, the dream of Chermadene, Tim's and John's childhood love and their idealized past in the Caribbean. The inner tube made of an old truck tire is “patched in many different colours of rubber, black, brown and red” (Clarke 1997, 5). It floats in the sea and marks “Barbadian economic deprivation, and cultural and racial heterogeneity” (quoted in Beneventi et al. 2004, 118). Both the conch-shell and the inner tube symbolize the traumatic losses of the two characters: the original loss of their homeland and the loss of Lang for Tim. For Tim, the inner tube that he recognizes in Lake Ontario incites



the process of self-recognition when he abandons nostalgic feelings for Lang and the conch-shell and gives up on committing suicide, and for the first time responds to John in a compassionate way.

In “This Tormenting Time of Indecision: Performative Metaphors in Austin Clarke’s *The Origin of Waves*,” Harting gives a reading of the conch-shell and the inner tube metaphors that question the dominant theoretical conceptualization of metaphor in the discourse of ethnic writing. Though the conch-shell and the inner tube function as metaphorical carriers of Caribbean history and heritage that add up to the essentialist notion of identity that Tim constructs in terms of cultural belonging, the repetitions of the metaphors dramatize the weakening of culturally essentialist traditions. According to Harting, the two metaphors operate performatively and they reiterate, disidentify, and resignify (quoted in Beneventi et al. 2004, 106–107) the historically accumulated effects of their prior meanings in Caribbean literature and in the discourses of identity production. A performative reading of the two metaphors facilitates a critical reading of how social and psychological conformity to the cultural authenticity influences the construction of cultural identity in Clarke’s novel. Thus, Harting concludes that a performative understanding of metaphor in ethnic writing “emphasizes a catachrestic notion of identity based on cultural difference and allows for a conceptualization of metaphor in less homogenizing forms” (Beneventi et al. 2004, 124).

By generating multiple meanings of the two metaphors and the sea in the novel, Clarke references the multiple origins of the Black Diaspora and different cultural heritages in the Caribbean (African and European), as well as different meanings of Tim’s and John’s homeland. These multiple meanings significantly contribute to the two characters’ process of moving away from a stable identity towards a more fluid identity which crosses cultural borders. Tim’s and John’s memories of their original home become stories, but the place, the concept of home, that they reflect upon exists no more as John explains to Tim: “Man, there ain’t no goddamn home back home” (Clarke 1997, 70). The place also becomes part of the narrative of home. The sense of time and place in their reflections and conversations blur and the borders between homeland and host-land as well as diaspora are bridged. The representation of a text, the imagined form of spatialization, the two stories rendered in the novel, add new dimensions to the sense of place and time in the text. The imaginary place/landscape described in the text, like the two main metaphors, acts as a symbol reflecting different meanings.

By floating between fact and fiction, like the conch-shell and the inner tube from the sea to the shore, both characters turn to their fantasy, imagine the ideal state of living in Canada and in Barbados, tell stories about their own lives in order to construct their new identities abroad. Since John’s and Tim’s links with earlier times and places have been severed by migration and displacement, they feel an urge to



explore and represent their own memories which are permeated by nostalgia. Tim and John dream of a blissful past, their garden of Eden in the Caribbean, long to return there, though the return is not possible any more. Their generalized desire for the original home - and what Kundera refers to as home is "the suffering caused by an unappeased yearning to return" (Kundera 2002, 5) - the strong nostalgic feelings in the text push Tim and John to re-inscribe their past into the stories they produce. Still, by reflecting the past and his characters' nostalgic feelings for their homeland, Clarke negotiates Caribbean identities in diaspora and shows that "identity is always a question of producing in the future an account of the past, that is to say it is always about narrative, the stories which cultures tell themselves about who they are and what they came from" (Hall 1995, 5). Similarly, in *The Womb of Space*, Wilson Harris explains hybridity as a struggle of the self to be freed from the past, from roots and ancestry, and attempts to construct the future while he values difference over essentiality.

In *The Origin of Waves*, Clarke challenges the notion of fixity of identity since the fixed self and close attachment to the past and the original homeland do not influence the creation of identity as the end product - they are merely a phase in the process of achieving a fluid diasporic identity. This is the fact evident from the way Tim moves forward towards a more fluid diasporic identity and a new sense of the host-land. Clarke's representation of diasporic identity in the novel exemplifies the transformation of the diasporic self from multiple origins into the fluid self, which Clarke shows more clearly in his other works. Hybridity results from identity's fluctuation between different transnational levels when it frees itself from common roots and bases itself on difference. Memory of the past and homeland experience impact the process of healing the trauma of rupture from common origins and make up for a phase in the process of the formation of the fluid diasporic identity in a host country.

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**TANJA CVETKOVIĆ** / is Associate Professor of English language at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia. Her current research is in Canadian literature, English language and literature and American literature. She has published scholarly articles as well as the following books: *English for the Students of Humanities* (2016); *Between Myth and Silence: Canadian Literature, Postmodernism and Robert Kroetsch's Out West Triptych* (2010); *The Journey from Slavery to Freedom in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (2008). She has translated into Serbian Robert Kroetsch's *The Studhorse Man* (*Vlasnik Pastuva*, 2009) and *Gone Indian* (*Otišao u Indijance*, 2018).



# L'exil d'espèce dans le roman *Espèces* de Ying Chen

## Exile of species in Ying Chen's novel *Espèces*

Georgeta Prada

### Résumé

Ying Chen traite dans ses romans tous les thèmes spécifiques de l'écriture migrante, c'est-à-dire l'exil, l'identité, la quête de soi, les déchirements du déracinement et de l'enracinement. Nous allons analyser cette problématique de ses écrits en insistant sur une caractéristique commune : ses héros se sentent exclus même dans leur pays natal. En quête permanente de soi, ceux-ci s'efforcent d'accepter les conséquences de l'exil intérieur ou de construire la nouvelle identité migrante. Un autre attribut propre à l'écriture de Ying Chen et particulièrement dans le roman analysé, *Espèces*, se trouve dans la description des relations au sein d'une famille confrontée à différentes formes de l'exil que nous aborderons dans un deuxième temps. Nous montrerons également de quelle manière Ying Chen met en exergue les valeurs morales, familiales et culturelles et comment elle a contribué à l'enrichissement d'une nouvelle littérature qui a au centre le sujet migrant.

**Mots-clés :** identité, exil, relations de famille, amour, écriture migrante.

### Abstract

In each of her novels, Ying Chen tackles an entire array of themes that are characteristic of migrant literature: exile, identity, the search of the self, the torture of being uprooted and that of roots. Thus, we will analyse the entire approach of her works, putting an emphasis on a common characteristic, namely, that of the heroes feeling lonely or excluded, even in their own country. The permanent search of self brings forth an acceptance of the consequences of the heroes' inner exile on the one hand and a creation of a new migrant identity, on the other. Another characteristic of Ying Chen's writing in general and of the novel *Espèces* in particular is to be found in the description of his family members, who are all facing different forms of exile, which will be approached in a second manner. We will equally show the way in which Ying Chen put an emphasis on moral values, family values and cultural ones, but also the way in which she has contributed to the enrichment of a new kind of literature that has at its core the migrant subject.

**Keywords:** identity, exile, family relationships, love, migrant literature.



## Qui est Ying Chen?

*Je suis une étrangère depuis la naissance, car je n'aime pas l'air de mon temps. [...] Les générations suivantes écriront longuement sur cette période de mirages, sur ce semblant de renaissance. Quoi qu'il en soit, en me déplaçant d'un continent à l'autre, je désirais simplement un endroit relativement calme pour me reposer, sachant cependant que l'odeur de l'eau est partout la même.<sup>1</sup>*

Ying Chen est née à Shanghai en 1961. Elle y a fait des études universitaires et elle a obtenu sa licence-ès-lettres françaises. En 1989, elle vient au Canada pour étudier le français à l'Université McGill. Elle réside depuis 2003 à Vancouver. Elle est polyglotte : le mandarin, le russe, l'italien, l'anglais et le français.

Traductrice et interprète au Québec au début de son arrivée au Canada, elle s'investit ensuite dans l'écriture en français. En 1997, elle participe au film de George Dufaux *Le voyage illusoire*. Elle publie en français et ensuite elle traduit ses écrits en mandarin ou cantonais. On rappelle ses œuvres : *Les dieux ont soif*, *Les fleurs de lotus* (1991), *La mémoire de l'eau* (1992), *Les lettres chinoises* (1993), *L'ingratitude* (1995), *Immobile* (1998), *Le champ dans la mer* (2002), *Querelle d'un squelette avec son double* (2003), *Quatre mille marches. Un rêve chinois* (2004), *Le mangeur* (2006), *Impressions d'été* (2008) *Un enfant à ma porte* (2008), *Espèces* (2010), *La rive est loin* (2013), *La lenteur des montagnes* (2014). Pour ces écrits, elle a été récompensée par de nombreux prix.

Ses écrits parlent des difficultés de quitter le pays natal et des efforts pour s'enraciner dans la patrie d'accueil. Au début, elle a circonscrit ses romans à l'espace chinois. Puis, petit à petit, elle y a renoncé. Dans *Espèces* et *La Rive est loin*, le nom du pays ne figure pas, signe que les problèmes d'identité et de filiation, l'exil de toute sorte forment une écriture qui tend vers l'universalité. Cette ouverture de l'écriture est bien décrite par Clément Moisan : « L'écriture migrante n'est pas différente, ni autre, elle adopte des voies nouvelles, des thématiques dominantes, des formes souvent inusitées, pas toutes hybrides, qui la distinguent des pratiques littéraires courantes. »<sup>2</sup>

Ying Chen passe de l'écriture migrante (*Les lettres chinoises*) à un autre type de migration, celle des formes d'existence afin de bien créer ce monde inquiétant où se promènent ses héroïnes à la recherche de leur salut. *Espèces* se particularise par la narration d'un point de vue animal, car le personnage principal féminin se transforme un jour en chatte et lance vers les humains un œil critique. Le nouveau personnage se glisse donc parmi les héroïnes chères à l'écrivaine sino-canadienne, puisqu'il observe sa vie et la commente du haut de la transmigration accomplie. Après avoir fait ce trajet en morte dans *L'Ingratitude* et en fantôme dans *La rive est loin*, c'est en chatte que l'héroïne de Chen du roman analysé explore la perspective de « l'entre-deux ». *Espèces*

1) [http://www.lexpress.fr/emploi/ying-chen-je-suis-une-etrangere-depuis-ma-naissance\\_1131391.html](http://www.lexpress.fr/emploi/ying-chen-je-suis-une-etrangere-depuis-ma-naissance_1131391.html)

2) Moisan, Clément, *Ecritures migrantes et identités culturelles*, Montréal, Éditions Nota bene, 2008, p. 63.



s'inscrit dans la catégorie des écrits qui ont comme thème principal la cellule familiale auquel s'ajoutent d'autres problématiques : la quête d'identité, l'exil intérieur, l'exil de l'espèce, la condition de la femme, la solitude, la maternité, le mutisme.

On analysera la décomposition de la cellule familiale dans le roman *Espèces* et les ruptures de toute sorte qui mettent le couple en péril de disparaître. On verra ensuite les deux types d'exil qui hantent les héros, la métamorphose de l'héroïne en chatte et ses conséquences. On se penchera enfin sur le destin du héros vu de deux perspectives et sur deux symboles récurrents dans la prose de l'écrivaine.

## 1. La cellule familiale – le couple en miettes

La cellule familiale a comme protagonistes A., le mari, un archéologue narcissique, qui se passionne pour son travail et détient une cave pleine de squelettes humaines, sa femme dont l'écrivaine ne précise pas le nom, ni même en majuscule, et leur enfant sans destin. La femme passe pour un auxiliaire de l'époux, sans identité, souffrante à cause du manque de communication humaine. Leur fils disparaît un jour en rendant l'écart entre A et sa femme plus grand. Après avoir échoué dans son rôle de conjointe et de mère, la femme se transforme en chatte.

La problématique de la condition de la femme en société, en famille et l'égalité entre les sexes y trouvent place. Ainsi A., en égocentrique véritable, voit dans sa femme un miroir où il s'admire et un auditoire devant lequel il tient ses plaidoiries. Il a besoin d'être écouté, applaudi, encouragé, glorifié. Pour cela, dès qu'il rentre du bureau, il raconte à sa femme toutes les anecdotes, il lui décrit toutes les personnes rencontrées sans se préoccuper de ses activités à elle aussi, de ses sentiments, de son univers. Sa femme en souffre énormément : « Il a grandement besoin d'être écouté et applaudi, afin de ne pas expulser ses pensées jaillissantes vers un mur, tout de même, ni vers un animal, mais il ne se soucie pas toujours d'être réellement entendu, compris et approuvé. Sa masculinité en dépend. »<sup>3</sup>

Le destin de la femme vivant à l'ombre de la masculinité, sous la lourdeur d'une société et d'un époux qui ne se préoccupent pas d'elle sera remplacé par celui de la chatte. L'héroïne, en quête d'identité, sous sa forme animale, ressent au début le bonheur de son nouvel univers découvert. Puis, petit à petit, elle se rend compte que la distance entre les deux plans, humain et félin, s'accroît et que cet entre-deux est invivable à long terme : « Étant sans pesanteur, sans énergie vitale, sans pulsion de tuer ou de me tuer, sans identité fixe, ne me trouvant dans aucun temps, je n'ai jamais pu apprécier les jeux humains. » (E, 58)

3) Chen, Ying, *Espèces*, Paris, Éditions Seuil, 2013, p. 56 (Les références au roman seront notées au long de l'article avec E.).





La dynamique du couple connaît des transformations inattendues. L'héroïne femme, une fois atteinte la condition de chatte, ne quitte pas le domicile, ne s'éloigne pas de A. Au contraire, elle devient plus tolérante, essaie de le comprendre et même l'accepte comme maître. Il s'agit là d'une situation paradoxale. Après avoir réclamé l'individualité, la liberté et les mêmes droits que les hommes, la femme-chatte obéit aux caprices masculins. A. devient plus préoccupé de son épouse, réfléchit à la disparition inattendue de sa femme et fait des efforts afin de saisir les causes de la fuite mystérieuse pareille à celle de leur enfant (perdu, quitté ou mort), comme on l'apprend de la voix narrative de la femme-chatte :

Il ne sait pas que je ne suis pas en danger, tout comme il croit que notre enfant est encore vivant quelque part, que ce ne sera pas la peine de mener une enquête. Mais ces impressions sans fondement, il ne les dira à personne. À son avis, il s'agit d'une fuite, d'une volonté de rupture de ma part, il pense que je voulais simplement partir, sans l'avertir, sans justification, sans passer par des scènes de reproches ou de réconciliation, sans chantage mesquin sur le partage des biens, préférant à l'agonie d'une relation une mort franche et digne, comme notre enfant un jour nous avait brusquement quittés. (E, 81)

Les voisins et les policiers le croient responsable de la disparition de sa femme et probablement de son fils aussi, A. *Espèces* rappelle un autre roman de Ying Chen, *Un enfant à ma porte*, où l'écrivaine décrit le destin d'une mère qui refuse la maternité, mais qui s'occupe quand même d'un enfant trouvé dans son jardin.

La détérioration de la maison du couple, envahie par la moisissure, délabrée, ressemble à celle de leur relation. La femme en souffre, tandis que l'homme n'y prête aucune attention car il est le voyageur. Dans la vie de A. une autre femme fera son apparition, mais la relation ne durera pas plus de temps. Et une nuit sans lune, sa chatte redeviendra sa femme.

## 2. De l'exil intérieur vers l'exil de l'espèce

La rupture de la parole sincère, de la communication authentique, de l'amour conjugal dans les romans de Ying Chen est décrite et ressentie comme un exil intérieur. La femme veut se libérer des chaînes de la parole venimeuse et de son union conjugale stérile : « Les paroles qu'il crachait en rentrant à la maison occupaient mon espace mental puisque je n'étais pas sourde, empoisonnaient le silence, et m'empêchaient de respirer. L'avantage de ma transformation est donc évident. Je suis devenue presque muette, pas du tout audiovisuelle. » (E, 56)



L'héroïne-femme a tous les traits d'un « étranger », d'un exilé souffrant et incompris, déraciné et solitaire. Les autres, les voisins, les collègues de A, ne connaissent pas son pays d'origine, ils ne savent rien sur le destin de cette femme. Elle n'a pas de relations d'amitié avec les voisins ou avec les commerçants des magasins fréquentés. Elle passe d'ailleurs pour une personne bizarre, solitaire, névrotique. Le jugement des autres est dur et malheureusement ceux-ci ne lui offrent aucune aide, aucune bouée de sauvetage : « Il paraît que le couple est capable d'actes extrêmes. Surtout la femme, venue de nulle part, connue de personne, n'étant pas ancrée là où elle habite, pas du tout assimilable. Elle marchait dans notre rue, parmi nous, comme si elle se trouvait seule, dans une forêt [...] » (E, 104)

La fuite ou la disparition de sa femme crée à A. bien des mécontentements, du malaise, vu les enquêtes de la police, les regards soupçonneux des voisins et l'incompréhension de l'acte. Cette fugue impose des questionnements, ébranle les habitudes quotidiennes, oblige à l'analyse. La nouvelle destinée où A. est contrait à vivre le rend inquiétant à son tour. En effet, le changement de *statu quo* conjugal ainsi que la réflexion qu'il entraîne font que A. devient lui-aussi un étranger au sein de la communauté.

Ying Chen a un penchant pour les métamorphoses non seulement animales, mais aussi végétales. Comme chez Ovide, elle voit le héros masculin transformé en arbre : « Cet homme deviendra un arbre blessé que les insectes de toutes sortes désormais oseront aborder et attaquer, dont ils suceront la sève et ils saliront la peau de leur salive nocive, dans lequel ils se permettront, sans scrupule et sans respect, de se nicher, de parasiter, d'élargir leur terrain pouce par pouce, jusqu'aux racines, jusqu'au bout, jusqu'à la fin, en vainqueurs. » (E, 31). C'est un arbre d'ailleurs détruit par les parasites, un arbre qui a perdu toute sa beauté végétale. Le destin de cet arbre qui périt petit à petit ressemble à celui des protagonistes.

L'héroïne du roman *Espèces* ne recourt pas à l'exil extérieur, la fugue dans un autre pays, afin de vivre mieux, de s'enraciner dans une autre terre, peut-être plus fertile. Elle choisit un exil d'espèce qui lui apportera une nouvelle perspective de vie, plus d'optimisme, plus de gaieté, du moins l'espère-t-elle. Si les personnages du roman *Les lettres chinoises* quittent leur pays natal afin de s'offrir une chance, le personnage féminin du roman *Espèces* quitte son espèce humaine. Cette transformation mènera *volens nolens* à une nouvelle perspective, obligera à tracer d'autres graphes de perspective.

Il est essentiel de souligner que l'acte de la transformation dans la peau féline a une motivation diffuse. Il est totalement interne et inconscient. Il s'opère, tout comme chez Kafka, naturellement. C'est d'ailleurs ce que Paul Savoie observe : « La métamorphose du protagoniste s'opère de façon graduelle, de façon si naturelle qu'on aurait dit qu'elle avait déjà, en elle, les prédispositions nécessaires à une telle migration. »<sup>4</sup> Ce qui

4) P. Savoie, « L'animal au fond de soi », *Voix plurielles* 9.1 (2012), p. 145–147.



rapproche de plus les deux auteurs des métamorphoses c'est le fait que leurs héros, même après la transformation, restent ancrés dans la même réalité.

L'héroïne - chatte s'interroge, tout comme les exilés décrits dans les *Lettres chinoises*, si la réussite de l'intégration dans le nouvel univers est possible au prix de l'éradication des racines du pays maternel, pour le roman épistolier, ou de celles de la race humaine, dans ce cas-ci. Pareillement aux exilés qui vivent entre deux mondes, l'héroïne-chatte connaît également le déchirement de la dualité. Elle vit sa métamorphose avec lucidité et angoisse : « Je ne crois à aucune véritable métamorphose. Ce scepticisme, dans la situation particulière où je me trouve, me cause d'autant plus d'inconfort et d'inquiétude. » (*E*, p. 38) Après avoir connu l'égarément de la condition humaine, l'héroïne le revit dans la condition féline. Si d'abord l'héroïne a été heureuse du changement de perspective, bientôt elle voit combien les animaux sont eux-aussi impuissants.

L'héroïne voit dans la stérilisation des chats une forme de déchéance et de parenté avec soi-même et en extrapolant avec tous les humains qui sont devenus des os, des ossements rangés à présent au sous-sol de la maison de A. Le destin modifié d'une race et de l'autre donne à la narratrice des vertiges : « Leur mine distraite et fantomatique suggère leur parenté avec moi, leur parenté avec les chats déchus de cette rue, de même leur provenance d'un peuple éteint, leurs origines, tout comme les miennes, se trouvant au plus près dans la cave de A., au plus loin dans les déserts étrangers. » (*E*, 120) Les chats ont perdu leur chance d'avoir des chatons et les ossements qui se trouvent dans la cave de A. ont été détachés de la chair et de l'esprit, tout cela sous le signe de l'amorphe : « L'amorphe est ce qui a été vidé de son énergie vitale. Le mot est lié au mou, au gélatineux, mais aussi au sommeil, à la mort et à la privation de l'Être. »<sup>5</sup> L'évolution de la narratrice sous sa forme féline stérilisée s'inscrit donc dans un parcours de l'amorphe, de la déchéance tout comme il arrive sous sa forme humaine, toutes les deux dépourvues de la chance de la maternité.

Redevenue femme, la narratrice reprend son ancien rôle d'épouse dans la maison de A., mais le lecteur n'apprend pas comment se situent à présent les forces de ce couple en miette. L'idée est nuancée par Sophie Beaulé qui affirme : « Le devenir a certes généré des forces affirmatives chez la narratrice, qui se distancie des discours genrés, mais rien n'indique s'il s'agit de lignes de fuites qui déterritorialiseront l'espace conjugal pour le revivifier ou de simples félures. »<sup>6</sup> Quand même, l'héroïne-chatte s'est investie dans la lutte personnelle pour affirmer son identité. Les lueurs de la renaissance apparaissent : « La femme-chatte a réagi au joug discursif la paralysant;

5) Paré, François, *Les littératures de l'exigüité*, Ontario, Éditions du Nordir, 1992, p. 22.

6) Beaulé, Sophie, « Le corps en devenir et la machine de guerre : Bérard, Chen, Darrieussecq et Dufour », *Recherches féministes*, vol. 27, n° 1, 2014, p. 129-144., <https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/rf/2014-v27-n1-rf01435/1025419ar/>, p. 138.



son retour à la forme humaine ouvre sur le potentiel d'une autonomie assumée et d'une relation à l'autre renouvelée. »<sup>7</sup>

### 3. A., vu de deux perspectives

Les ossements qui peuplent la cave de la maison servent de cadre à la création du personnage masculin : sérieux, sage, sobre, lucide, froid, ce « collectionneur d'ossement, éleveur de fantômes, gardien de peuples morts » (E, 67). A. ressemble à un autre collectionneur célèbre de la littérature universelle qui apparaît dans le roman de John Fowles, *Le collectionneur*. C'est dans la cave que A., en homme de science, cherche l'essence de l'existence. Tandis que sa femme est éprise de la liberté de la nature, de l'air frais, du soleil, A. s'enferme dans le laboratoire et fouille dans les débris du passé, car la science est, à ses avis, porteuse du sens de la vie. Son travail devient de cette façon une autre barrière entre la fusion des conjoints : « Passe ton temps à contempler, ainsi me disait A., mais permets-moi de m'en aller, j'ai du travail. » (E, 114). Les époux se positionnent donc de façon différente quant à la vie. Elle, d'une manière contemplative, et lui, par son activité. Elle, en essayant de le comprendre et lui, en lui montrant du mépris. Dans ce contexte, la femme de A. était en péril de devenir comme les squelettes de son mari, terne, sans identité, sans personnalité. La nouvelle vie animale la met en garde, l'oblige à voir différemment, la transforme radicalement, de sorte qu'elle accorde même à A. des attributs plus humains qu'au passé : « Malgré tout, A. m'a protégé. Il a toléré les mille insuffisances de mon esprit et de mon corps. Il semblait savoir vaguement ce que je suis réellement. C'était bien lui qui avait provoqué mon entrée dans la vie et qui m'avait inventé une identité en m'épousant. » (E, 68) La double perspective sous laquelle est vu A. montre une évolution dans la compréhension du mari par la femme. C'est sous la forme féline qu'elle a observé l'impact néanmoins positif de A. dans son destin.

### 4. Le rêve et l'eau

Le rêve est dans l'œuvre de l'écrivaine sino-canadienne porteur de sens multiples. C'est le cas du rêve pendant lequel l'héroïne poursuit un écureuil et se sent en même temps guettée par celui-ci :

Il me semble qu'il s'agissait de l'ombre de ma mère, précisément d'une femme qui prétendait être ma mère et avoir des droits sur moi. Mais cela ressemblait aussi à un enfant qui n'était

7) Idem, p. 140.



pas sans doute le mien, que j'ai fini par vouloir tout de même – je contrôlais mal, très mal mes vies antérieures, les ayant ratées l'une après l'autre. Cet écureuil devant et derrière moi qui, tout comme ma mère, tout comme mon enfant, m'attirait, me provoquait et me poursuivait, me faisait courir plus vite que je ne le pouvais. (E, 69)

Toutes les constantes de l'écriture de Ying Chen se trouvent dans ce paragraphe-là: l'image de la mère, l'enfant qu'elle désire, mais qu'elle n'a pas ou qu'elle ne réussit pas à le garder auprès d'elle, la maternité, les rapports enfant-mère, le destin raté, le vouloir inassouvi de transformation, de réussite. La mère-écureuil, l'enfant-écureuil, ce rongeur grimpeur symbolise la femme de Ying Chen en quête permanente d'identité, en lutte constante avec soi-même et avec les autres. Il n'est pas à prendre à la légère que l'écrivaine a choisi l'écureuil afin de créer cette formidable mise en abyme, car ce petit animal à la queue panachée montre des similitudes évidentes avec l'héroïne d'*Espèces* : toujours en mouvement, toujours en changement, toujours soumis au jugement et au pouvoir de la prévoyance.<sup>8</sup>

L'eau, un autre motif préféré par la narratrice, apparaît comme un livre sacré qui garde le secret de la vie, comme source de révélation.<sup>9</sup> L'interprétation du destin se fait sur la surface de l'eau. Toutes les douleurs y jaillissent, tout le passé. La citation suivante concentre l'essentiel de toute l'écriture de Ying Chen : « Les lumières de cette nouvelle prospérité se reflètent et tremblent à la surface de l'eau. J'y vois aussi le cadavre d'une mère, l'image de mon enfant perdu et l'ombre de ma propre forme nouvelle, tout cela non pas écrasé au pied des édifices mais flottant ensemble avec eux dans une eau trouble, éclairée non par des étoiles mais par la splendeur terrestre. » (E, 85) L'auteure prouve ainsi une force stylistique spéciale qui rend la lecture adoucissante.

Dans le paradis imaginé par la narratrice, il n'est pas besoin de paroles, de langues pour communiquer : « Nos corps bougent d'un coin de la maison à l'autre dans la variation de la lumière et de l'ombre, comme des bêtes préhistoriques, sans langue. Voilà une condition paradisiaque. Notre maison calme flotte dans un monde bruyant, telle une île qui se tient dans le va-et-vient des vagues étourdissantes. » (E, 205) Plus que ça, la métamorphose en des « *bêtes préhistoriques* » ne représente pas une régression, mais le secret du nirvana. Le mutisme est une condition pour le flottement dans la rêverie vue comme un salut. La rêverie trouve ainsi son âme-sœur dans l'eau, toutes les deux pensives, flottantes, profondes.

8) Pour les Autochtones d'Amérique, avoir la force de l'écureuil se dit de l'homme qui est toujours en mouvement. Rêver d'un écureuil est une invitation à se préparer pour un grand changement. Il apprend aussi à réserver son énergie pour un besoin ultérieur mais aussi à réserver son jugement pour l'avenir. En héraldique l'écureuil est le symbole de la prévoyance, de l'agilité, de la vivacité et de l'indépendance ou bien encore des contrées boisées. (<https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%89cureuil>)

9) « La force vient de la source. L'imagination ne tient guère compte des affluents. Elle veut qu'une géographie soit l'histoire d'un roi. Le rêveur qui voit passer l'eau évoque l'origine légendaire du fleuve, la source lointaine. » (Bachelard, Gaston, *L'Eau et les Rêves*, Paris, Éditions Livre de Poche, 2015).



## Conclusion

Ying Chen relève dans la narration ce que Lévi-Strauss avait souligné en ce qui concerne les résidus existants dans chaque espèce : « [...] dans le corps humain, il y a des organismes, peut-être tout à fait étrangers, qui ont été captés dans le cours de l'évolution, je crois des organelles, de sorte que l'unité de l'individu ne se réduirait pas seulement à une société de cellules; car, parmi ces cellules, il y aurait des prisonniers d'autres « races » ou d'autres « civilisations ».<sup>10</sup>

La métamorphose de la femme et tous les nouveaux rapports à la vie qu'elle découvre sont autant d'invitations lancées par l'écrivaine à une analyse lucide du sort humain, de son appartenance à l'espèce, à l'environnement, à la famille. L'être humain doit en fin de compte assumer son rôle dans l'univers en s'interrogeant constamment sur son identité et sur les réseaux sociaux qu'il tisse. Paul Savoie met en relief cette idée en analysant l'œuvre de l'écrivaine : « Grâce à un astucieux renversement des perspectives, l'auteure Ying Chen suscite un questionnement sur le sens profond de ce que signifie le fait d'être humain et le besoin de créer des rapports dans un contexte dit humain, selon les lois et les attentes régies par l'espèce humaine. »<sup>11</sup>

En fin de compte, c'est la parole bouddhiste qui résonne dans son roman en synthétisant toutes les révoltes, toutes les souffrances, toutes les recherches : « Le bonheur est cette rive lointaine qu'on ne trouve qu'en soi. » (E, 176) La rive et l'entre-deux de la métamorphose temporaire sont des symboles pour l'effritement du soi. La narratrice transmet ainsi qu'il n'y a toujours pas réintégration réelle du soi car on est sur la rive.

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10) Lévi – Strauss, C., *L'identité*, Paris, Éditions Grasset, 1979, p. 209.

11) Paul Savoie, œuvre citée, p. 147.



Georgeta Prada

L'exil d'espèce dans le roman *Espèces* de Ying Chen

**GEORGETA PRADA** / est doctorante à l'Université « Dunărea de Jos » de Galați en Roumanie. Elle est aussi professeure de FLE en Galați depuis vingt ans. A présent elle enseigne au Collège National « Vasile Alecsandri ». Elle a publié deux recueils de fiches de travail en coauteure et elle s'est investie dans de nombreuses activités culturelles (nationales et internationales) et didactiques afin de promouvoir la culture française et de motiver ses élèves. Ses domaines d'intérêt sont la littérature francophone et l'anthropologie. Elle prépare une thèse sur le questionnement identitaire dans l'écriture migrante québécoise.



# Cinderella Writes Back: Sara Jeannette Duncan's Mary Trent as Canada Personified

Cendrillon répond : Mary Trent de Sara Jeannette Duncan, le Canada personnifié

Tihana Klepač

## Abstract

Sara Jeannette Duncan concerned herself overtly with the debates about the status of Canada within the British Empire by critiquing Canada's place within that empire. Her Mary Trent of *Cousin Cinderella* arrives in London at the height of the preferential trade debate, thus enabling Duncan to illuminate the issue of Anglo-colonial relations. Formulating Mary as ignorant of her wealth and potential (and thus personifying Canada), and positioning her against Evelyn, an American social climber, gives Duncan the opportunity to depict what it means to be Canadian. While Mary comes to London with the idea that England is home, we observe as her pride in her Canadian origins increases. Additionally, through Mary's unique female Canadian vantage point, as we watch her develop from a raw product commodified by the London market into a writer through the creation of her autobiographical narrative, one with increased confidence in herself as a Canadian and a woman, we learn how economic and political workings of imperialism affected women. At the nexus of imperialism, nationalism and feminism emerges a narrative of Canadian modernity.

**Keywords:** Sara Jeannette Duncan, *Cousin Cinderella*, Anglo-colonial relations, imperialism, nationalism

## Résumé

Sara Jeannette Duncan s'intéressait ouvertement aux débats sur le statut du Canada dans l'Empire en critiquant la position du Canada dans l'empire. Sa Mary Trent de *Cousin Cinderella* arrive à Londres à l'apogée du débat sur échanges préférentiels permettant ainsi à Duncan d'éclairer la question des relations anglo-coloniales. Elaborer Mary comme ignorante de sa richesse et de son potentiel (et ainsi personnifier le Canada), et la positionner contre Evelyn, un grimpeur social américain, donne à Duncan l'occasion de décrire ce que signifie être Canadien. Pendant que Mary vient à Londres pour interpréter l'Angleterre comme son chez-soi, nous voyons s'accroître sa fierté de ses origines canadiennes. De plus, grâce à l'unique point de vue féminin canadien de Mary, tandis que nous la voyons se développer à partir d'un produit brut transformé par le marché de Londres





en écrivaine à travers la création de son récit autobiographique, celle dont une confiance en elle-même en tant que Canadienne et femme s'accroît, nous apprenons comment les fonctionnements économiques et politiques de l'impérialisme ont affecté les femmes. À la croisée de l'impérialisme, du nationalisme et du féminisme ressort un récit de la modernité canadienne.

**Mots-clés :** Sara Jeannette Duncan, *Cousin Cinderella*, relations anglo-coloniales, impérialisme, nationalisme

In the 2003 Introduction to her influential *Survival*, Margaret Atwood claims that although “The erstwhile molehill of Canlit has grown into a mountain” (11), one still has to deal with the issues of its existence and its distinctness as Colonial Mentality, a belief “that the Great Good Place, was, culturally elsewhere” (5), is still present in Canada. In the chapter “Family Portrait: Masks of the Bear” Atwood, discussing the period of the formulation of the nation following exploration and settlement, fittingly detects three symbols of vital importance for Canadian identity: “the English Island, the American Frontier and the Canadian Survival” (2003: 157) as dominant concerns of the period. And yet, even though it is precisely those symbols that Sara Jeannette Duncan concerns herself with in her two most popular novels – namely, *The Imperialist* and *Cousin Cinderella* – she remains off the edge of Atwood’s study.

Faye Hammill gives two reasons for this. She claims that Duncan’s writing was too self-aware to fit the model proposed by Atwood, arguing that “instead of unconsciously accepting a limited range of recognizably Canadian (and largely nature-based) symbols, she invented new ones” (2003: 59). Consequently Hammill describes Atwood’s, Frye’s and D. G. Jones’s frame of reference in reading Canadian literature as too restrictive and, ironically, accuses them of “garrison mentality” (2003: 60).<sup>1</sup> The other reason is the fact that Duncan never closely identified herself with a national literary tradition (2003: 60). Hammill suggests that the reason for that may be that there was no literary tradition she could identify with.

In contrast, I would argue that in the modernist age of increased interaction between nations and intercontinental exchange of ideas Duncan, who according to Tausky was “always conscious of being a modern woman” (1980: 20–21), wished to participate in those and deal with the above-mentioned English Island, American Frontier and Canadian Survival by putting them in the context of Canadian modernity, rejecting

1) The term “garrison mentality” was actually coined by Northrop Frye in his 1965 “Conclusion” to the *Literary History of Canada* in 1965. It was further explored by Margaret Atwood in her *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (originally published in 1972).



“aggressive parochialism” (Tausky in Hammill 2003: 61). In her journalistic piece “Saunterings” of 30 September 1886 Duncan writes:

A spirit of depreciation of such faint stirrings of literary life as we have amongst us at present has often been remarked in Canadians, a tendency to nip forth-putting buds by contemptuous comparison with the full blown production of other lands, where conditions are more favourable to literary efflorescence. This is a distinctly colonial trait; and in our character as colonists we find the root of all our sins of omission in letters. ... Our enforced political humility is the distinguishing characteristic of every phase of our national life. We are ignored, and we ignore ourselves. A nation's development is like a plant's, unattractive under ground. So long as Canada remains in political obscurity, content to thrive only at the roots, so long will the leaves and blossoms of art and literature be scanty and stunted products of our national energy. (Duncan in Ballstadt 1975: 35)

Rejecting what Margaret Atwood could in 1972 refer to as Colonial Mentality (or in Australia the Cultural Cringe),<sup>2</sup> Duncan resembles Atwood and the nationalist critics much more than they are ready to admit.

Yet, as a result of Duncan's specific historical moment – namely, that of Canadian modernity – her literature blends loyalty to and faith in her country and the social order with her commitment to the future of the Empire and her personal identification with British history and British mission. Like many of her contemporaries, she saw the Empire as a bulwark against the destructive social effects of materialist capitalism; an effective check on US militarism; and a preserve for the ideals of justice, disinterested debate, altruism, and community which were threatened by the conditions of modern life. Her work speaks to the contradiction, as common among Canadians of her day as of ours, between commitment to the ideals of our European heritage and suspicion of its imperialist motives, to the difference that is Canadian point of view. (Dean 1991: 4–5)

This interpretation of Duncan's attitude toward Britain and America, as well as her vision of Canada, stems, I would argue, from the understanding of modernity as that slippery term which, to use Susan Friedman's words, “has no single meaning, not even in one location. This polylogue...voices particular views shaped by different planetary

2) The term “cultural cringe” was introduced by the noted Australian commentator A. A. Phillips in his 1950 *Meanjin* essay of the same name; there he put a name on the submissive mentality from which a settler colony is not released following its nominal independence: “We cannot shelter from invidious comparisons behind the barrier of a separate language; we have no long-established or interestingly different cultural tradition to give security and distinction to its interpreters; and the centrifugal pull of the great cultural metropolises works against us. Above our writers – and other artists – looms the intimidating mass of Anglo-Saxon culture. Such a situation almost inevitably produces the characteristic Australian Cultural Cringe...” (299).



positionalities. Globally and locally, modernity appears infinitely expandable” (Friedman 2010: 473). She adds

Modernism became a reflection of and engagement with a wide spectrum of historical changes, including intensified and alienating urbanization; the cataclysms of world war and technological progress run amok; the rise and fall of European empires; changing gender, class, and race relations; and technological inventions that radically changed the nature of everyday life, work, mobility, and communication. Once modernity became the defining cause of aesthetic engagements with it, the door opened to thinking about the specific conditions of modernity for different genders, races, sexualities, nations, and so forth. Modernity became modernities, a pluralization that spawned a plurality of modernisms and the circulations among them. (Friedman 2010: 474)

Understanding modernity in its plurality, understanding that in Canada cultural nationalism and modernism can and do work side by side in the production of modernity,<sup>3</sup> one cannot but say that each modernity produced its own modernism, and Duncan's is one of the many on the international stage at the turn of the nineteenth century; it is one fraught with identification of Canadianness against former colonial masters and against its aggressive southern neighbour. This is especially evident in Duncan's *Cousin Cinderella*.

The novel describes the visit of two Canadian siblings, Mary and Graham Trent, children of a rich Canadian businessman, to England at the beginning of the twentieth century. There they encounter their rich American friend Evelyn Dicey, who has quickly become part of the London society. She introduces the Trents to the Pavisay-Doleford family, and it soon becomes clear that she has an interest in marrying young Lord Peter Doleford. However, it is Mary who ends up marrying Peter, while Graham (though for a time blinded by his infatuation with the Pavis Court which is the Doleford family home and intending to marry Peter's sister Barbara), ultimately realises the mistake he was about to make, breaks off the engagement, and returns home to Canada.

Duncan herself arrived in England at about the same time the Trents did, in 1903, in the year Joseph Chamberlain delivered his famous “I Believe in a British

3) Modern is, especially following Mao and Walkowitz's “The New Modernist Studies,” increasingly seen as a “critical practice, a mode of responding to social and economic modernity” (Snaith 2014: 6–7), and this new expansiveness of modernist studies enabled the inclusion of writers which would not conventionally be considered modernist – Duncan, but also Sarojini Naidu or Olive Schreiner. Their “critical engagement with modernity can be found precisely in their feminist response to colonialism. And that response, in turn, finds expression in a range of stylistic experiments with perspective, narrative voice, temporality and imagery. Their modernity resonates on many levels: as writers, as colonials, as single women on the streets of London, and through their challenging of the cultural and spatial hierarchies of global, imperial space” (Snaith 2014: 8).



Empire” speech wherein, much like in his 1897 speech “The True Conception of the Empire,” Chamberlain admitted that past relationships with the colonies were not commendable, but the “feeling of Imperial patriotism” has not been extinguished. At the beginning of the new century he wished to rekindle that feeling. The British Crown was painfully aware that the power relations within the Empire had changed: “The United States, with all their vast territory, are filling up; and even now we hear of tens of thousands of emigrants leaving the United States in order to take up the fresh and rich lands of our colony in Canada” (Chamberlain). Fearing the loss of influence, and even more importantly of wealth, Chamberlain is urging the peoples of the Empire to think what their separation from Britain would mean to their “power and influence as a country; ... [their] position among the nations of the world; ..... [their] trade and commerce – I put that last” (Chamberlain). He openly states that the “empire could only be maintained by ‘relations of interest as well as relations of sentiment’” (Snaith 95). By singling out Canada as the most prosperous of the colonies, he reinforced “his point that only through preferential tariffs could Britain reciprocate Canada’s generosity” (Snaith 95). His final comment is the most revealing, as is his stress on a self-sustaining and self-sufficient Britain which requires British possessions all over the world:

I believe in a British Empire, in an Empire which, though it should be its first duty to cultivate friendship with all the nations of the world, should yet, even if alone, be self-sustaining and self-sufficient, able to maintain itself against the competition of all its rivals. And I do not believe in a Little England which shall be separated from all those to whom it would in the natural course look for support and affection, a Little England which would then be dependent absolutely on the mercy of those who envy its present prosperity, and who have shown they are ready to do all in their power to prevent its future union with the British races throughout the world. (Chamberlain)

As Anna Snaith writes, “In Canada, such arguments also led to concern about British self-interest and a feeling that the ideals of imperialism were being reduced to economics. This was Duncan’s anxiety” (94).<sup>4</sup> *Cousin Cinderella*, as well as Duncan’s earlier writings,<sup>5</sup> reveals the contradiction of Canadian writing of the time with feeling of Imperial patriotism going alongside Canadian nationalism. It is clear

4) In 1905 Adam Shortt, a Canadian political scientist, wrote a pamphlet wherein he expressed the same concerns: “The most fatal mistake which Britain could make would be to attempt the restoration of those mechanical and mercenary bonds, under whatever gilded or insinuating disguises they may be presented by Mr. Chamberlain or any one else. It cannot, however, be too strongly emphasised that Canadian attachment to Britain is in no way dependent upon the volume of trade which passes between them” (5).

5) See Faye Hammill’s *Literary Culture and Female Authorship in Canada 1760–2000* (page 50) for a study of Duncan’s earlier writings on the topic.



from her writings that Duncan placed a high value on Britain's culture and especially literature. Similarly, her work critiques British imperialist motifs. The attitude was confusing for the early reviewers of her *The Imperialist*, as they wrote that "One cannot be quite sure [...] that Mrs Coates [Duncan] herself knows at times whether she is preaching Mr. Joseph Chamberlain's doctrine, or laughing at it" (Hammill 2003: 50). Thus, old Mr. Trent of *Cousin Cinderella* "was perfectly delighted when Graham made up his mind to go out with the first contingent of Canadian Volunteers" (Duncan 1908: 3) to the Boer War and fight for the Empire, and has taught his children to perceive London as a "Mecca" as the children see themselves as "the faithful who approach from Minnebiac" (33).

Although old Mr. Trent was "so rich that none of us liked ... to mention money" (7), he collects newspaper clippings of speeches delivered in England on the subject of Canadian future greatness from local newspapers with a desire to "paste them in a book, which he intend[ed] some day to publish at his own expense, so that whatever happens, they will be obliged to recognise over there that they did see it and say it once" (7), his need to demonstrate Canadian greatness before the British, revealing his colonial mentality.<sup>6</sup> It is the one quality around which he is constructed: he refers to his children as "nothing but a pair of colonial editions" (9) and sends them to England for additional education and refinement. When he advises them to explain to anyone interested that the North American continent "grows something besides Americans" (11), Mary realises that "he wanted to send [them] as samples" of a new and flourishing Canadian society to England.

The new generation of Canadian-born youngsters – the Trent siblings – are, much like Duncan herself, permeated by the profoundly colonial feeling which constructs London as a Mecca. The first thing the Trents do is go sightseeing – to see the London they have been reading about all their lives: the Crown Jewels and Thomas Carlyle's house in Chelsea, Admiralty's docks and Scotland Yard, and Greenwich Observatory. The two Canadians appreciate British tradition and history. For them being in London is being near "the Royal heart of England, which has always been before beaten for [them] in a fairy tale far away" (65). Accordingly Mary finds England "nearer heaven than any other country" (248), while Graham claims that "the greatest temptation of England" (120) is Oxford, or as Mary explains: "I think he means that Oxford would tempt him to be an Englishman more than anything else over here"

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6) In his *Reflections of a Siamese Twin: Canada at the End of the Twentieth Century* John Ralston Saul discusses colonial mentality by referring to it as a result of a delusional romantic view of Canadian relationship with London and Paris – a view which reflects the "growing pains of tiny colonies into an enormous complex country" (1997: 23). Ultimately Ralston claims, "The insistence on the maintenance of an illusory family relationship, where one limited only to political and financial interest existed and exists, is humiliating for those in the former/current colonies and embarrassing for the metropolitan centres" (1997: 22).



(120). Graham is uncritically fascinated by Britain and its material culture – artefacts and architecture, purchasing all he can so that it would remain “at home” and not fall into the hands of the Americans. As Canadians, the Trents interpret their arrival to England as arriving to the mother country, as “being more or less at home” (75).

But in this post-Confederation period of Canadian semi-nationhood (since Britain was still controlling security and foreign affairs) brother and sister soon learned that they were “strangers really, though [they] knew the flag so well, and had sung ‘Rule Britannia’ since [they] could sing anything” (51), and that the Britain they were taught about in school does not exist anymore, it “belong[s] to the period of Alfred the Great” (71). Namely, in spite of old Trent’s letters of introduction to higher society his children “were unfortunate in meeting these people ... they were always just going out of town; but they very kindly sent [them] tickets for Madame Tussaud’s” (69). The British are so perfectly disinterested in Canada that Graham, albeit in exasperation, makes an ingenuous comment: “I imagine we are known to their leading ethnologists and perhaps to Lord Elgin” (76). Their knowledge of Canada is extremely outdated. Lady Doleford mentions Iroquois war-whoops, while Lady Lippington refers to the difference between Lower and Upper Canada which has long since ceased to exist. Thus when British nobility makes perfectly disinterested statements such as when Lady Lippington, pretending to be fascinated with Canada while actually working on securing a governor position for her husband, says: “Its history thrill-lls me; its loyalty touches me to the heart” Graham offers a brilliantly sarcastic reply: “That would greatly gratify Canada ... if she knew” (91). As a final point, the Duchess of Dulwich, the head of the Royal Commission on the Assimilation of Aliens, finds no problem in publicly announcing: “Personally I am not very fond of aliens. I would repatriate them all” (98).

As a result of such interactions the Trents begin to assert their own national allegiance and identity. Thus when asked by Lady Barbara Doleford when her people think of coming back to England to settle Mary replies: “But they are at home now, Lady Doleford!” (170) When Lady Doleford comments how accustomed the English are to people coming home “from South Africa, and India, and even Australia” saying that “They seem to prefer it,” Mary replies: “But Canada is different ... Nobody prefers to leave Canada” (170). Canada is, through the responses of the Trents to England, formulated as a beautiful place. Thus Graham finds Canada in the sound of the sawing mills on the road along the river: “It is a delicious sound; they sing their way through it with a kind of mounting cry, that wanes and waxes and wanes again with a perpetual call and a perpetual lullaby; I like it better than any other note that you hear out-of-doors” (5).

Canada is, importantly, also a place of freedom from social bondage, while “blinkered vision and ... snobbery ... are shown to be part of the British ‘condition’”



(Hammill 2003: 71). Peter Doleford envies Graham for being Canadian: “No bother in seeing your way out there. No impedimenta” (Duncan 1908: 142). In contrast, when Mary admires England before Peter Doleford, in one sentence he formulates English history and society as very restricting: “I sometimes envy people who are free to come and look at it.” (248). Because Peter Doleford is trapped in the English social system, and under pressure to marry rich to save the family estate, the Pavis Court, as well as to keep pretence of power and authority by going into politics. Exasperatingly he concludes: “Bah – birth’s a rotten borough!” (142)

Finally, Canada is a place of enormous possibilities, and as Graham comes to believe: “It’s a one-horse show that is going some day to pull the Empire!” (213) While Canada is thriving, Britain is falling into a racial and moral abyss, as is evident from the above given examples, as well as from Duncan’s description of British upper class youth and their preoccupations with their public image. When learning the story of one Ambrose Lane-Gwithers’s concern about being called a “dancing man” by the *London Daily* and his subsequent disclaimer which he demanded be published, Graham can only conclude that he probably never earned a penny in his life, and that “nothing so contributed to the swelled head as a false relation to the economic basis of society” (136). Additional proof of this is how the British upper class court both, American and Canadian money to rescue their family fortunes. Thus “Graham and Mary, as inheritors of the pioneering qualities of health, energy and self-reliance, are required in the heart of the empire” (Snaith 2014: 95). They will bring the regeneration desperately needed if the ball of the Empire was to be avoided. This is the reason why Canadian modernity is characterised by seemingly contradictory imperialism and Canadian nationalism: “federation implied that Canada was an asset to Britain as an equal partner. Canada could revitalise the heart of the empire” (Snaith 2014: 94).

Duncan’s attitude toward America is equally complex, and it, too, reveals the contradictions of the day. As Janice Fiamengo detected, based on Duncan’s writings in *The Week*, Duncan’s “account of American institutions and social habits was designed to be appreciative and friendly while also piquant and critical – a form of appraisal intended to enable readers to see past the broad-brush rhetorical strokes of national rivalries” (2010: 467) Duncan claimed that Canadians and Americans were alike in many ways, and it was foolish to pretend otherwise: “We have greatly their likings and their dislikings, their ideas and their opinions,” Duncan commented in an 1887 article that suggested the inescapability of American influence. “In short, we have not escaped, as it was impossible we should escape, the superior influence of a people overwhelming in numbers, prosperous in business, and aggressive in political and social faith, the natural conditions of whose life we share, and with whom we are brought every day into closer contact” (Duncan in Fiamengo 467). But they are not the same, and both “the similarities that nationalists denied and the genuine





differences of history and culture were worth considering as a means to greater mutual understanding” (Duncan in Fiamengo 467).

The differences that Duncan focused on were threefold: problems with America’s claims to freedom and human flourishing, the power of wealth in America, and the excess of American Anglophobia. The first can best be summed up in an incredibly witty piece Duncan wrote for the *Montreal Star* on American cultural practice of the publication of White House recipes, in this particular case, of the brown bread recipe by the First Lady of the United States, Mrs. Grover Cleveland, in the *New York World* wherein Duncan refers to the “dear cousins the Americans” as “such sincere Democrats” mocking them for claiming that “the incidents of place and power mean so little to them” and that “the hideous distinctions of caste are so little known in their free, equal and enlightened midst!” (Duncan in Fiamengo 2010: 471) She continues by saying that Mrs. Cleveland’s recipe can undoubtedly be depended on, but it is most definitely “as light and crumbly and crusty as the same article upon the plebeian table of Mrs. Jones in Jonesville” (Duncan in Fiamengo 2010: 471). However, the recipe will never be published, since it would never be “religiously followed by a large majority of good American housekeepers, and carefully pasted in several thousand gilt-edged scrapbooks” (Duncan in Fiamengo 2010: 471). Not unless “Mrs. Jones had forsaken a noble husband and a promising family to become a society actress, or had the honor of placing the art of female pugilism on a professional basis, or had walked abroad a startling illustration of some pronounced theories of dress reform, in any of which cases her attention would have been temporarily diverted from brown bread” (Duncan in Fiamengo 2010: 471). And this is where Duncan makes a crucial point: “Mrs. Cleveland’s recipe is really a rather curious comment on Republican notions. In allowing it to be published she does the most democratic thing possible herself, and directly encourages precisely the opposite thing in her fellow citizens. I had almost written subjects” (Duncan in Fiamengo 2010: 471).

As Fiamengo accurately points out, this is not an ordinary recipe. Instead it speaks volumes about American republicanism. Namely, “while on the surface [it] appears to be testimony to the democratic nature of American society, [it] is also a betrayal of it” (Fiamengo 2010: 471). The baking of bread, while meant to stand for domestic virtues all republican homes share, and with them their First lady as well, is revealed as a sham when the recipe is published, when the First Lady, “offers the bread recipe to her fellow citizens (who declare themselves *not* British subjects)”. Rather than confirming her ordinariness,

it reveals that everything the First Lady touches is news, her bread recipe worth publishing not because of its intrinsic merit but because of the First Lady’s proximity to power. It is not an ignoble power – unlike the other, more objectionable routes to celebrity that





Duncan mentions – but it is foolish for Americans to boast of equality while bowing down before a secular idol. In Duncan's estimation, social hierarchies can be changed by human institutions, but hierarchy itself, stemming from human nature, is probably ineradicable, whatever the triumphalist prophets of progress might declare. (Fiamengo 2010: 471)

In *Cousin Cinderella* this elitism is exemplified in Evelyn's social class – “her father owns any number of the Thousand Islands (in the River St. Lawrence)” (Duncan 1908: 70); it is only the rich who can afford to send their children to Europe. Also, her father's connections got her a ticket to the Parliament the day the King delivered his speech there, and she offers to “work that for” the Trents (77), as the American Minister is “always ready to oblige” (77).

Commenting on the King being “a dear” (75), Evelyn notes that the North Americans have nothing like him over there to which Mary exclaims: “We've got him!” Evelyn's flippant “To be sure; I forgot. He's got you.” (75) reveals a particular American attitude toward Canada. Americans feel superior. The thesis finds support in Evelyn nicknaming Mary Miss Canada and Graham the Maple Prince, as well.<sup>7</sup> It is because of what Duncan termed the American Anglophobia that Americans cannot approve of Canadian loyalty to the British Crown. In a number of her articles in *The Week*, Duncan focused on “the excess of American

Anglophobia, reading it as a kind of disavowal – a declaration of rejection so insistent as to seem a disguised confession of what is denied, an admission of guilty attraction” (Fiamengo 469). She critiqued American rebellious inheritance of revolutions and overthrowals committed in the attempt to achieve distinction, as she believed that “genuine differences can develop gradually and naturally” (Fiamengo 2010: 469).

She often pointed to the hypocrisy of American behaviour: “Theoretically, well-regulated Americans hate a lord, but only theoretically ... Practically they dine him and wine him, and are not averse to marrying him” (Fiamengo 2010: 469). The plot of *Cousin Cinderella* is largely based on such cross-Atlantic attractions. Evelyn preys on Britain, she does not admire it, and she does not appreciate the Old World culture. Listening to the Trents listing what they went to see once in London, she laughs it all off saying she is in London “for tons of other things” (Duncan 1908: 74), referring primarily to social affairs. Thus she leaves room for Graham to mention the institution of the American duchess. Evelyn is not offended. On the contrary, her response confirms Graham's suspicions that she came over to Britain to find an aristocratic husband: “The American duchess is a deservedly popular institution – good for the Duke and improving for the American. Do you know any?” (76) It is in the financial collapse of the British aristocracy before the challenges of the capitalist system that

7) Graham's flippant response to Evelyn: “American titles are great. They carry no responsibility.” (93) reveals Duncan's ingeniousness.



Evelyn sees her chance of getting an aristocratic title. Or, as Carrie Macmillan put it, “Evelyn, with no self-consciousness whatsoever, is in England to wed her American fortune to an English title. Duncan presents the American as openly self-interested and uninhibited by questions of local custom and manners, whereas the Canadians are much more socially sensitive” (Macmillan). The Dolefords are in such dire financial straits that they had to pawn their furniture, and yet Evelyn is amused by the attention the Earl of Doleford is showering her with, all the while both of them knowing it is her money that is being courted. Later, in a private conversation with Mary Evelyn sums up the situation “with brilliant and unblinking clarity” (Thomson):

“When it comes to the gold attraction I am not taking any.... and this is the place,” she went on with conviction, “to make you thankful to be able to say so. It’s simply disgusting, the importance of money over here – just the dead importance of it. They don’t like talking about it any more than we do – or have as much as we do – about the food they are digesting; but it’s just as necessary to keep them morally healthy and socially alive. They’ve never had to earn it; it’s always been there, like the air, to exist by, and they’ve got to have it – it’s a matter of self- preservation. When they absolutely haven’t got it and finally can’t get it, there’s no sort of way for them to live – they become extinguished.” (Duncan 1908: 182)

Even though Evelyn is clearly manipulating the weaknesses of her British friends throughout the novel, here the full extent of the morass of decay Britain is wallowing in is revealed.

Lastly, Duncan dismisses the American delusion of being free and independent individuals, claiming that they are ruled by wealth: “Theoretically, the American citizen is a free and independent personality. Practically, he is dominated, to some extent at least, by what seems to him a worthier master than rank” (Duncan in *Fiamengo* 470). Thus when first encountering the Trents in London and upon hearing what they have been doing, Evelyn reminds them of their position in terms of money, she implies that they should be aware of their purchasing power and live extravagantly: “Do you realise that you represent between you a good quarter of the mining interests of Nova Scotia, and enough New Brunswick timber to buy a county town with?” (Duncan 1908: 75) Also, Evelyn is the first to mention the Trents’ wealth presenting Graham to the British high society as “the biggest berry on the bush over there” (92) and naming him “the Maple Prince.” As Anna Snaith has detected “Evelyn openly talks of the Trents in terms of the stock market” (2014: 99). Indeed, the only reason why the English have not considered the colonial market thus far is because it is small: “Maple princes and princesses ... have only lately been quoted in the share lists. But prices are firm, Marykin – and rising. And Mrs Jerry ... declares that it’s a Heaven-sent way of drawing the ties of Empire closer without tinkering...with the tariff” (Duncan 1908:



181). “The society magazines pick up on Evelyn’s name for Graham, the Maple Prince, thus connecting them to the basic commodity which renders them so desirable” (Snaith 2014: 99). The climax of this commodification, claims Snaith, occurs when Mary is riding home in an electric brougham and feels

the definite thrill of new perception, something captivating and delicious. Suddenly, without Graham, without anybody, moving through the lovely, thronged, wet, lamplit London streets in Mrs Jarvis’s electric brougham, I felt myself realized – realized in London, not only by the person who happened to be near me, but in a vague, delightful, potential sense by London. Realized, not a bit for what I was – that wouldn’t, I am afraid, have carried me very far – nor exactly for what I represented, but for something else, for what I might, under favourable circumstance, be made to represent. (Duncan 1908: 126)

Anna Snaith perceptively claims that London at that moment becomes a giant market whereon Mary is floated. It is at that moment that she recognises her worth. Significantly, Snaith claims that it is not marriage that Mary is interested in, but rather the “solicitation...of London” (100). “Her value as a commodity, ‘a possibility, a raw product, to be melted or hammered or woven into London’, is a route to recognition in London. The potential of the situation gives her a voice in London, a way of seeing,” (100) argues Snaith. This excitement is never repeated, and from that moment on Mary becomes increasingly disillusioned with Britain. This is why Snaith’s point is extremely important – even at the height of excitement “immediately the rhetoric is one of sacrifice: ‘one would be obliged, in a way, to hand oneself over’” (Snaith 2014: 100). Mary, however, resists the temptation. Significantly, she is the character that most clearly identifies herself with Canada. Her personal and artistic development throughout the novel can be identified with Canadian path to national self-assurance.

In any case, the novel’s autodiegetic narrator is Mary. She, however, begins the novel by introducing herself through her father, senator John Trent of the Minnebiac Planning Mills – “I will first introduce our father, as seems suitable” (Duncan 1908: 1), and then moves on to introduce the mother. When she presents herself, she does so in “we-form” or use Hammill’s term that of the “composite protagonist” (66) – “We ourselves are Graham and Mary Trent” (1). Having introduced the family, and drawing authority as a narrator from this respectable and influential family, Mary only then moves onto her story of being sent to Britain “to be finished” (11). As the father sent them off, Mary feels as if “he had handed us a banner”; however, she is “glad that Graham, who would have to carry it most of the time, was better qualified than [she]” (11). As it turns out, it will be Mary who will remain true to her Canadian identity and will correctly recognise insincere imperial designs in



British colonial policy. While Mary is a little naïve at the beginning of the novel, throughout the narrative she comes to represent the balanced Canadian viewpoint, one which negotiates between the Americans and the British. Hammill correctly concludes that “The detailed explorations of perception and subjectivity in the novel reveal the ways in which Duncan – through Mary Trent – creates herself as a Canadian author and responds to her identity as such” (Hammill 2014: 66). She ends with a crucial argument: “I contend that the processes of *self-realization* and the *recognition* of difference are as central to the novel as the precise contours of the national characteristics and identities which are presented” (2014: 66) [*italics in the original*]. Mary’s naiveté in the course of the novel develops into recognition as she comes to understand that she is “like a mouse in the paws of Mrs. Jarvis, her own small Colonial trophy” (Duncan 1908: 155). Once she understands it, she is able to resist it; she is able to avoid being intimidated by the weight of English cultural traditions, and even prevent Graham’s marriage arranged only because he wants to claim his moral birthright, his share in the commonwealth that is so much richer and more rewarding where the Empire began” (Snaith 2014:105), and Barbara is part of this share.

While Mary does marry Peter Doleford, a different colonization is at stake here – it is “reverse colonization”, as Mary has a “plundering feeling” about the empire, wishing to take home with her clothes, ideas and old china “anything portable”. She “reorders the geography of the empire by refusing to read the “voyage in” (Anna Snaith) as homecoming. She reasserts Canada as home, as the centre, countering Lady Doleford’s anglocentrism: ‘can one be at home out of England?’” (Snaith 2014: 105). Thus this incredible young woman arrives to London with her parents’ point of view, with an inherited point of view, and leaves with her own, and with her own mature voice.

At first glance Graham might be taken to exemplify the position of a Canadian artist at the beginning of the twentieth century. Namely, if Duncan’s writings in the *Saunterings* are taken into account, Graham is a perfect fit. In her famous passage in the *Saunterings* Duncan claims that the greatest impediment to the development of Canadian art is the Canadian orientation toward practicality: “We are indifferent; we go about our business and boast of the practical nature of our aspirations; we have neither time nor the inclination for stargazing, we say. The Province of Ontario is one great camp of the Philistines” (Duncan in Ballstadt 1975: 34). And Graham is, indeed, formulated as a missionary “of simple purposes and fine ideas in wood” having built a “mantelpiece ... with a design of fir-trees”, which was to Mary “like a line of poetry, or a bar of music” (Duncan in Ballstadt 1975: 6). However, even though he had built himself a “workshop for composing and carving things out of wood,” that was never to be as “Instead, ... he was the Son of John Trent and Son; and with the business



extending the way it has done and seems to do, he has been obliged to reserve the poetry of it for his spare time..." (Duncan in Ballstadt 1975: 6).

Thus Graham stands for most Canadian artistically inclined youth of the day – he never really develops as an artist. Instead as a potential Canadian artist Graham is developed in relation to English culture. Carrie Macmillan detects it marvellously:

Graham falls in love with England, and more particularly its fine old artifacts. He selects the flat in which they will stay on the basis of its old furniture and a seventeenth-century wood engraving. He also starts collecting fine old pieces of wooden furniture. However, it is significant that in Canada he was a craftsman in wood, an artist, albeit part-time, whereas in England he only collects. Also, he is himself unsure of his complete devotion to English art, for he says to Mary at one point that everything in England seems so completed. The Canadian boy senses a tiredness to the English scene that was lacking in his own more dynamic country. Respect for England while preserving his own character would be appropriate for Graham, but loss of self is the danger he courts there. (Macmillan)

It is a trap that his sister, however, never falls into. Instead, Mary Trent writes herself "into existence both as an author and as a Canadian" (Hammill 2003: 77). Through this process of self-realisation and recognition of difference Mary writes a new and contemporary narrative of Canada, one that will counter the obsolete and external view of the land and the continent such as the one offered by Lady Doleford based on the eighteenth-century letters by her great-grandfather from Quebec (Duncan 1908: 172).

Thus it is Mary who represents the future of the Canadian artist. She is the one who counters colonial mentality. It is Mary who in writing finds a basis for self-definition and writes both herself and her country into being. In the process she recognises the importance of England as a source of tradition, and the importance of America as the entrepreneurial neighbour, but also stresses the importance of preserving the national distinctions.



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Tihana Klepač

**Cinderella Writes Back: Sara Jeannette Duncan's Mary Trent as Canada Personified**

**TIHANA KLEPAČ** / is an assistant professor at the Department of English, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb, where she teaches 19<sup>th</sup>-century Australian literature. She has published papers on Australian exploration narratives and on early Australian women's writing. She has co-edited *Irish Mirror for Croatian Literature: Theoretical Assumptions, Literary Comparisons, Reception* (2007) with Ljiljana Ina Gjurgjan, and *English Studies from Archives to Prospects: Volume 1 – Literature and Cultural Studies* (2016) with Stipe Grgas and Martina Domines Veliki. Her research interests include 19<sup>th</sup>-century white settler literature of Australia, and women's life writing.



# (Un)Seeing is (Un)Belonging: The power of Sight in “Vision” by Alistair MacLeod and “Eyestone” by D. R. MacDonald

Le non-voir et le non-appartenir: Le pouvoir de la vue dans « Vision » d'Alistair MacLeod et « Eyestone » de D. R. MacDonald

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Alexander Kostov

## Abstract

The article examines the notions of *seeing* and *belonging* as being central to the short story tradition of Nova Scotia, exemplified here by two of the region's most prominent writers: Alistair MacLeod and D. R. MacDonald. The stories analyzed (namely, in “Vision” and “Eyestone”) further support the idea of the role of tradition and history as being central to the short fiction of Nova Scotia; also shown are how the problems and difficulties that arise between the opposition *mainland/island* very often lead to problems with understanding or even an inability to find one's place in the world. Analyzing the two texts in detail, the author argues that the two authors pay special attention to tradition as a central tool in their repertoire and that the problems outlined very often oscillate between the notions of *seeing/unseeing* as prerequisites for *belonging/unbelonging*.

**Keywords:** sight, identity, Nova Scotia, mainland, island

## Resumé

L'article examine les notions de *voir* et d'*éprouver un sentiment d'appartenance* qui sont au centre de la tradition des nouvelles néo-écossaises, une tradition illustrée ici par les deux écrivains les plus en vue : Alistair MacLeod et D. R. MacDonald (plus précisément dans « Vision » et « Eyestone »). Les nouvelles analysées soutiennent davantage l'idée que le rôle de la tradition et de l'histoire est au centre des nouvelles de la Nouvelle-Écosse et que les problèmes et les difficultés qui surgissent dans l'opposition continent/île (*mainland/island*) entraînent souvent des problèmes de compréhension ou une incapacité à trouver sa place dans le monde. Après avoir analysé en détail les deux textes, l'auteur défend l'argument selon lequel MacLeod et MacDonald accordent une attention particulière à la tradition en tant qu'outil central de leur œuvre et que les problèmes qu'ils soulignent oscillent très





souvent entre les notions de *voir* / *ne pas voir*, comprises comme une condition nécessaire pour éprouver ou ne pas éprouver un sentiment d'*appartenance*.

**Mots-clés** : vue, identité, Nouvelle-Écosse, continent, île

## Introduction

When one encounters the name “Nova Scotia” for the first time, one often thinks about one thing in general: what is this “New Scotland” doing in Canada, and how did that come to be? The name *Nova Scotia* can be traced back to 1621, due to some occasional Scottish settlements. However, today it is 1773, when the greatest part of the Scottish emigration took place on the board of *Hector*, which is now celebrated as the founding year for Canadian Scots. Why is it so important to introduce these historical facts to the reader? Mainly because it was the Scots (and the Irish to some extent) that brought with them traditions and customs that still resonate strongly in literature and folk tales of present-day writers and poets from the province. Their community was closely-knit; they paid special, almost holy, attention to language and kinship, as is evident in the two stories on which this paper focuses.

The Scots came for the prospect of owning land, being free of landlords, while seeking better opportunities for their children. That said, one salient moment in Scotland’s history marked the Scottish community in Canada for life, and echoed (and still does) in the works of the authors from the region – namely, the *Fuadaichean nan Gàidheal* (“the eviction of the Gaels”), or more simply The Highland Clearances of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In a few words, these clearances resulted in a great number of Scots emigrating either to the Scottish Lowlands in order to be closer to home, or to Australia and North America, in search of a better life. Since the historical aspect is not one of central importance to this paper, but is still inseparable from the examined literature, I confine myself here to a simple introduction, and then will move forward to the authors and works referred to in the title.

The reason I mentioned the Highland Clearances from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries stems from the fact that in both Alistair MacLeod’s “Vision” and D. R. MacDonald’s “Eyestone” the Scottish heritage of the characters plays an important role in defining tradition, the protagonists’ place in the world, their past, present or/and future, and their families altogether. Language, too, is of great importance for both writers, and they pay it considerable respect –presenting entire sentences in Gaelic, giving children and grandchildren Gaelic names, or just sticking strongly to the Gaelic customs and traditions, despite the overall decline of the language itself.



In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Gaelic was the third most spoken language in Nova Scotia, after English and French. However, after the 1850s, the people who spoke and used Gaelic for various purposes began to dwindle in number, leading to an overall decline in the use of language. Some of the factors that are worth mentioning for this decadence involved school and government politics, the increased influence and prestige of English, some biases concerning the state of Gaelic; further mockeries and anecdotes added to the overall opinion that Gaelic was a language consigned to oblivion, or just suited to poetry and fairy tales. And this is exactly why I pay such attention to the role of Gaelic in the province and its influence, for it is important to consider the language's history.

Alistair MacLeod and D. R. MacDonald are important figures in the literature of Nova Scotia and they embody characteristic features that are part and parcel of the literature from the province. The main topic of *seeing/unseeing as belonging/unbelonging* is linked to the idea that the region (mostly that of Cape Breton) is characterized by strong ties to the recent and not-so-recent past, and very often presents considerable clashes between the new and the old, between the imported and the inherited, between past and present. What is more, the sense of belonging and identity is strongly felt and expressed in the respective works by the two authors, for it connects with the idea of Canada as a place where, despite the various histories and cultures, it is the Canadian identity that must endure. This sense of belonging is also linked to the efforts and sacrifices that people are willing to make, and the understanding they exhibit towards the fast-changing present and foreseeable future. My most salient point pertains to the power of sight (represented through various mediums) and how it affects the sense of belonging to both the particular region of Nova Scotia and to Canada as a whole.

## A brief look at Maritime literature

Ushering the reader into the realm of Alistair MacLeod and D. R. MacDonald's stories requires an acquaintance of sorts with the literature of the province. Generally speaking, the literature of Nova Scotia (and the Maritimes in general) could be broken down into two periods: that of the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century, and that of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. During the first period, literature of exploration flourished, journals and personal narratives comprising the greatest part, Indian and French skirmishes, letters and diaries. Later on, the writers began to elevate their register, to incorporate new elements into their writings – after the American Revolutionary War, a lot of Loyalists fled to the Maritimes and transported their literary prowess with them, thus adding flavour to the stagnant literature of the province, though there was some criticism



that the literature provided did not belong to Canada, but to the American and British traditions.

The literature from the second period, the 20<sup>th</sup> century (and onwards), is characterized greatly by the uncertainty that has loomed over the Eastern part of Canada in terms of economy and politics. Despite the big names of L. M. Montgomery, Hugh MacLennan, Ernest Buckler, Thomas Raddall and many more, for most of the century, those writers felt smothered by the authors from “central” Canada – Alice Munro, Timothy Findley, or Margaret Atwood. Nova Scotia has moved to the margins of society and the literary aspect of the region reflected that in the best way possible. David Creelman even claims that “the Atlantic provinces are linked by their common struggle against the economic hardship of underdevelopment and underemployment” (Creelman 2003, 3).

## Alistair MacLeod’s “Vision”

Alistair MacLeod’s stories revolve mainly around the ordinary and economically handicapped mining and fishing region of Cape Breton, where the characters are destined (and very often doomed) to walk in their parents’ shoes in order to make a living. The bonds and responsibilities that exist between the generations very often result in difficulties, problems, and denial that generally stem from the younger generation facing the old. In many of MacLeod’s stories the reader bumps into difficult relationships between fathers and sons, between wives and constantly absent husbands, and even between grandchildren and their grandparents. Furthermore, the author pays special attention to the storytelling in order to help the reader as well as the narrator to find the meaning that has been lost due to a parent’s death, absence, or, indeed, non-existence. By doing that, MacLeod relies heavily on the reader’s ability to *see* and *understand* the stories that are presented to them, so that they can find their own place in the story world. Hence the this article’s main focus on the power of *seeing* (or *unseeing*) as a core prerequisite for one’s sense of belonging to the created world of the short story, and thus it would help to outline that salient element in regional Nova Scotia short story writing – the search for identity through finding one’s place in the world. “Vision,” the penultimate story in the collection *Island* is such an example where the power of *seeing* the story is presented as one of the best ways of reconciling with the past and understanding the present. Moreover, it clearly exemplifies the power of seeing as being part of one’s belonging to the particular culture – those who have the *vision* adapt easily and more properly to the present Canadian way of life.

“Vision” tells of a narrator who hears a story from his father’s past, when his father and uncle went on a trip to visit their grandparents on the island of Canna, which is



overflowing with the old Gaelic traditions and is seen by outsiders as a strange place. There they met an old blind woman, who appeared to have been in love with their grandfather, though he later left her for another woman. Near the end of the trip, the two boys are told the story about their grandfather and the old woman, as well as the *second sight* ability of some people from the distant past, which played and still plays an important role in the lives of the contemporary generations. At the end of the story, the old blind woman dies in a fire, and the story of the second sight (and how one must sacrifice his physical sight for the metaphysical one) is transplanted into the present. As a result, tradition seems to overstep the boundaries of time and the past errors and happenings are reflected in the present moment, taking their toll on the protagonists' offspring. Throughout the whole story, the telling of past events and of tales surrounding the mysterious happenings is of great importance, for it creates a framework for the entire narrative. And from the very first sentence, the reader is presented with the storytelling element and its importance for the story:

I don't remember when I first heard the story but I remember the first time that I heard it and remembered it. By that I mean the first time it made an impression on me and more or less became *mine*; sort of went into me the way such things do, went into me in such a way that I knew it would not leave again but would remain there forever. (321)

The story that follows is a reflection of the narrator's inner world, an event that has been imprinted upon his psyche and has "remain[ed] there forever" (ibid). MacLeod's choice of words is indicative of the power of sight that dominates the rest of the narrative – "sunny day," "light reflected and glinted off," "gleaming rooftops" (ibid) – also, he mentions the scars that the story has left – that "will be forever on the outside, while the memory will remain forever deep within" (322). For MacLeod, memory plays an important role in his stories, as it is the cohesive power that usually holds the characters together when they face difficult choices.

Seeing is omnipresent and it is an inseparable element of one's belonging to the island's past and present; it also closely linked to the daily chores performed by the characters – the eating of the lobsters' black vein and the rest of the meat is thought to be "unsightly" (324), the lobsters in the wet sack at the back of the boat are just silhouettes, one "could see the movement, but not the individuals" (324). Belonging to the traditions of the island is not only expressed through the various customs of the people there but further strengthened through a constant comparison between the *mainland* (i.e. the rest of Canada) and the island that is Cape Breton. Early in the story, the father mentions that magical ability of *Da Shealladh* or "Second sight" (its English translation), while remarking that the best translation would be "two sights," which also supports the idea of that mainland/island division. The two sights



stand for the Canadian traditions (mainly English), and for the Gaelic ones which do their best to preserve the old ways. The power of this "Second sight" is almost prophetic – one could look "through a hole in a magical white stone [and] could see distant contemporary events as well as those of the future" (326). (This element will be later transformed in D. R. MacDonald's "Eyestone," where the stone serves as a sight-recovering object.) Alongside the framework of storytelling, at some point the father mentions a prophet who was known to have possessed *Da Shealladh* and who functions as yet another nucleus to the story. The prophetic element goes back to the old traditions of the Gaelic tribes from Scotland and Ireland, and supports the view that when these people came to Canada looking for better living conditions, they did not forsake their ways of life, but brought them into the new world as part of their distinct identity.

Another important element that can be mentioned here is the very physical aspect of seeing, which is greatly expressed through the description of the isle of Canna as a place that is close and near the horizon, yet so far and difficult to get to. "Do you see Canna over there? Do you see the point of Canna?" (329) is a perpetual answer that the father used to ask the narrator. Despite the proximity of the island to the fishing grounds, Canna remains a place of mystery, a place where one is almost advised not to visit. When the two brothers ask their parents for permission to go and visit their grandparents, they receive a biblical answer that neither bears a reply, nor any source of new information: "Wait and see" (329). Echoing Saint John's Revelation, Chapter 6, the parents' response is similar to "Come and see," uttered by the four beasts signalling the beginning of the end of time. The two brothers' world as they know it is about to come to an end when they go to Canna. The island, thus, achieves a mythical and almost Armageddon-like quality of a place, where people have to bear witness to its wonders and to expect apocalyptic sightings. Cape Breton, and the islands in Nova Scotia in general, possess this magical quality that people often associate with the old traditions and with proximity to nature. Similar to the abovementioned prophet with the magical stone, the grandmother reads the two boys' teacups, acting like a *visionary*, and tells them of their trip to Canna, but does not finish her prophecy. This ushers in a level of uncertainty which in turn will add to the overall effect of *unseeing*, starting from the parents' obvious reluctance to provide a fully-fledged answer, to the unfinished teacup prophecy, and later to the parentage of the two brothers' grandfather (called "The Child of Uncertainty") and all the happenings surrounding those with the "Second sight."

The next important moment in the story is the actual journey the two brothers undertake to Canna, which from the very beginning is shrouded in mystery and uncertainty:



It was sunny when the boat left the wharf but as they proceeded along the coast it became cloudy and then it began to rain. The trip seemed long in the rain and the men told them to go into the boat's cabin where they would be dry and where they could eat their lunch. It was almost impossible to see the figures on the wharf or to distinguish them as they moved about in their heavy oil slickers. (322)

The two brothers' journey and arrival at Canna seems to belong to the dream world and everything unfolds as if in a vision – figures are undistinguishable, the weather conditions help to establish an overall effect of mystery and secrecy. The key word of *uncertainty* is following them like a shadow, like something that is there and at the same time is not. When asked about their destination and why they are travelling, the two brothers are met with even more uncertainty by the sailors on the wharf:

“To see our grandmother,” they said.

“Your grandmother?” he asked.

“Yes,” they said. “Our grandmother.”

“Oh,” they said. “Your grandmother, are you sure?”

“Of course,” they said, becoming a bit annoyed. For although they were more uncertain than they cared to admit, they did not want to appear so. (333)

The island of Canna is the repository of old values, of the Gaelic traditions that have been confined by the English and French values to the small isles, so it is perfectly understandable that the sailors who live there and still thrive in these traditions feel uncertain about the intentions of the two brothers. Everything that comes from the outside is seen as a possible threat to the heritage they preserve and hold dear. Those who do not belong to the island have to be tested before they are given permission to enter this sacred world, just like in old adventure romances. The weather conditions and the sailors are the first trial, the old blind woman and her world of shadows is the second one, and the ultimate one is the meeting with their grandparents. From the very entrance to her house (they mistakenly enter the house of the old woman, firmly believing that it is their grandparents'), the two brothers fall under the spell of the old place. Their vision is blurred by the “very little light” (335), the house is populated by various animals – dogs, cats, and even a lamb (the guardian, the sacred animal, and the sacrificial one) – and it is as if they have entered a witch's house.

The old blind woman is presented as the Jungian wise old woman, who speaks in the language of olden times, and is surrounded by mythical beings. Here MacLeod uses the image of the old woman as an archetype for the Gaelic culture. Her life among animals brings her closer to nature (as opposed to the industrial world outside); this life spent in semi-darkness (shadowed and almost made blind by the dominant



traditions of Canada) sees her moving around a dilapidated house with broken objects lying around (signaling the jumpy transition between past traditions and present values), and she is seemingly oblivious to the cacophony around her (different people, languages, customs, and problems). Seeing in this moment is presented as just the opposite – the two brothers do not like what they see, they wish they could *unsee* that moment with the fornicating cats, the clutter of broken dishes, the grimy hands and long fingernails, and they wish to go back to the moment where they could *see* again and to which they really belong. *Unbelonging* comes from *unseeing*, a conscious decision of the two brothers to not understand the state of events they find themselves in. Even later, when they meet their real grandparents, they are still not able to see clearly, and neither is their grandfather able to see: “He stood blinking and swaying in the light, trying to focus his eyes upon them. He swayed back and forth, looking at them carefully and trying to see who they really we” (342).

The brothers have just come from the old blind woman’s house to their grandparents’, and momentarily are seen as coming from another plane of existence – as if something has clouded the eyes of their grandfather and is preventing him from seeing clearly (like the scales on the mackerel’s eyes). The two children have entered the world of Canna from the outside and have become marked in the old woman’s house, turning into intermediate beings who display characteristics of both the outside world of the present, and the traditional internal world of the past. What they see and experienced in the blind woman’s house is not enough to grant them permission to *belong* to this world – they too do not recognize their grandfather, for he appears different here than he is on the mainland. The same happens when the two brothers visit a store where the man who gave them a ride to the blind woman’s house works, and they fail to identify him as well. On the whole, Canna appears to possess protean features, almost dream-like with its inhabitants changing contours, and not retaining their faces and behaviour for too long. Everything on Canna belongs to the old Gaelic traditions, the rituals (“riding their horses on Michaelmas and carrying the bodies of their dead round toward the sun” (347)) and beliefs of the old mould the very core of the society. The blind woman, the drunk and disheveled grandfather, the unknown store-owner – they all belong to Canna, to its past and present, and they all see Canna with their tradition-layered eyes (like the mackerel who have scales at first, but when they return, their scales have fallen off). The outsiders *see* Canna differently, they very often fail to see it clearly for the obvious reason that they have grown strangers to the Gaelic traditions and have lost their place among the sacred and the old, as well as having accumulated *unbelonging* that is difficult to get rid of for it belongs to the *mainland* world, the visible one.





## D. R. MacDonald’s “Eyestone”

The second story analyzed here is “Eyestone,” a story which is much shorter than the 40-page “Vision” but which nonetheless offers great insight into the topic. From the very beginning, the reader is presented with a motto that established the uncertain and almost eerie atmosphere that is about to follow suit: “An ancient chill is rippling the dark brooks” (MacDonald 1988, 21). The motto comes from a poem by American Elizabeth Bishop poet, “Cape Breton,” and is important because MacDonald’s story is also set in Cape Breton, and further illustrates the power of one’s belonging to the old traditions and the rejuvenating and at the same time destructive powers of history. Cape Breton is an ancient world where traditions are kept alive and where strangers are seldom welcomed. There are ancient powers that govern the island, and its dark brooks are not for the naked eye, one should come prepared. Just like in MacLeod’s “Vision,” MacDonald’s story abounds in lexical tools that usher the reader into the realm of seeing from the very beginning: there are “eyes, horizon, watches, bright, darkened, light” (21–22), all words associated with one’s ability to see. The story deals with the protagonist, Royce, who buys a house from an old couple, so he can live there with his wife. But the husband, Mr. Corbett asks Royce to let his wife live in the house for her remaining days after he is gone, and Royce succumbs to his wish, unaware of Mr. Corbett’s decision to take his own life. Royce’s wife finds it strange to wait for the old woman to die, so she moves to the mainland (another opposition found in “Vision” – mainland versus island) and leaves Royce to deal with the matter alone. During one of Royce’s walks in the forests, he injures his eye and there is no one else to help him but the old Mrs. Corbett, a neighbour he uses as an inspiration for a painting, but from whom he nevertheless remains distant for there is “much about [her] he does not understand” (22). However, the act of seeing as understanding is not reciprocal – Mrs. Corbett is able to see and understand Royce in an easier way than he does because she belongs to the old traditions; her eyes could easily penetrate his soul, while Royce remains the outsider, the trespasser.

It is important to note that Royce is an outsider, he does not belong to the island, and his ancestors never lived there. He is a painter – a person who creates what he *sees* either with his own eyes (portraying the physical world), or with his inner sight (the metaphysical). Thus, Royce is presented as a person who is closer to nature than the two brothers from “Vision” – he cannot see clearly due to his lack of past, but there are moments when his heart and soul can, for example, in a dream he had “he foresaw this barn, in his daydreams back in Boston” (24). The dreams come to him as visions, as images that are transplanted into his psyche with the move to Canada, as if the very land he now possesses tries to talk to him. In contrast to the short sight of the two young boys, who are unable to see through the weather conditions or the





dark interior of the blind woman's house, Royce's sight is closer to his new belonging. The magical setting of the place starts to work its wonders on Royce the outsider. He goes deeper and deeper into the world around him, into the world that he wants to see both as a painter and as a person, the world that he is going to live in. MacDonald uses simple natural descriptions in order to present some long lost connection that is slowly but steadily being regained by Royce: "[He] squints at the white-grey sky. The sun burns somewhere. He can feel its heat, and for a moment a sudden aimlessness comes over him" (26).

Once again, the author shows that the physical quality of *seeing* is not sufficient for the person to *understand*, even when it comes to simple objects. Everything around Royce is filtered through his other senses – hearing, smelling, feeling, but seeing remains a *terra incognita* for him. And here comes the important element: how can one be made to *see* when all the usual prerequisites are insufficient? The answer comes in the form of an attack to Royce's physical sight; his eye is injured when a branch snaps back, and a piece of the bark remains inside his eye. This is very similar to the adventure stories where the hero has to undergo a difficult trial or to suffer an impediment to his abilities that would later be healed by the holy grail of his sacred destination. And it is for the very first time after the injury that Royce is able to see Mrs. Corbett better, who in one way or another, stands for the repository of old values and traditions, just as Canna does in MacLeod's story: "He wonders if she has looked like this always, gaunt, straight, her eyes pale as beach shells. He has tried to sketch her in the past, but always at a distance or from memory, the versions as varied as his own moods" (30). Just as the old woman from Canna becomes the major impetus for change in the interconnected stories, so too does Royce's near-blinding cause change. Mrs. Corbett is finally given physical form, however distorted through the splinter in Royce's eye, and is finally able to answer the questions that have plagued Royce for so long. At the same time she remains as elusive as ever, resembling a phantom, a being from the world of spirits: "Through his shimmering vision she seems already to be disappearing" (31). Royce's mission is to talk to Mrs. Corbett and to *understand* when she is going to vacate the house so he and his wife could move in, but during the time he spends around, uncertain of his abilities to speak directly to her, Royce's mission (or journey) changes and he finds himself on the road to another discovery that is his sole purpose in life.

Similar to the prophetic element in "Vision," where MacLeod describes the method of looking through a magical stone to see distant and past events, MacDonald uses a similar model, a little round stone that Mrs. Corbett places under Royce's eyelid and which is believed to cure sight problems. The moment the stone is placed on its predestined place, Royce's vision changes – Mrs. Corbett's contours blur and his world is filled once again with shadows and silhouettes, just like the figures on the wharf for



the two brothers in MacLeod’s story. The old world of wonders enters Royce’s real life and literally opens his vision for the events that are to follow. He understands that his wife is never coming back, and that his mission with Mrs. Corbett was more of a journey that he made up so he could find out more about himself. The various simple questions that he asks Mrs. Corbett – about the name of a strange bird he is unable to identify or of her family and past – serve as a way to win more time in order to clear his vision. With MacLeod, the wise old woman appears before the two young boys in the form of an old blind woman, while MacDonald chooses an elderly lady whose husband commits suicide, with excellent (eye)sight, and who is well-versed in the old traditions, sharing a deep belonging to the land. Both Royce and the two boys exit the two houses refreshed and with eyes opened a little bit wider than before. And as with most fairy tales and legends, the archetypal wise woman disappears at the end of the journey – the blind old woman dies in a fire, while MacDonald’s Mrs. Corbett just vanishes into thin air, thus fulfilling Royce’s initial journey’s mission of finding his own place in the world.

## Conclusion

In both Alistair MacLeod’s “Vision” and D. R. MacDonald’s “Eyestone,” the idea of seeing as one’s prerequisite and perhaps most important part in belonging to a particular place is strongly expressed through various aspects. While MacLeod focuses more on the old legends, the magical, and the shadow-enveloped relationships, MacDonald places his characters in a more modern, yet not clearer and comprehensible surroundings. The power that the land exerts upon the characters is made visible through the various elements that deter the characters from reaching their respective destinations – be it the tempestuous and obscure weather conditions, along with the different customs and traditions of the people from Canna in MacLeod’s story, or the impossibility for Royce’s wife to live on the land that his husband bought, together with the diverse visible and invisible forces that block the way. The metaphysic aspect of seeing goes hand in hand with the transcendental quality of one’s belonging to a particular place, or to a particular set of ideas and beliefs. The problems that arise with the protagonists’ ability to see and belong stem from the difficulties this new life (“Eyestone”) or new experience (“Vision”) pose for them. All things considered, the two authors have managed to catch the unique atmosphere of the (in)visible world in both their stories and have quite successfully expressed the idea that one’s place in the world can be easily found or lost, depending on their efforts and attitude towards the beliefs, customs, and traditions that characterize a specific place. The blindness of the characters serves as both a punishment and a penance, for it is through their



loss of sight that they are reborn and that their future generations can see better. The temporary loss of sight of MacDonald's Royce serves an even greater purpose – eventually he achieves his initial aim, but gains much more than that: he discovers the magic of the place he can call home – he finds a place where, in contrast to his wife's metaphorical blindness, he can finally belong.

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**ALEXANDER KOSTOV** / is a PhD student at “St. Kliment Ohridski” Sofia University in Bulgaria. He graduated with a BA in 2012, and later received his MA in Communication and Literature in 2014, his primary interest being the evolution of the horror genre in literature. His current field of research is Canadian culture and literature, and the province of Nova Scotia in particular. Furthermore, he is interested in the genre of the short story, and its traditions, flourishing, and position in Canada as a whole. In his research he pays close attention to such writers as Alistair MacLeod, D. R. MacDonald and Carol Bruneau.





# Multicultural Identity Negotiation in Recent Canadian Mixed-Blood Narratives: Boyden's *Three Day Road*

La Négociation de l'identité multiculturelle dans  
*Three Day Road* de Joseph Boyden

Judit Ágnes Kádár

## Abstract

Using the example of Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road* (2005), this paper addresses the “broken taboos and uncomfortable truths” of mixed blood identity in Contemporary Métis writing. I explore identity negotiation and the radical textual undoing of ethnic identity concepts (including stereotypes) reflected in Métis Canadian and US Southwestern Nuevomexicano/a writing and visual arts. Here I present how interracial understanding is challenged by mixed heritage authors and what Boyden's protagonists' identity negotiations in the shifting sites of identity formulation (“journey”) are like. I study the fluctuation between more social identities, ethnic choice and specifically the possibilities for escaping prescribed identity formulations and re-connecting with tribal heritage that manifests the clashing western and Indigenous cosmologies and tackles the problems of ethnic pride, shame and stigma.

**Keywords:** Joseph Boyden, *Three Day Road*, Métis writing, ethnicity

## Résumé

En se basant sur le cas de *Three Day Road* de Joseph Boyden (2005), le présent article traite des « tabous brisés et des vérités inconfortables » de l'identité métissée dans l'écriture métisse contemporaine. Y sont explorées la négociation identitaire et la défaite textuelle radicale des concepts d'identité ethnique (y compris les stéréotypes), reflétées dans l'écriture et les arts visuels créés par des Métis canadiens et américains du Sud-Ouest (« Nuevomexicano »). Nous définissons comment la compréhension interracial est contestée par les auteurs du patrimoine mixte et ce que sont les négociations identitaires de ses protagonistes dans le cadre des sites mouvants de la formulation de l'identité (« voyage »). Enfin, nous soulignons la fluctuation entre plusieurs identités sociales, le choix ethnique et les possibilités d'échapper aux formulations d'identité prescrites et de renouer avec le patrimoine tribal – un patrimoine qui manifeste le conflit entre les cosmologies occidentales et autochtones et qui aborde les problèmes de la fierté ethnique, de la honte et de la stigmatisation.

**Mots-clés :** Joseph Boyden, *Three Day Road*, arts créés par des Métis, ethnicité



This article addresses the problem of mixed ethno-cultural identity presented in the prose writings of a self-proclaimed blended heritage novelist of Anisnaabe and Irish origins, Joseph Boyden (1966-), whose ethnic affiliation has been challenged recently. I believe that being born into a mixed ethno-cultural heritage that incorporates the traits of both the former colonizer and colonized peoples, i.e. that of Euro-Canadian and Indigenous cultures, generates special sensibilities in a man of letters. Even if the primary subject matter or protagonist is not a mixed blood person, the literary text depicts the problems of racism, discrimination, identity turmoil, acculturation challenges, identification, identity negotiation and authenticity. I explore how the widespread patter of return to Indigeneity is actually tackled in the view of two different personal transformation processes, the Cree Canadian followers of L. M. Silko's *Ceremony* (1977).

Boyden's *Three Day Road* (2005) takes a historic incident to draw a parallel with some contemporary concerns and explores how certain "broken taboos and uncomfortable truths" related to mixed ethno-cultural heritage in North America perpetuate in a broader sense the problems of ethnic pride, shame and stigma, what Paula Gunn Allen has called "conflicting blood strains" ("Dear World"). As for Canadian mixed blood writers, what the Cree/Dene Tomson Highway, the Ojibwe Drew Hayden Taylor and Richard Wagamese, the Cherokee/German/Greek/American/Canadian Thomas King and the Dogrib Richard Van Camp share is their Indigenous and Caucasian blood and their sensibility for embodying conflicting ethno-cultural heritages of Aboriginal and Anglo-American nature. Similarly, in the US Southwest, the Laguna, Scottish, Lebanese Paula Gunn Allen, the Laguna Pueblo, Mexican and Anglo-American L.M. Silko, have paved the literary path to writing about the previously stigmatized mixed blood identity, while the Cherokee, Irish and Dutch Wilma Mankiller, the Cherokee/Choctaw/Irish Louis Owens and the currently so popular Joy Harjo of Muskogee, Cherokee, French and Irish roots, seem to have focused on the so called "hybrid potential" (Owens, "Syllogistic" 101), a positive stance of understanding one's multiple ethnic heritage as a source that might replace the earlier stigmatized identity of their protagonists. In fact, regardless of the geographical location or the actual ethnic blend of the author, what they all share is the sensibility for racist discourses as well as the desire to turn the negative, often tragic sense of identity to positive and confident self-understanding as well as the empowering treatment of the literary text.

Boyden scrutinizes ethnic stereotype and discrimination, shame and victimry with regards to First Nations identity in general and Cree identity in the view of intercultural encounters, the context of the First World War respectively. As Joe Wiebe remarks, *Three Day Road* is a rare book that works at different levels for various readers (Wiebe online review essay), it can be read as a war novel, a Bildungsroman,



a book of comradeship, a First Nations' counter narrative to Anglo-Canadian history and even more readings are possible, too.

As for identity negotiation in the communities of shifting sites of identity formulation, i.e. the "journey," Boyden's novel presents us with a contrastive pair of personality developments depicted within the concentric circle of sites. *Three Day Road* is a story of two Cree friends and hunters from Ontario, Xavier Bird and Elijah Weesegeechak/ Whiskeyjack. Xavier was raised by his aunt Niska in the bush, while Elijah ran away from a residential school and were raised with Xavier. The friends join the Canadian army and fight in WW I, actually fighting their own "wars" in different fronts, those of military, racial, physical, mental and spiritual nature. Xavier, the quiet one, clings to his Cree culture and feels the war to be alien ground. Elijah, however, is more adoptive to the white Canadian lifestyle and to war mentality even at a loss of his self. The friends become emotionally separated and their spirits mostly dwell in different worlds. Retuning from war back to his band means for Xavier a reconnection with his heritage and also healing the intolerable wounds of his heart.

*Three Day Road* is constructed on a less fixed, shifting time and special storyline. The novel has a cyclic storyline starting from the return from war and reconnecting with Indigeneity. But to understand the latter, Boyden takes us back to the childhood of the protagonists, with references to even earlier, Niska's birth when the *wmistikoshiw* (whites) still depended on the Natives. Storytelling is in fact part of the identity negotiation process, as regards to its references to the distance between teller, listener and the archaic tradition, it is a virtual umbilical cord per se. The ending of the narrative is the sweat lodge scene, where Xavier goes through a purifying and healing process and where Niska's vision appears. They both imply a spiritual return to tribal culture and to the comrades' own selves as well. Here the ritual purification and reference to Xavier's future sons (*TDR* 379) reconnects the cyclic storyline to the beginning of the novel, while giving a future prospect to it as well. Besides, the organic pattern of storytelling (Niska and Xavier) with its rolling, embracing and cyclic nature serves as a source of wisdom and healing therapy, too. Laura Groningen and Neta Gordon agree that within the "healing aesthetics" of Boyden's novel, the author's aim is to devictimize, commemorate and destigmatize the Aboriginal soldiers and to "recover marginalized histories" (Gordon #2). In addition, the *windigo* story provides another dimension to comprehend and interpret the actual story of two Cree youngsters going to a European war, and expands its scope with possible allusion to survival of First Nations communities and individuals in modern times.

One can observe how the two kids grow up in the context of clashing cultures, more specifically the residential school, the urban environment in contrast with Niska's bush land mark the clashing paradigms that in a different setting, i.e. the European war frontline and the army does not significantly change for them. The author signifies





one aspect of those worlds that Xavier finds challenging in spiritual and intellectual terms, while Elijah seems to adjust easily, i.e., to the violence. The *windigo* killer story allegedly denotes violence, too; however, the reader can understand the wisdom behind killing the evil-spirited one in the community, and violence is an essential part of that world, too. A deep sense of humanity is at the bottom of this kind of “mercy killing” for the protection of the community. However, in European and Anglo-Canadian culture, sheer verbal violence through racism and actual physical violence in the first modern warfare of the First World War perpetuate countless examples of inhumanity. The two friends present very different attitude to this fact: while Elijah becomes the chief killer at war, Xavier says: “I will never understand this god, these people” (TDR 309) who celebrate love, forgiveness and purity at Christmas and constantly act against their faith. The postcolonial agenda is represented by means of the parallels based on violence: “The sickness of the *windigo* could spread as surely as the invisible sickness of the *wemistikoshiv*” (TDR 263). There is another example of violence-focused parallels: the *windigo* killer appears in parallel worlds, and the Huns’ new weapons in the First World War resemble the new “weapons” in Anglo-American and Indian relations, like the ideological genocide of the residential schools.

The particular communities as sites of shifting identity transformations are the condensed and encapsulated venues of clashing paradigms that represent in the novel various challenges for First Nations individuals. The residential school, the small town Canada community with “converted Indians [who] look full of food” (TDR 174), “a place of stones and glass called Toronto” (TDR 87) and the army on the French frontline, signifying the double frontline (TDR 327) where (military and racial) the friends keep fighting on. All these sites of transformation are marked by initial conflict and gradual acculturation, but obviously to various extents in the case of the two Cree youngsters. I believe that the archetypal and critically depicted civilization versus wilderness dichotomy seems to pose alienation and conflict for them, however, it is human beings, but white and Indigenous, who actually surprise or shock Elijah and Xavier with their attitudes that perpetuate the problem of innate racism and personality shortcomings or merits, too.

There are some potential problems and sources of frustration the Cree protagonists face from time to time, namely, problems pertaining to authenticity, identification and validation. What is actually at the bottom of both narratives is the identity crisis of Indigenous persons in conflict with their surroundings as well as themselves. There are some concentric circles of identification, Cree/ Indian/Canadian/Brit in *Three Day Road*. The id fluctuates among these definitions and struggles with especially the negative definitions others attach to the protagonists. TDR tackles the primary early childhood frustrations of the residential school and the bush Indian (“heathen”) versus urban Catholic Indian disparity, and then the army experience. All these perpetuate



the basic problem of Indigenous identity and its challenges in modern urban culture in North America. While in the residential school the question is, who can keep any of his Indigenous identity against the cultural genocide practiced by the nuns and authorities. The “bushed Indian goes to town” situation challenges the extent to which one wishes and can keep to his tribal heritage, authenticity and validation are central in every case when Aunt Niska goes to town, Moose Factory, Canada and assimilation is an escape option as well as pressure both at the residential school and in town (“So you are an Indian, then?.....You are pretty short for an Indian, ain’t ya?” *TDR* 35). As for the army, there seems to be less pressure to assimilate, in fact for a while even invisibility bothers Elijah: “They ignore us like we are ghosts floating by” (*TDR* 34). Becoming visible is important for him, being acknowledged and achieving a great reputation as a scout is essential for him and actually he unconsciously decides to enforce the stereotypical Indian image that is traditionally praised for special military skills and attitude.

In the army, nobody is really interested in their tribal affiliation, Native ways of life and thinking, the war situation does not allow for more personal attention than acknowledging the fact that the two guys are different and perhaps racially still inferior, but certain skills make them respectful. In its impact this fact obviously underlines the prototypical racial divides, but at least for periods of time releases some of the frustration the two Cree fellows had had. We could see in the case of all 20<sup>th</sup>-century wars fought by the US and Canadian armies the same general pattern emerging: ethnic minorities’ contribution is temporarily appreciated and even taken as heroic examples for fellows. However, the fundamental racial divides remain stable during and after the war, as explained by Ronald Takaki (378–428) and on the Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada website, where the same is discussed regarding the particular race relations that Canadian Aboriginal veterans were affected by (“Postwar Experiences of Aboriginal Soldiers”).

Beyond the interpersonal identification challenges, Elijah formulates his own (ethnic) identity unconsciously and Xavier follows the changes and also defines his own identity in view of that: “Elijah wants to become something he’s not” (*TDR* 86), from “a dirty bush Indian” (*TDR* 297) but smart trapper he can de-stigmatize himself through adapting to Anglo needs, and then through acting out the warrior stereotype. “He says he couldn’t speak in his old voice even if he wanted to now. It’s gone somewhere too far away” (*TDR* 145), collects scalps... Elijah gradually becomes an oversized cartoon-like Indian, whose personality changes can be detected from early childhood traumatic experiences through adolescence up to the embodiment of the merciless killer warrior Indian stereotype, and he had developed his own argument, too: Elijah kills many, saying he is helping those get to the spirits’ world (*TDR* 107), and scalping is necessary to prove the “confirmed kills” he has achieved. The army



peers underline and validate that fearful hero image: “Breech says that it is our Indian blood, that our blood is closer to animal than that of a many” (TDR 109). Actually he replaces the stigmatized Indian image with that heroic warrior as well as with a temporary identification with fellow soldiers: “We are an army to be reckoned with suddenly, no longer the colonials, as the Englishmen call us, looking down at us” (TDR 242). Here he shifts from double to single minority status, and then with the top number of killings he becomes an achiever doing “Most in our regiment. Most of any Canadian. Or Brit for that matter” (TDR 36). This transformation of his image indicates the psychological process of stigma alteration: a fierce killer at war is taken as a strange but heroic character who can best any number that Anglo-Canadians or Brits can, thus emphasizing a military achievement over ethnic features of the same person.

Interestingly, Boyden applies irony in the course of counter racism, for instance, the two Cree friends observe that “Fritz smells differently than an Englishman or a Frenchman or a Canadian” (TDR 144–5). Counter racism is essentially based on simplified concepts, too; thus, the English, French and Canadians are disturbingly taken as “the same” by national character. At another case Elijah tells others that Xavier is a “heathen, speaks his own tongue fluently, nothing else” (TDR 207), that way serving whites’ craving for the well-known stereotype and protecting his friend. Finally, another incident shows how racism is turned against the very person racist earlier, when Frenchman having raped Niska in church and called her a squaw whore (TDR 180–1) as a revengeful fate goes mad and commits suicide, while the local community refuses his Christian burial.

Escaping prescribed identity formulations through the acts and processes of ethnic choice and through reconnecting with Indigeneity (tribal or pan-Indian) is a central issue in the novel. Boyden offers the reader an insight to the spectrum of conscious and unconscious choices regarding one’s ethnic identity and relation to Indigeneity in *Three Day Road*. Actually, the two friends Elijah and Xavier exemplify the very choice, its manifestations and impacts that Native Americans and mixed blood persons make every single day. Elijah is a bit opportunistic, truly adaptable to majority ways and expectations, without any concerns about losing touch with his authentic ethnic origins, and surely fixed on best survival options without ethical considerations. However, as for Xavier, on the one hand ethnic and humanistic concerns do trouble him in the army and he often feels challenged by not fitting white man’s Indian stereotype, on the other hand, he revitalizes himself through tribal spirituality.

Xavier’s name symbolically refers to his role: he is Bird and he feeds Elijah, the always hungry, through mouth feeding (TDR 291), for survival, both physical and spiritual. I believe that this bird symbolic status is the embodiment of his role to reconnect with ancestral ties, “the old way” of praying in Cree (e.g. TDR 120), though



prayers come hard to him far from home. Remembering means mental and emotional survival in hard times: “I force myself back to Mushkegowuk” (TDR 123). He reinforces his own ethnic identification in several ways, for instance, through naming that expresses ethnic pride (TDR 117) and keeping his Cree language as a primary medium of communication. He loses his hearing a bit, which indicates his being deaf to alien ways, too, while Elijah functioned sometimes as an interpreter for Xavier (e.g. TDR 228, 256, 258). Finally, when he returns home, he physically and spiritually reconnects with the umbilical cord of his ancestral ties with the help of Niska, the facilitator of their transformations, reference point for their ethnic identification and provider of the sweat lodge ceremonial cleansing and healing that cures Xavier.

In terms of ethnic identity change, the army and the war provide a cataclysmic incubation ground for personal development, as is presented in the the war novel tradition of Stephen Crane's *Red Badge of Courage*, Timothy Findley's *The Wars*, Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* and Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*. The friends start their journey with a protective moose hide bag, a medicine bundle that Niska had given them to maintain spiritual protection over them. Dreams and visions as a passage between worlds (e.g. TDR 80, 88) help both of them. They “share a space” (TDR 39) and their primary confusion in the trenches of the French frontline as well as in their position among military peers. But this shared space stimulates totally divergent reactions in them. Xavier is certainly able to keep the core of his identity intact both in terms of his personality traits and his ethnic identification. Although the war makes both friends ghost like liminal beings, the whole journey to European fronts and back home make Xavier experienced but does not bring any profound alteration of the basic concept of who he is. The whole war experience and living in the army focuses on the problem of escaping by concealing (masking), and Xavier does learn the pragmatics of camouflage as a scout for sure. Nevertheless, Elijah goes far beyond that. A foreshadowing incident is already there in the residential school where he protests against the nuns' habit of cutting students' hair by shaving his own head bald (TDR 101). In contrast, he is willing to have his hair cut for the army. As for language, “as a child he was so proud that more than once he claimed that he would never speak the *wemistikoshiw* [white man's] tongue” (TDR 98). However, in the European military environment they learn that adopting somewhat to white ways and also using Cree language and skills for their own benefit are necessary survival skills: they grow practically bilingual (and also apply sign language occasionally), and their language choice depends on the situation, they can use Cree as a code language (TDR 279) and can also express emotions in a slightly manipulative fashion (e.g. TDR 60), as the situation demands.

Elijah is more adaptive in manners, speaks the language, follows what he considers as white morality, including implied racism, and becomes an Indian hunter taking



killing too far. The frame story and fundamental paradox of the *windigo* killers seem to run parallel, especially when Elijah shows symptoms of going mad and taking pleasure in killing (*TDR* 284), even killing a mother and child with a feeling of shame to follow. Escaping prescribed identity formulations is an essential process that the two protagonists experience walking two different paths in life. Elijah escapes one disadvantageous stigmatized image by running into another, that of the warrior Indian, and also by taking morphine, that is, stigma alteration with societally successful but individually essentially disastrous and tragic impact. Meanwhile, Xavier manages to escape the prototypical “dumb *indjun*” (Valaskakis 1) stereotype by becoming a tactful scout and reliable comrade, a sensitive human being whose affection for Elijah, Lisette, Niska and even unknown people in trouble underline the general human features making one person truly good and another a villain, as a victory over racial divides. Moreover, his unfading connection with his tribal culture sustains a model in which a human being can take several social roles, that of a nephew, a Cree youngster, a Canadian soldier at the European frontline, friend, comrade and inheritor of a mythic grand narrative of tribal wisdom and stories. In that sense *Three Day Road* makes a positive statement about the possibility of escaping fixed ethnic identity constructs by developing individual concepts and constructs of one’s identity configuration.

The parallel process of radical textual undoing of ethnic identity concepts (including stereotypes) is the underpinning motif running along the narrative. As mentioned earlier, escaping prescribed identity formulations is an essential (unconscious) trait in *TDR* and part of this is achieved through irony and playing out the stereotype, mockery, means of radical textual undoing of ethnic identity concepts posed by the Colonial ideological agenda the protagonists were born into. The Cree protagonists, especially Elijah plays out the Indian stereotype, less in order to identify themselves among peers than for achieving some minor benefits: “I am a Cree Indian from Moose Factory, and I have come to kill Germans” (*TDR* 67). He continues, explaining more specifically how the stereotypical image works and can be manipulated for some personal benefit: “Better to let them know you’re an angry warrior than some fucking bush Indian” (*TDR* 68). They present a careful, wise and sensitive distancing from the stereotype for their own security: they decide not to capture goose, for surely Indians would be blamed for it (*TDR* 93) along the negative connotations of the stereotype. However, as for the positive features attributed to Indians, since they are said to make fine scouts, there is a need to recruit more (*TDR* 193), while guys like Elijah are respected for killing, thus their “added value” is on the increase at wartime. These considerations, the re-evaluation of a person based on merits attributed to ethnic affiliation and race shows the confusion of values in the two worlds colliding.



As for ethnic change, another interesting approach is that of assimilation versus integration: while Elijah seems to adopt way more easily in his adolescence to white culture and Xavier says: “I rely on Elijah to help me in their world” (*TDR* 68), However, “their” signifies the distance that separates Xavier from the alien environment. “He teaches us the importance of blending into our surroundings” (*TDR* 94), i.e. symbolic and pragmatic assimilation, which is not necessarily internalized. In addition, the suspended steps of their identification is fostered by the fact that initially they are invisible for officers (*TDR* 183). Besides, the cultural differences do not really disappear with partial acculturation, for instance, Christmas is interpreted from their perspective as the feast of sadness and the fundamental paradox of the celebration on the frontline and the religious ideology while killing continues remains. The two friends separate in their attitude to the distance from non-Native culture. While Elijah hopes that they can return to the bush to Niska, Xavier knows that Elijah has gone too far, the inhumanity in his deeds essentially cuts him from his core ethnic culture and one can see him less and less as a representative of First Nations and increasingly as a fallen villain, a human being who has lost everything. He adopts to cruelty, becomes a borderline personality in psychological sense, like Frenchman, and Elijah’s reversal act of killing and blasphemy at the sculpture of Virgin Mary (*TDR* 203–4) has nothing to do any more with any kind of morality but ultimately pushes him into a vacuum, both cultural and psychological, that he cannot ever escape.

Another exciting aspect of ethnic change in *TDR* is the identity game, the masking they play throughout the story. “Conceal yourself here” (*TDR* 123) is the rule of survival on the frontline, as well as in a more abstract sense among peers, and, in the broader concentric zones of identification, among white folks, wherever, including the residential school back in their childhood (*TDR* 159). Back there and then they believed that the tooth of the lynx gives speed, visions and invisibility (*TDR* 295), a different kind of protection for hunters and warriors than the masks the trickster takes (*TDR* 312). Xavier is the only one who sees through Elijah’s mask, who can fool everyone else. Xavier’s clear vision develops through a number of sour experiences, take his sweetheart, Lisette, who turns out to be a prostitute and Elijah has known it and played that game for Xavier’s sake—he says. Earlier, in a parallel world, Niska has fallen in love with Frenchman, who turns out to be a racist villain raping her. Niska also has to conceal herself when in town to avoid being a target of racist remarks and assault, she needs to change clothes and “fit in” look a young homeguard Indian (*TDR* 177). Then in the European context, charcoal face masking is a survival practice at war (*TDR* 187), hiding in a cellar, covering one another on frontline due to the constant fear of being found and killed further underlines the relevance of hiding and masking. If we enter the game of invisibility, the lethal game of hide and seek, we can read the novel at more levels: one is the actual physical visibility the soldiers try





to avoid (TDR 235–6, 249), the next is the question of visibility as human beings in the context of racial divides in the army: “I am especially proud to note that Acting Corporal Whiskeyjack has been recommended for the MM for unmatched bravery in the face of the enemy” (TDR 255), but Xavier is then invisible and frustrated (TDR 256). There is even a sarcastic game of invisibility at the end of the war: Bird tries to save Elijah but cannot, kills the *windigo* in him, rips off his ID and keeps it in his own pocket. However, when wounded, Bird is mistaken for Elijah with that ID, praised for bravery, returned home as if he was called a “great Fritz killer,” and Xavier plays that role most probably for final return home. His guilt complex is relieved through the sweat lodge ritual, when identities are resettled in home grounds.

In conclusion, Boyden's novel depicts a fundamental aspect of interracial relations and identity development of Indigenous persons who are intensively exposed to the culture of Euro-Canadians, and that is the fluctuation between more social identities and utilizing the “hybrid potential” in post-racial nations in North America. Xavier claims that “I am stuck between these two places” (TDR 372) in a vacuum, that can be resolved by reconnecting with his tribal heritage, through the sweat lodge rebirth ritual facilitated by Niska. Both comrades experience a major identity transformation process of oppositional outcomes and the radical undoing of ethnic stereotypes surrounding them. Similarly to Silko's *Ceremony*, where Tayo's journey towards wholeness and health (as Owens illuminates, *Other* 170), the two Cree men also attempt to reach those, but only Xavier can actually achieve both. Rituals and ceremonies of transformation mark those journeys, and the reader can feel the painstaking process and also understand the relevance of the CEREMONY both in a tribal cultural and in a personal psychological sense. I presented how interracial understanding is challenged by a mixed heritage author and what is his protagonists' identity negotiation in the shifting sites of identity formulation like. The fluctuation between more social identities and ethnic choice seem to be perhaps the most exciting aspects of these characters, and their story also projects the author's similar experiences deriving from being born mixed blood. In the context of the challenge to prototypical civilized versus barbarous savage and medicine versus genocide dichotomies, the ethnical paradigm of the novel allows the reader to reformulate his reading of history and race relations. The problems of ethnic pride, shame and stigma have been eliminated in various ways, but most successfully through reconnecting with one's Indigenous heritage, which seems to be a general pattern applying to the authors of such social background and their protagonists as well.



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**JUDIT ÁGNES KÁDÁR** / has taught American and Canadian studies for almost three decades and now serves the University of Physical Education of Budapest as the director of International Relations. She worked in the United States for Georgia State College and University and for the University of New Mexico as a Fulbrighter. As for research, she studied recent western Canadian fiction, then passage rites in US/Canadian literature. She published *Critical Perspectives on English-Canadian Literature* and *Going Indian: Cultural Appropriation in Recent North American Literature*. She obtained her doctoral degree and habilitation at Eötvös Lorand University, Budapest. Currently she explores mixed blood identity negotiation in *Nuevomexicano* and Métis writing. She is the past head of the Hungarian Network for Canadian Studies (CEACS/HUNCS), and co-chair of the International Committee of the Hungarian Rectors Conference.



## Quebec City as Portrayed in *Guardian: The Lonely Great God* (2016)

La Ville de Québec dans *Goblin* (2016)

Sangjun Jeong / Judit Nagy

### Abstract

Lee Eung Bok's fantasy TV series, *Guardian: The Lonely Great God* (2016), partly uses contemporary Québec City for setting. Tourism may be an underlying motive, which articles on the reception of the series published in leading Quebec media seem to confirm. With this background information and the genre-specific features of the series in mind, this paper aims at exploring how Québec City is portrayed in *Guardian: The Lonely Great God*. The analysis will demonstrate that positive images prevail regarding the city in every aspect of fantasy, which contributes to making Québec City an attractive place for prospective Korean and other East-, and Southeast Asian visitors.

**Keywords:** Lee Eung Bok, Québec City, *Guardian: The Lonely Great God*, tourism

### Résumé

En partie, la mise en scène pour la série télé fantastique, *Goblin* (2016), est la ville contemporaine de Québec. Les articles sur la réception des séries publiées dans les médias québécois semblent confirmer que le tourisme est un motif sous-jacent. L'article va explorer comment la Ville de Québec est représentée dans *Goblin*. L'analyse démontrera que des images positives prévalent concernant la ville dans tous les aspects de la fantaisie. Pour attirer les futurs visiteurs coréens et ceux d'Asie de l'est et du sud-est, cette image fait l'impression que la ville de Québec est un endroit attrayant.

**Mots-clés :** Lee Eung Bok, la Ville de Québec, *Goblin*, tourisme



## Introduction

The setting for fantasy-related works is oftentimes remote in space and/or time. The most typical such locations include Medieval Europe and ancient historical places or imaginary near or distant future/futuresque locations. To provide a few recent examples of films and television series, Guy Ritchie's *King Arthur: Legend of the Sword* (2017) has England of the Middle Ages as its setting, Gary Shore's *Dracula Untold* (2014) takes us to 15<sup>th</sup>-century Transylvania, the 2016 TV series *Roman Empire: Reign of Blood*, Kevin Reynold's *Risen* (2016) and Daniel Lee's *Dragon Blade* (2015) are set in Ancient Rome, Alex Proyas's *Gods of Egypt* (2016) takes place in Ancient Egypt, whereas the 2016 American TV series *Colony* is future-based.

However, Lee Eung Bok's TV series *Guardian: The Lonely Great God* (2016) partly uses contemporary Québec City – an actual location in North America for setting. In an article published in *Le Journal de Québec* on December 16, 2016, Cédric Bélanger reveals that the episode, in which Québec City featured for the first time was watched by 15 million viewers in Korea, and *Guardian: The Lonely Great God* has the potential of reaching 500 million to one billion viewers in East-, and Southeast Asia, which he comments on as “monumental visibility for the city of Québec.” What is more, Destination Canada – a Canadian federal organization whose mission is to promote tourism – paid \$600,000 (Canadian) to attract the production to Québec City while Air Canada and Chateau Frontenac invested \$200,000 each. On whether the investment is yielding any rewards, Bélanger quotes Anna Lee, the Seoul representative of Destination Canada: “Many fans of the series talk about Québec City in the social media. The interest in Québec, a city Koreans have not known before, can be sensed immediately.”

Yet, in spite of the fact that Québec City as an actual location forms part of the setting, the drama series fulfils Katherine A. Fowkes's criterion of fantasy films as a genre: it displays more than “isolated moments of fantasy in otherwise realistic or dramatic contexts,” since its “imaginary elements pervade the entire story” (“Fantasy Films”). Or, to refer to Moorcock and Clute and Grant's observations on the distinctive features of the genre, nor does *Goblin*'s setting serve simply “thematic purposes” or the “underscoring of moods” (Moorcock 73); indeed, it is far from being a mere “backdrop or arena [...] dissociated from the actions played out upon it” (Clute and Grant, 341). As Clute and Grant note, “the setting of a fantasy work is often of great importance to the plot and characters of the story” (558), and Québec City seems to function in that capacity in *Goblin*.

The authors' research centering on the various roles Québec City fulfils in *Guardian: The Lonely Great God* therefore has been motivated by both the above described tourism-related aspects and genre-specific characteristics of Lee Eung Bok's fantasy TV series.



## 1. Tropes of fantasy relevant to the series

In *The Encyclopaedia of Fantasy*, Clute and Grant mention magic as the most prevalent element of fantasy, the frequency of which “varies from [...] legend, through to rare but available to the well connected, up to a ubiquitous part of everyday life” (615). Magic can be manifested in various ways. For one, it can be a skill practised by “qualified professionals such as wizards or sorcerers” (616),<sup>1</sup> resulting from which, among many other consequences, objects may come about or disappear. Naturally, an object itself can also possess magic qualities. According to genre-related literature, such as Lissauer’s *The Tropes of Fantasy Fiction* or Fowkes’s *The Fantasy Film*, swords, hats of disguise, books and rings are frequently relied-upon objects to this end. Magic deriving from magic objects is not always exercised or activated instantly and/or knowingly. In other cases, the special power of objects lies in their catalyst-like capacity to trigger actions rather than in their performing the actions themselves. In addition, Clute and Grant note that certain objects in fantasy films and TV series may convey a special meaning or message, which is of vital importance to both plot and the characters. Their ‘magic’ lies in providing a clue, an instant compass for characters and audience alike to enhance their navigation of the fantasy world. In an abstract form, maintaining their status as plot device, they become “self-fulfilling prophecies” (798).

Another indispensable trope of the genre is the presence of a secondary world “whose connection with our present day world ranges from nominal to non-existent. It could be the remote past or future, or simply a-historical. The inhabitants can be anything from human only, through the standard elves, dwarves and orcs, to a complete Fantasy Kitchen Sink” (“Fantasy”). Fantasy worlds themselves are often magic places, which, at the same time, need not necessarily be entirely fictitious. However, even if they do not realize an entirely different, self-contained realm, they all seem to possess an ‘out-of-place aspect,’ a ‘fantasy differentia specifica,’ which “sets them apart from the ordinary” (Westfahl 1017), whether it be out-of-place objects, buildings, creatures, characters, milieu, actions or principles governing this world. One way to reach fantasy worlds is by means of travel in time or space. In some cases, featuring as a destination, fantasy worlds can form the hero’s quest, or function as “locus amoenus” (Clute and Grant 793) representing the ideal or the idyllic, a desired place for the hero/ heroine to be, where happiness awaits them. Messengers may be employed to guide the characters there, providing them with direct or indirect clues.

Finally, yet another inherent genre-related feature of relevance to our purpose is the mythology pertaining to or governing the fantasy world. In Clute and Grant’s interpretation, this may include stories, legends, common knowledge and

1) Sometimes, characters are provided with a magic quality by a higher power (Anderson and Miesel, 270).



various wisdoms, which may also be employed as regional markers thereby contributing to the creation of a sense of place. The hero's quest itself may be a central part of this mythology, whether it aims at saving the given fantasy world or at self-realization.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Analysis

As a next step, let us reveal how the above specified tropes appear in the series in connection with Québec City.

### 2.1 Magic objects

At the end of Episode 1, Goblin and Ji Eun Tak arrive in Vieux Québec through a magic door opening from a Korean high-school library after they bicker about whether Ji Eun Tak deserves the title 'Goblin's Bride' or not. Goblin is surprised to find Ji Eun Tak with him, asking: "Did you just follow me through that door? How ... did you do that?" At first, Ji Eun Tak believes that she is in Province Village in Paju, South Korea, and it is her turn to be surprised when Goblin tells her where they are: "Canada... You mean, the place with the maple leaf? The one in North America? Is this really a different country? Can you do this, too?" The magic door serves multiple purposes in the TV fantasy series: it opens to a faraway place as epitomized by Québec City, where Ji Eun Tak finds a refuge from her unhappy life with her aunt's family, it demonstrates that Goblin can move in space, it serves as evidence for Ji Eun Tak that Goblin is not an ordinary character while it alarms Goblin that Ji Eun Tak may not be a regular human being, either.

Upon their first visit to Québec City, Goblin has some business to attend to, which takes him to the tombstones of Parc du bastion-de-la-reine with a changing incision and/or picture on them. The names appearing on the tombstones are surprisingly in Romanized Korean, and, on the next occasion Ji Eun Tak is visiting the city, she discovers that one of the incised names is identical to the name on the business card she got from Deok-hwa's well-to-do grandfather in Korea. Also, she assumes the one tombstone without a name must be Goblin's. Both the tombstones themselves and their location – Parc du bastion-de-la-reine marks the historical site where the Battle of Quebec took place in 1759 – accentuate the arduous nature of the journey Goblin has been undertaking.

During their second stay in Québec City, Goblin performs feats of innocent magic at Fontaine de Tourny to entertain Ji Eun Tak, which result in objects such as the

2) The hero's quest can manifest as "self-realization" (Clute and Grant 796).



fountain water sword – a sword made of the water of the fountain – or the pedestrian crossing with white stripes turning red when Ji Eun Tak's steps onto them. Not only do the magic and the resulting objects emphasize the idyllic and at places romantic mood of the journey, but they also provide moments of comic relief in the face of the drama unfolding.

A few Québec City-related objects with a special power to trigger actions inhabit the fantasy world of the TV series, too. For example, Ji Eun Tak admires a stylish mailbox placed in Hotel de Chateau in Episode 2, where she places a letter upon her next visit. Nine years later, when she is trying hard to regain her lost memory of Goblin, she finds the letter she sent from the same mailbox among her belongings in Korea. This is exactly what starts her on her journey to Québec City, through which her past – and along with it, memories of her relationship with Goblin – will emerge.

Also, from her first visit to Québec City, Ji Eun Tak takes home a souvenir booklet with the highlights of the city. When her aunt finds it, she comes to believe that Ji Eun Tak wants to desert them and leave for Canada. As Ji Eun Tak is not in a position to explain her adventures to her aunt, she chooses to face her foster family's fury. Later on, along with the letter she has sent from Québec City, the booklet will be instrumental in setting her on her journey there to find out about her past.

In Episode 4, when Ji Eun Tak decides to write the letter referred to above and place it in the mailbox in front of Hotel de Chateau, she presents Goblin with a book of poetry to read so that he does not get bored while waiting for her. Goblin's gaze falls on a poem. Reading it in the idyllic surroundings of Fontaine de Tourny, Goblin becomes fully aware of his feelings for Ji Eun Tak. The last line of the poem, "it was my first love" will be a recurring sentence from here on. Most importantly, Ji Eun Tak will jot it down on a piece of paper together with a brief description of Goblin's physical appearance before her memory of him is erased.

As for objects with a special meaning/ message, the most prominent one is the maple leaf. Upon her first arrival in Québec City, Ji Eun Tak refers to Canada as "the place with the maple leaf." A few shots later she is shown running around kicking and chasing falling maple leaves in a park and teasing Goblin: "if you catch a maple leaf, you will fall in love with the person who you are with," which foreshadows what will happen later in the story. Back in Korea, Ji Eun Tak laminates the red maple leaf she collected and brought home from Québec City<sup>3</sup>, and intends to offer it to Goblin as a present. However, due to a quibble between them, she places it in the book *Colourful Goblin* in a bookstore and leaves it there. When she tries to retrieve it an episode later,

3) Ironically, in the series, Québec City is linked to the maple leaf, a Canadian national symbol, though Québec has a history of observing itself as 'a distinct society' identifying with the fleur-de-lys. This may be suggestive of either the scenario writer's lack of regional sensitivity, or, quite on the contrary, it may be a conscious choice of the film-makers to brand both Canada and Québec City at the same time in order to meet sponsors' expectations.



it is gone, but luckily, Deok-hwa returns it to the store complaining that he does not need a book with someone's memories in it. After Goblin is finally presented with the maple leaf, he beholds it as a token of Ji Eun Tak's love for him, and is shown later looking at it absorbed in daydreams. Thus the maple leaf represents Canada and Ji Eun Tak and Goblin's love at the same time and in close connection: it is a remnant of the location of their secret adventures and their feelings for each other.

Upon one of their Québec City 'dates,' Goblin buys Ji Eun Tak a silver necklace as a souvenir with the inscription meaning "a match made in heaven." When Ji Eun Tak travels to Québec City to find out more about her past, she is wearing the same necklace, and an elderly lady reveals to her that nine years before she sold the necklace to a handsome young man who meant it as a present for his love. Thus the necklace functions as another Québec City-related clue helping Ji Eun Tak piece together the puzzle of her past love.

Finally, when Goblin takes Ji Eun Tak to the elegant restaurant in Vieux Québec for the second time, he experiences a vision: he sees her nine years later in the same restaurant with a radiant smile on her face waiting for someone she calls '대표님,' from which Goblin concludes that Ji Eun Tak will have forgotten about him by then. No matter how the plot turns and how the context changes, the vision will remain, and will eventually prove to realize a self-fulfilling prophecy. Much to Goblin's surprise, however, he will be the person Ji Eun Tak is calling out to in the restaurant.

## 2.2 The out-of-place aspect

Québec City as a location also produces examples of the out-of-place aspect in *Guardian: The Lonely Great God*, though to a much smaller extent. One such example is the Korean-owned hotel by the side of Chateau Frontenac, where the staff speaks flawless Korean to the guests. Similarly, as has been mentioned earlier, the tombstones with the Romanized Korean names seem equally out of touch with reality, just as it is quite unlikely for a waiter to greet customers in English in Vieux Québec, a dominantly French-speaking part of Canada. These discrepancies contribute to making Québec City as a place more 'fantasy worldly.'

## 2.3 Destination

As has been stated above, Goblin and Ji Eun Tak get to Québec City through the magic door between the high-school library and Vieux Québec first. In Episode 4, Goblin takes Ji Eun Tak out for a beef dinner in his car driving on a road in Korea which leads



miraculously to Québec City. At the end of Episode 5, they reach Québec City from the porch of Goblin's house in order to eat dinner at the same restaurant. These means of fantasy world travel with Québec City as a destination are juxtaposed to the real-world mission trip Ji Eun Tak undertakes to find her lost memories of the person she once loved, where the Air Canada poster and airport shots employed also amplify the real-world nature of this trip. Moreover, when Ji Eun Tak finally remembers Goblin, she is worried about returning to Korea using a fantasy means of travel on the ground that, in that case, she would have no stamp in her passport and thus would get into trouble with the authorities.

Québec City can also be seen as the embodiment of the locus amoenus, "an idealized place of safety or comfort" (Russell, 21) in *Guardian: The Lonely Great God*. It is remote, it functions as a refuge -- which Ji Eun Tak's spontaneous "I am happy here!" also reinforces --, and the city's strong connection to the romance<sup>4</sup> between Ji Eun Tak and Goblin is apparent, it symbolizes the fulfillment of their love. It is by Fontaine de Tourny that Goblin becomes aware of the crush he has on Ji Eun Tak. Goblin initiates their second visit to Québec City to compensate the girl for his harshness resulting from the discovery that she is able to see the invisible sword penetrating his chest. Similarly, before their third visit, judging from Goblin's behaviour, Ji Eun Tak arrives at the conclusion that he intends to use her as a mere instrument to rid of the sword.<sup>5</sup> Thus, on this occasion, Goblin's dinner invitation to the beef restaurant in Vieux Québec can be interpreted as his attempt to appease Ji Eun Tak and an escape from the conflict that arose. Later on, the city will mark the place of Ji Eun Tak's re-discovery of her relationship with Goblin just as it will become the location of her first encounter with Goblin in her new life. Thus, in *Guardian: The Lonely Great God*, Québec City appears as a place of romantic bliss for Goblin and Ji Eun Tak, free of calamities; nor does it ever rain there. (Rain would signify Goblin's sorrow.)

Although Québec City is an urban location in essence, Ji Eun Tak mistakes it first for Province Village for its charming small town character and pastoral echoes. Indeed, based on the images presented in the TV series, it is more natural to associate Québec City with the countryside than with a North American metropolitan city. In addition, the shots introducing the city at the beginning of Episode 2 display all three classical locus amoenus elements<sup>6</sup>: trees (Parc Samuel-Hollande near the city gate with a handsome Canadian ghost), grass (Parc du bastion-de-la-reine with the tombstones) and water (River St Laurence and Fontaine de Tourny). Moreover, witnessing Goblin

4) Evans stresses the connection between locus amoenus and romance in his article entitled "Paradise's Only Map": The "Topos" of the "Locus Amoenus" and the Structure of Marvell's "Upon Appleton House." Also, Clute and Grant define locus aemonus as an idyllic setting, "often one in which a romantic encounter occurs" (793).

5) To her question, "Do you love me?", he responds "I will, if you need me to" (Episode 5).

6) See Russell, 21.





and Ji Eun Tak's budding love, the park with Fontaine de Tourny equally satisfies this condition.

As Goblin keeps making Québec City his destination, the city provides evidence of his passing through time, as well. The tombstones of Parc du bastion-de-la-reine mark long-dead acquaintances Goblin used to meet, just as he catches a glimpse of Ji Eun Tak 10 years into the future sitting at a table in their favourite beef restaurant, where she is waiting for an unknown man who will turn out to be Goblin himself. What is more, when Ji Eun Tak comes back to life 30 years later, she meets Goblin again at the tombstones of Parc du bastion-de-la-reine.

Last, Québec City as a setting also has messengers to guide Ji Eun Tak and Goblin on their mission to find each other. The elderly lady at Porte Prescott recognizes the necklace Ji Eun Tak is wearing and provides her with information which will be instrumental in her remembering Goblin, whereas the concierge at Hotel de Chateau prepares Goblin for Ji Eun Tak's comeback in her next life as a high-school student: "Pay attention to Korean students – they are very noisy."<sup>7</sup>

## 2.4 Mythology

Recurring through the series as flashbacks, some of the Québec City-related items catalogued above contribute to generating the fantasy world mythology of *Guardian: The Lonely Great God*. The most important such item is the maple leaf. The connecting fantasy world common wisdom has it that if a person is kicking maple leaves, he/she will fall in love with the person he/she is with. Even though the maple leaf is a Canadian national symbol, and the red maple has also inspired Korean poetry, neither culture possesses the common wisdom Ji Eun Tak cites in Episode 2. What it holds – thus conceived in the fantasy world – will come true; its validity is verified by Goblin and Ji Eun Tak's example.

The scene at Fontaine de Tourny can boast a similar myth-generating capacity. Goblin's fountain water sword magic, the pedestrian crossing with the white stripes changing red as Ji Eun Tak steps on them, the poetry volume with the line "it was my first love" bear testimony to the innocent and pure feelings Goblin and Ji Eun Tak have for each other. Capturing the happiest and most unspoiled moments of Goblin and Ji Eun Tak's relationship, which the idyll of this locus amoenus also mirrors, the echoes of this scene will resonate throughout the series.

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7) Indeed, when Goblin exits the hotel to take a stroll among the tombstones of Parc du bastion-de-la-reine and sits down to read on his walk, his attention is distracted by a Korean girl dressed in a high-school uniform. She is holding a dandelion with the florets blowing off. Her recognition of him is immediate: "I found him," she says.



In addition, the tombstones lending Goblin's past historical depths, Goblin's vision in the Vieux Québec restaurant realizing a self-fulfilling prophecy, the elderly lady's story of the necklace with the inscription "a match made in heaven" all function as myth-building blocks in the fantasy world of *Guardian: The Lonely Great God*.

### 3. Conclusion

As has been demonstrated, Québec City, a real location, is home to the fantasy world of the TV series *Guardian: The Lonely Great God* in many different ways. First, it can be associated with magic through various objects such as the door opening to the Petit Champlain district, the tombstones at Parc du bastion-de-la-reine, the fountain water sword and the pedestrian crossing with white stripes turning red at Fontaine de Tourny, the mailbox at Hotel de Chateau, the Québec City souvenir booklet, the book of poetry with the line "it was my first love," the laminated maple leaf, and the silver necklace with the inscription "a match made in heaven." Second, instances of the out-of-place aspect and the fact that the city can be reached by fantasy means of travel contribute to making Québec City as a real location more 'fantasy-worldly.' Third, the city functions as a locus amoenus where Goblin and Ji Eun Tak find happiness and a refuge from the turmoil their lives are thrown into. In addition, Québec City has benevolent messengers who work towards reuniting the 'Goblin couple,' just as it also provides evidence of Goblin's passing through time. Finally, as shown above, the contribution of the city to the fantasy world mythology of the TV series is conspicuous and significant. To sum up, in *Guardian: The Lonely Great God*, Québec City features as a 'fantasy worldly' place through several tropes characteristic of the genre. These appear in a rich 'web of relations,' "of great importance to the plot and characters of the story" (Clute and Grant, 558). Moreover, and in accordance with the Canadian intention to promote tourism from Korea and East-, and Southeast Asia to Québec City, the featured fantasy roles assigned to the city in the series are markedly positive.

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**SANGJUN JEONG** / teaches American literature and cultural history at Seoul National University. His current research interests lie in New England Puritanism and the tradition of American political novels. He served as the president of the American Studies Association of Korea.

**JUDIT NAGY** / is a full time associate professor, director of the Canada Center and vice-dean for international affairs at the Faculty of Humanities of Károli Gáspár University in Budapest. Her research focuses on East Asian Canadians and on teaching material development.



# Defining Motherhood – Three Canadian Short Stories

## Définir la maternité – Trois nouvelles canadiennes

Sanja Ignjatović

### Abstract

The chosen selection of Canadian short stories – Craig Boyko's "The Baby" and Clea Young's "Split", both published in the *Journey Prize Stories* 2006, and Zsuzsi Gartner's "Pest Control for Dummies™", published in the collection *All the Anxious Girls on Earth* (2000) – deals with the theme of motherhood through various examinations of the personal identities of, mostly, female characters. Namely, this selection explicitly deals with skepticism about prevalent traditions and the diverse body of themes pertaining to what is nowadays known as motherhood studies. The primary focus of the paper is to examine how the culturally constructed concept of motherhood, as inseparable from the concept of womanhood, affects individual female identity. Additionally, the paper investigates how three different authors, incidentally in the same collection of short stories, treat the discourse on motherhood.

**Keywords:** motherhood, Canadian short stories, Craig Boyko, Clea Young, Zsuzsi Gartner

### Résumé

La sélection choisie des nouvelles canadiennes, « The Baby » (Craig Boyko), « Pest Control for Dummies™ » (Zsuzsi Gartner) et « Split » (Clea Young), traite le thème de la maternité à travers des divers examens d'identités personnelles, principalement des personnages féminins. À savoir, il traite explicitement du scepticisme à propos des traditions dominantes et de la diversité des thèmes différents à ce que l'on appelle aujourd'hui les études sur la maternité. L'objectif principal de l'article est d'examiner comment le concept de la maternité, culturellement construit, comme une partie inséparable du concept de la féminité, affecte l'identité féminine individuelle.

**Mots-clés :** la maternité, nouvelles canadiennes, Craig Boyko, Clea Young, Zsuzsi Gartner



## Introduction

The paper primarily examines how the culturally constructed concept of motherhood, inseparable from the concept of womanhood, affects individual female identity. In a brief review of related concepts, the paper strives to find a solidly defined framework that would allow for the analysis and literary interpretation of different perspectives on motherhood and identity, as well as the interrelatedness of the two concepts, in Craig Boyko's "The Baby", Zsuzsi Gartner's "Pest Control for Dummies™" and Clea Young's "Split". The paper will propose that the concept of motherhood, even when examined in literary narratives, exposes a very powerful network of political and economic conditioning inbuilt in the mainstream discourse thereby exhibiting significant and authoritative influence on individuals, and in this case women.

Despite numerous attempts at defining the concept of womanhood in terms of political, cultural and economic opposition towards the equally under-defined concept of manhood, and the respective implications, feminists, philosophers and artists remain undecided about what their task is – to describe the socio-political situation pertaining to gender, or to redefine the concepts involved inspired by the quick paced socio-political changes at the end of the twentieth and the onset of the twenty-first century. Essentially, conclusively defining or re-defining the concept of womanhood necessarily entails a thorough examination of multiple gender-typical roles and their effect on individual identity. However, the definition of individual identity, and in this case female identity, presents a separate theoretical issue. Women's struggle for political recognition stands as the foundation for what is considered, on the general level, an identity that could consequently be taken as the norm in political and economic context.

On the other hand, this practical construct evades the answer to what this 'group identity' or the 'desired' identity represents. In essence, what it means to be a 'woman' remains obscure and somewhat dependent on the proposition that gaining political rights and formal equality removes any necessity for further feminist or political engagement, which it, clearly, does not. However, both when it comes to the role of women in economy, or to women's political, legal and civil rights, and most importantly, personal freedoms, the sets of concepts participating in this implied construct of identity are often reductive or un-inclusive. This prevalently cultural reluctance at expanding the definition of female identity, or at least making it more inclusive, is usually based on the biological and physiological differences between women and men, translated into cultural performative imperatives. Women, biologically designed to bear and give birth to children, are paradoxically both ascribed specific qualities in terms of child-rearing and care-giving, and denied the right to expand their culturally prescribed gender-identity or reduce it without consequences of lesser or greater



degree. Refusing motherhood removes women from the mainstream discourse and renders them vulnerable to negative stereotypes. By extension, sterility in women becomes a handicap or a disability.

In her study *The Monster Within – The Hidden Side of Motherhood* (2010), Barbara Almond, a clinical psychologist, suggests that “[O]ur need for mothers leads to an idealization in which they are expected to be all-loving, all-giving, and self-sacrificing, an idealization that makes little room for normal emotional reactions, such as ambivalence” (Almond 2010: 23). By extension, it can be deduced that such an ideal along with unrealistic expectations exerts a significant amount of pressure on women who chose to embrace the role under the conditions dictated by society and mainstream culture. Granted, women are generally not forced into marriage or motherhood. However, the rejection of motherhood, as well as biological inability to conceive, indirectly removes them from the position of identification with their cis-gender or cis-sexual group. Women who refuse to become mothers are stripped of certain expectations and of specific qualities customarily assigned to women – an unjustified yet prevalent mode of categorization in terms of cis-gender. The matter is all the more difficult with those individuals who stray from the cis-normative for they are almost invisible in political and legal terms, and culturally unsuitable – unproductive in terms of their biological givens. However, this paper deals exclusively with the question of heterosexual female identity as defined through the prism of motherhood. Moreover, the issue is the psychological pressure each of the characters cope with in their (in)decision to conceive with their partners. The selected Canadian short stories by Boyko (“The Baby”), Gartner (“Pest Control for Dummies<sup>TM</sup>”) and Young (“The Split”) all deal with parenthood, or rather the inter-personal and inner conflicts of the partners as they reach that point in their relationships where children-talk becomes a matter of social and cultural custom. The paper focuses primarily on female characters, three of whom desire children, but also a character who remains completely disconnected from the idea of being a mother. On the one hand, the paper will explore the connection between the biological and psychological impulses on the part of female characters relating to their becoming mothers. On the other hand, the objective is to analyze the thinking process leading up to the decision, and their rationalization of it, in terms of how the decision changes the paradigms of their relationships, but also how it affects their personal identity.

## Motherhood

Motherhood studies, “an autonomous and independent scholarly discipline” (O’Reilly 2010: vii), emerges from the broad theoretical and literary works by first and second-wave feminists, and yet its scope refuses to remain in the field of women studies or



feminist theory. In fact, motherhood studies incorporate interdisciplinary and cross-cultural approaches suggesting a very powerful link between social, psychological, economic and political circumstances in which its relevant topics are defined and contained in the discourse, as well as absorbed by individuals and especially women through the influence of public policies, religion, pop-culture, fashion, literature, etc. In the introduction to *Encyclopedia of Motherhood* (2010), Andrea O'Reilly introduces a paramount distinction between two specific terms which are often used interchangeably, but which seem to reveal a restrictive patriarchal mechanism of control aimed at the female gender. A framework that would allow for a satisfactory elaboration of the mentioned concepts requires an extensive overview of feminist theory and criticism. Unfortunately, it will have to suffice to use the potentially reductionist explanation of the two terms, 'motherhood' and 'mothering', as standing in opposition and as terms that may be substituted in a broader context as the cultural norm and as a performative action. It was Adrienne Rich who re-defined the two concepts in *Of Women Born* in 1976 (1995), and according to her, the concept motherhood can be used to "signify the patriarchal institution of motherhood" (viii), for it integrates a vast network of interrelated values, beliefs and practices standardized by society and culture. As such, motherhood is a construct representative of a complex system of cultural values and practices in service of imprinting on an individual a certain range of performative roles. By extension, O'Reilly suggests, "*mothering* refers to women's lived experiences of mothering as they seek to resist the patriarchal institution of motherhood and its oppressive ideology" (viii).

On the syntactic level, the two terms display a certain tension between the fixed and the mutable – passivity and action. Traditionally, womanhood has been defined exactly on the basis of opposition between the domestic and public, and in terms of the former being highly favorable, and the latter uncomplimentary and even disadvantageous. Therefore, womanhood is culturally assessed through the prism of self-realization motherhood-wise, but only within the cultural normative. It must be noted that the twenty-first century, with its focus on expanding political rights to minority and marginalized social groups within, particularly, Western societies culminates with a necessity to politically, economically, but also theoretically re-assess the institution of motherhood. This re-examination of the concept of motherhood focuses on the socio-political and cultural processes that treat motherhood fluidly enough for the potential restraints of the patriarchal framework to become the subject of discussion and change. The traditional role of a mother has only come to include new responsibilities and expectations, placing on women greater expectations and pressures both economically, and in terms of cultural values propagated by the mainstream media, literature and pop-culture. Ironically, however, this is exactly what the twentieth-century feminist movement saw as the only appropriate solution



to the “maternal dilemma” – a solution that allows women the full realization of their newly acquired political rights in the wake of the twentieth century, both in terms of the public sphere and economic independence, and in the domestic sphere in the role of a mother. This paper treats motherhood as one of the constructs and gender roles inevitable in discussing womanhood and female identity in terms of culture.

## To be, or not to be a mother

Craig Boyko in “The Baby” (2006) plays with perspective by parodying a situation in which a young couple is expecting a baby, and where the male-protagonist is not entirely confident about his ability to connect with the bundle of joy itself, nor the impending changes. The narrative abounds in intentionally violent and brutal transitions, but also in unexpected distortions in character representation. These distortions are especially noticeable because they premeditate both the deeply personal and honest truth about becoming a parent, and because they emphasize the deviation from the discourse that typically promotes solely the sanctity and joys of parenthood. What is particularly brilliant in Boyko’s opening of the story is the naiveté with which he introduces the biological impulse behind parenthood, ascribed to the main character’s wife, Delia, immediately creating the basis for contrast with the otherwise overtly rational, though humorous, discourse:

Delia was again making noises with her mouth. The noises she was making, with her tongue and her teeth and the selective vibration of the vocal folds of her larynx, were intended to convey me a message. The substance of that message was that she wanted a baby.

“We don’t need a baby,” I said with my mouth.

“Nobody *needs* a baby,” said Delia with hers. “But I *want* one.” (Boyko 2006: 73)

Nowhere in the narrative does the character-narrator mention anything about Delia’s biological circumstance, age or the related haste. Quite the contrary, to the male protagonist, the matter of biological capability does not operate as a relevant factor in the decision. This invites two possible and equally interesting interpretations. Boyko’s subtle opening of the story may suggest the male-protagonist’s utter ignorance on the matter of the female physiological and reproductive capacity. For the protagonist, the biology behind Delia’s plea is neither relevant nor threatening. Another interpretation may be that the male protagonist is well aware of the biological impulse, and that the parody addresses the matter most profoundly. He says “with [his] mouth” that the couple does not “need” a baby to be content, for the protagonist neither desires nor (yet) accepts the lifestyle changes. Moreover, the soon-to-be





father appears to be catapulted into parenthood without any emotional preparation, and without enough time to grieve the loss of his personal freedom and space. Delia, the mother, is the one who “wants” a child – suggesting an irrational decision triggered by something that is less controllable. Barbara Almond would explain this by saying that “[M]otherlove, the bright side of maternity, is fueled by intense biological strivings inextricably bound to powerful psychological wishes” (Almond 2010: 24).

From the perspective of the new ‘daddums’, the narrative tackles the contemporary concern for the loss of personal freedom, but also subtly brings into question the traditional concept of marriage and family and the highly romanticized ideas associated with it. The dialogical mode of the narrative reveals the necessity for this kind of parody because the negative attitude towards parenthood is not only unpopular, but also politically incorrect, among other things. The narrator in this story being a man, and the narrator parodying the events revolving around the baby, is an instrument cleverly employed by Boyko so as not to estrange the reader. It is almost inconceivable for a woman to express ambivalence, let alone reluctance or refusal to have children. With the inclusion of various voices of stock characters as representing society and the fixed romanticized attitudes towards parenthood, Boyko clearly explicates the necessity for the humor. His pragmatic and rational character-narrator, through time, finds “uses” for the baby, and acclimatizes himself into the new gender and social role (Boyko 2006: 78).

The next day the baby arrived.

I suggested that we return it as it was obviously defective. Though it seemed, I conceded, to be operating correctly for the time being (in truth I had no idea what functions it was supposed to perform), the harsh noises and sundry smells that issued from it gave me reason to worry that it would soon malfunction. I asked Delia if she’d filled out the warranty card. (Boyko 2006: 75)

The author defamiliarizes the newborn and instead of presenting it as a ‘bundle of joy’ he subversively approaches the customary and familiar cultural and ideological positions revolving around parenting and children. In this first and second-person narrative, the blatant and dark humor is manifestly aimed at the reader, and with the purpose of implicating them, as well as easing the reception of the controversial message that parenthood, for some, stands for a personal loss of sorts. The involvement on the part of the reader achieved by means of first and second-person ensures a broader, and more importantly, a personal understanding of the issue of becoming a parent (Boyko 2006: 75). Doubtful and yet undecided on the matter of whether they needed another family member, the protagonist-narrator quickly becomes unamused by the baby’s capacity for appropriating his personal time and a propensity for physi-



ological discharge and vocalizing its needs. The baby is “defective” for it does not fit with the idea proposed by his wife – it does not require “love”, per se, but constant attention and tending. And yet, Boyko relieves the mother of the unpleasant position in which she too should voice her dissatisfaction with the realistic image – she is there to protect the baby from the bewildered and immature father (Boyko 2006: 74). The character of Delia, the mother, represents the epitome of what is traditionally associated with women and motherhood – she voices the clichés often put forward as immutable truths. Basically, she is slightly parodied as the repository of love who desires a human being of her own to whom she would transfer whatever love has been undirected and unused. Obviously, Boyko’s choice of words, the future mother calling the hypothetical baby “a thing”, the almost imperceptible Freudian slip, adds to the overall humor, but also reveals a level of ignorance and possibly self-interest. Delia initially refers to the baby as “a thing” and uses the form “which”, and then corrects herself and says “whom”. The baby is an object, and the protagonist-narrator from the very beginning places it into the category of “things” they do not need, much like Delia, only without correcting himself.

In “The Baby”, Boyko makes visible the disparity of personal experience with the narratives promoted by mainstream culture, and the difficulty of fulfilling societal expectations – regardless of gender. The overall tone of the story, the sardonic yet playful humor, suspends the familiar cultural conventions. However, it is not the baby, the minuscule human, that is ridiculed as much as the adults’ hypocritical and sensational reactions to it. The baby is indeed an ‘it’ that arrives or is plunged into the world of the two adults, one of whom is initially reluctant to accept its presence (Boyko 2006: 81). The story closes with the protagonist reading the baby a bed-time story – a nonsensical and made up one with the purpose of parodying the romanticized image of a father reading to his child because babies, after all, wouldn’t understand anything or know the difference between nonsense and the original version. Moreover, the story may be interpreted as a cautionary tale against the idealized idea of parenthood aimed directly at the reader. In fact, the entire story may be interpreted as a warning, or a real-life practical guide for new parents.

I hesitated. “The moral? Why, the moral is look before you leap. Or perhaps it’s don’t bite off more than you can chew. Or maybe it’s don’t shit where you eat. Or perchance it’s think before you speak. Or mayhap it’s don’t do something just because everyone else is doing it. Or peradventure it’s pay no attention to honey-tongued demagogues for they act only and always in their own interest. All right? Okay? Now good night.”

The baby yawned. “Nigh-nigh daddums.”

... My heart melted. (Boyko 2006: 81)



Clea Young's "Split" seems to parallel Boyko's "The Baby" for it is a narrative about a woman who cannot bring herself to experience the pangs of the maternal instinct. Tova never reaches the culturally desirable ideal – the state of mind in which she could see herself in the role of a mother. However, in the character of Alannah, her best friend, she witnesses that very instinctual, or bio-psychological, transformation, and it leaves her confounded and acutely aware of the conflict between her private self and the socially appropriate, performative, version of it.

Jed would like to have children and Tova would like him to have them. His arms are made to rock babies, to swing them dangerously high and catch them just in time. Only Tova hasn't yet fallen under that maternal spell she'd heard women speak of so rapturously. And so she must wait either until she falls or is pushed head-first into its deep, embryonic darkness. Until then, she will use Alannah's baby as a gauge. Tonight Alannah will offer the baby and Tova will receive it with tentative arms, note her pulse as she jigs the squirming bundle. She doubts anything will have changed. When Tova held the baby as a newborn, her mouth dried up and she began to sweat. The baby, who weighed almost nothing, almost broke Tova's back. It wailed bloody murder. (Young 2006: 203)

Exposed to a newborn and to her own fatherly husband, she is still entirely removed from the prospects of giving life to a baby. Moreover, the protagonist is terrified by the idea that a child is something that the future inevitably has in cards for her, which is the reason why she examines her own feelings for her husband, the quality of their relationship, as well the quality of the relationship with her mother (Young 2006: 203). Tova's husband Jed becomes a threatening figure in her life precisely because of his fatherly instinct and desires. Under pressure, the female protagonist feels that she must use her best friend's baby to temporarily satisfy her husband's needs and buy herself time – "until she falls or is pushed" into pregnancy. Essentially, it is a story about two friends who face an insurmountable obstacle after one of them becomes a mother for the two do not seem to recognize each other. Narration-wise, the story is told through the eyes of the unmarried and childless woman who observes the behavior of her once close friend (Young 2006: 206).

"The Split" also asks whether motherhood is a natural stage in an individual's psychological and even spiritual development, and whether an individual who does not respond to this traditional cultural expectation may be regarded as underdeveloped, or egotistical and rebellious. The issue additionally refers to the institution of marriage as regulated to facilitate procreation and child-rearing. The character of Tova reveals how subtle cultural conditioning is, and how deviously effective its workings guide or direct the lives of individuals. In her own marriage, Tova feels obliged to conform regardless of her personal aspirations and desires, and regardless of her fears



and feelings of inadequacy. Her relationship with her mother is examined from this vantage point, and as pertaining to the manner in which societal expectations are transferred from one individual to another in the form of behavior correction or, simply, the instilling and perpetuation of gender-typical roles (Young 2006: 201). The implication, of course, is that the marriage to Jed was not a decision based entirely on her own feelings and desires, but rather something larger than that – a mish-mash of expectations, tradition and comfort. For this very reason, Tova observes Alannah, and sees her as “restrained, hunched, and without her old grace” (Young 2006: 207), which may be interpreted as a reflection of Tova’s own idea of the effect children have on women – a projection of the anxiety onto Alannah who does not seem to be that distraught in her role even if the protagonist cannot shake off the discomfort. The story may be interpreted as a self-reflective narrative which, at the same time, problematizes gender roles, societal and cultural expectations, and the unpopular talk of psychological pressure in the face of pregnancy.

Tova, the protagonist, frustrated by the lack of this maternal impulse, delves into her past, and the relationship with her mother, and deconstructs her relationship with her husband, but also desperately looks for an explanation and an excuse in her own physiology.

How even amid their ungainly groping, Tova managed to hide from Jed her split left nipple; whenever her shirt came off, her hand became a shell to cup her breast. Tova peels the waterlogged cloth from her chest and regards her anomaly. She’s unsure if *split* is the correct word. Perhaps *inverted*. Maybe *mutant*. [...] Privately, though, Tova wonders if it will cause problems if, or when, she has a child and wants to breastfeed. What if the nipple doesn’t work? What if the breast becomes full but the baby cannot drink from it and it grows painful and huge and must be punctured so that the trapped milk (might it sour inside her?) can flow? (Young 2006: 201)

Her “split nipple” flutters around the narrative as a kind of biological determinant and an omen. It is at the same time a materialization of Tova’s anxiety and fears, and the inability to picture herself as a mother, but also as a kind of mark – a physical defect that makes her ugly and monstrous metaphorically. The protagonist sees herself as anomalous, and by analogy, it is her not wanting motherhood that makes her an anomaly in her marriage, and in the society.

“A baby doesn’t make it better, though.” The words whip from Alannah’s mouth and are gone. (Young 2006: 210)



Zsuzsi Gartner's "Pest Control for Dummies™" is a carefully layered narrative revealing of a disturbing moment in the female-protagonist's life – the moment of her realization that her mother had lost a child, a baby boy, before she was born. An explosive emotional reaction prompts Daisy, the protagonist, into a series of hallucinatory dreams in which she regresses to a place representing her mother's womb where she encounters the fetus of her brother. Cold, distant and blatantly judgmental, Daisy's mother is appalled by her daughter's soppy reaction to the practically hypothetical death of a child her mother never actually gave birth to.

Daisy was mourning her brother. She had been mourning him for almost a month now, ever since her mother had told her he'd died. Her mother couldn't understand what the *fuss* was about. She was sure she'd told Daisy ages ago, but Daisy just doesn't *listen*. (Gartner 2000: 64)

Formally complex, the narrative of Daisy develops in the actual story-world, and a framed world within it – that of her own mind. The story-world real segments feature her partner Jack – a man guiltily attracted to the "boyish body" of a neighbor (Gartner 2000: 65) and Daisy's mother: "*Ohmegawd, your own girlfriend's won mother!*" the little anal Jack in Jack's head said, as if everyone didn't have wayward thoughts" (Gartner 2000: 65); and the segments taking place inside the main protagonist's mind – a plastic space that is simultaneously her mother's and her own womb – feature the fetus of her never-born brother. Symbolically, the two worlds overlap, and Daisy, similarly to Delia in "The Baby" plunges into hallucinations as if to release the love inside of her otherwise unused, corroding her mental state and reminding her of the unloving relationship with Jack. It is in this world that Daisy not only fantasizes a life for her brother, but also re-examines her relationship with her mother, as well as the idea of having life growing inside her.

The fetus looks so much like some Hollywood version of an alien that Daisy wonders if she isn't hallucinating an abduction. Maybe they've already stuck a tube down her throat and up her ass and shone bright lights in her eyes and scraped away enough tissue samples to create a whole new race of Uber Daisys. A Daisy chain. She laughs. Air bubbles spill out of her mouth and dance around in the warm amniotic fluid. The fetus bats at them with his little curled fists. (Gartner 2000: 68)

Psychologically, using the death of her brother as an impetus, Daisy not only constructs a virtual past for herself and her sibling, but also works through the disturbing conscious and unconscious material pertaining to her conception of motherhood. More precisely, Daisy re-examines the narrative of her own birth, and the narrative



of the relationship with her mother. Essentially, by creating a fictional past for her never-born brother, it is as if Daisy selectively changes her own childhood memories. Though a conscious effort on her part, it happens on a more profound level. In order to become a mother, Daisy must understand the broken relationship with her own mother. Somewhat aware of the true nature of her hallucinatory episodes, Daisy describes the “fetus” as “some Hollywood version of an alien” (Gartner 2000: 68). By extension, she not only identifies with her sibling in the womb, attempting to identify or reconnect to her mother, but also reveals the nature of her present state – the fetus is an alien being to her as much as she is alien to herself. The fetus, a convenient substitute, inside their mother’s womb, gradually allows Daisy to mentally and physically prepare for motherhood. This improvised cognitive therapy, the switching of roles with her mother, additionally re-examines the model of motherhood that she is familiar with, and towards which she has no aspirations (Gartner 2000: 68).

The vivid and surreal excerpt is the first hallucinatory episode in Daisy’s narrative (Gartner 2000: 68), and there, the fetus of her brother is introduced – through humorous and somewhat scientific comparison with an alien. However, on a deeper level, both Daisy’s melancholy and crying in the scenes happening in the actual story-world, and her imagining her dead brother not as a typical chubby baby but an alien-like fetus manifest a strong sense of anxiety. The insinuation of an abduction relates to motherhood and female identity in numerous ways. Daisy’s anxiety exposes unresolved issues pertaining to her mother and childhood, but it is also closely related to a woman’s sense of personal freedom and space. A child growing inside the womb is literally an invasion of sorts – it is a nine-month long biological abduction of the body and the mind, for it too is unarguably forced into an altered state. The monster metaphor, reminiscent of Ridley Scott’s “Alien”, is evocative of Tova’s fear of Alannah’s baby breaking her back, and his murderous wailing. In the case of Daisy, similarly to Tova in “Split”, the emotional component is the most striking one – if whatever happens to grow inside them comes out replicating exactly what they internalize, would history repeat itself, and would they be deprived of an emotional connection with their children just like with their mothers. Barbara Almond says that this mechanism, based on “empathic identification” dictates the course of development in child rearing (Almond 2010: 25). Additionally, this author suggests, as “mothers unconsciously relive all the stages in the children’s development” (Almond 2010: 25) they adapt their expectations according to this empathic model – the model learned from their own mother or mother-figure, and in their own infancy. Unsatisfied needs, according to Almond’s theory, lead to the replication of the same faulty empathic model, which in turn produces more unsatisfactory relationships – mothers who simply do not find the instinctual basis to connect. Whether Daisy’s anxiety stems from fear that she would emulate the same sort of unloving relationship with



her child, or from pure reluctance to conform to a standard of selfless mothering – the other extreme in terms of the model of her mother – remains unknown. Yet, the very questions Daisy's hallucinatory dilemmas raise testify to a complex phenomenon of motherhood, and its deep relation to personal identity.

The fetus is proving remarkably uncooperative, claiming no prior knowledge of ancient Hebrew... [...] Daisy can't contain her fury. She grabs him by the umbilical cord and yanks him towards her. "You're not even trying." The fetus's eyes go wide. "Go easy on me, sis, I haven't even been born yet!" (Gartner 2000: 83)

In another hallucinatory episode, Daisy overwhelms the fetus-brother with her preposterously unrealistic expectations and "the fetus is proving remarkably uncooperative, claiming no prior knowledge of ancient Hebrew and insisting that as far as he knows "Jesus Christ" is just a curse their mother frequently uses" (Gartner 2000: 83), and experiences a kind of aggression towards it that resonates with the monstrous idea Alannah confides in Tova in "Split". Almost amused with the idea, and yet embarrassed by it, this character feels overcome by the amount of power she has over the child – the power to end the baby's life as easily as it had been to give it life. Correspondingly, frenzied Daisy muses how she could "chew him up, stick her finger down her throat, and puke up the pieces" and how she is "certain her mother would like that" (Gartner 2000: 83) revealing a culturally disturbing idea of mothers having the propensity to be ambivalent, indifferent or unloving to their children. In "The Baby", it is the voice of the father that toys with this dichotomy all through the story, and his gender and the dark-humor of the parody stand as a buffer zone between the individual and the culture. "Pest Control for Dummies<sup>TM</sup>" ends with Daisy's unlocking of that instinctual capacity, the maternal instinct, and the process of her contemplating motherhood prompted by learning about her brother, may be interpreted as a form of therapy. If motherhood provides a framework for women to expand their identity – from daughters to partners and mothers – perhaps the link between childhood and motherhood may be reversed so that "reliving" the specific stages serves a therapeutic role.

## Conclusion

The three selected Canadian short stories explicitly deal with skepticism about prevalent traditions and the diverse body of themes pertaining to what is nowadays known as motherhood studies (O'Reilly 2010: vii). The female characters featuring the three stories, both the protagonists and the episodic characters, all belong to





the social group of emancipated, working contemporary Canadian women, and the setting is urban contemporary Canada. Namely, in Craig Boyko's "The Baby" and Zsuzsi Gartner's "Pest Control for Dummies<sup>TM</sup>", it is the male characters who initially question the traditional concept of parenthood, and their personal desires and choices pertaining to fatherhood. Women in these stories show different kinds of motivations – either stereotypical and clichéd 'wanting' of an object of pure affection, or an object that could compensate for the personal failings in the romantic, marital or other aspects of their lives. Clea Young's "Split", however, is the most complex of the three stories for it voices an opinion in complete opposition to the previously mentioned two – for Young's Tova, a baby would not be a compensation for a failed mother-daughter relationship or an unaffectionate childhood for she has nothing particular to reproach at her mother; nor does she need a baby to whom she would impart un-allotted amounts of love, affection and care. In fact, Young's "Split" delves deep into the psychological, emotional and romantic aspects of the protagonist's life in order to investigate whether there exists a particular space in which Tova could reconcile her identity with another particular extension or role. This space is only hypothetical and disturbing for the fact that it is undesired yet a social and marital inevitability. Tova's womanhood is examined through the prism of her willingness to adapt it to the role of a mother. In comparison to her double, Alannah, Tova projects her reluctance and doubts as manifested in her skewed image of Alannah's body – a body which suffered a pregnancy but which does not seem to have changed to the extent of Tova's panic of looking at it as injured, which is visibly manifested in the image of her 'split' and 'anomalous' breast.

"Split", similarly to "Pest Control for Dummies<sup>TM</sup>", deals with the issue of female identity as contingent upon the right of women to retain control over their bodies – literally and metaphorically. The 'alien abduction' in "Pest Control for Dummies<sup>TM</sup>" suggests the complex nature of the motherhood-experience, but only two of the stories deal with the concept of mothering as defined by O'Reilly, and previously Adrienne Rich. Namely, "The Baby" precisely focuses on the excruciating experience of caring for an infant, and the parody facilitates a painfully sincere and unpopular account. In "Split", Tova examines both the idea of being entrapped by motherhood – being assigned a role and position from which she can neither escape her sorely perfect husband; and the idea of being forced to mother a child – without having felt a desire for it, or even the slightest twinge of the maternal instinct. Additionally, "Split" problematizes the discourse around motherhood in terms of the origin and quality of the instinct itself. Much like Daisy in "Pest Control for Dummies<sup>TM</sup>" who plunges into an examination of her mother's and her own womb to uncover the maternal spark, Tova too attempts, although forcefully, to warm herself up to the idea, with different results. Both





stories, however, more or less explicitly, examine the extent to which womanhood is biologically marked and raise the question of whether, and how, culture, society, politics or biology encode it into individuals.

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**SANJA IGNJATOVIĆ** / is a PhD student at the Philology Department and a teaching assistant at the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš for the Canadian Studies and British Studies courses, but also Medieval English Literature, Renaissance Literature and Shakespeare. Her main fields of interest include the short story as a genre, its contemporary forms, as well as theory of literature and cognitive poetics.



# René Derouin : art et américanité

## René Derouin: Art and Americanity

Véronique Millet

### Résumé

Né en 1936 à Montréal, René Derouin est un artiste multidisciplinaire dont l'œuvre s'inscrit depuis de nombreuses années dans la notion d'américanité. Parti à la recherche d'une inspiration singulière lors de nombreux voyages en Amérique puis partout dans le monde, il parcourt les Amériques du Nord au Sud, à la recherche de ses racines et de son identité. En 1955–56, il se rend au Mexique pour la première fois. Revenu au Québec, il prend conscience de sa culture nordique. Il commence à représenter le lieu où il habite et revendique son appartenance à l'Amérique. Il veut retrouver les valeurs de ses ancêtres et ainsi privilégier les rapports Nord-Sud. Celui pour qui l'identité québécoise est en devenir va, à travers de nombreux voyages de par le monde et surtout de fréquents séjours au Mexique, intégrer à son œuvre artistique le concept de nordicité. Derouin, dont les œuvres sont exposées dans de grands musées canadiens et étrangers, s'exprime à travers la sculpture, la gravure, le dessin et les installations.

**Mots-clés :** René Derouin, l'art multidisciplinaire, l'américanité, nordicité

### Abstract

Born in 1936 in Montreal, René Derouin is a multidisciplinary artist whose work has, for several years, been rooted Americanity. Looking for a singular inspiration during numerous journeys in Americas, and then all around the world, he traveled from North to South in search of his roots and identity. In 1955–56, he went to Mexico for the first time. Having returned to Quebec, he became aware of his northern culture. He began to represent the place where he lived and claimed his belonging to America. He wanted to find the values of his ancestors in order to favor North-South relationships. Through numerous journeys throughout the world and especially through frequent stays in Mexico, the man for whom the identity of Quebec is in the process of becoming, integrated into his artistic work the concept of nordicity. Derouin, whose works are exposed in large Canadian and foreign museums, expresses himself through sculpture, engraving, drawing and installations.

**Keywords:** René Derouin, multidisciplinary art, Americanity, nordicity



Parler de l'œuvre de René Derouin, c'est aussi parler de l'artiste, dans ses pérégrinations et ses cheminements, dans ses allers-retours entre le Nord et le Sud, à travers le temps et à travers l'espace des Amériques. Partir à la découverte du territoire, c'est partir à la découverte de soi, c'est tenter de comprendre comment l'intime s'inscrit dans le territoire. De Montréal à Mexico, du Nouveau Monde à la civilisation précolombienne, Derouin le graveur, le sculpteur et le céramiste a sillonné le continent américain à la recherche de son identité et c'est en se confrontant au Sud qu'il a pris conscience de sa nordicité. Il a concilié, voire réconcilié, pour lui et pour les autres, dans son art comme dans sa vie, non seulement le Nord et le Sud, mais aussi l'intérieur et l'extérieur des paysages qu'il traverse, le voyage dans l'espace et celui dans le temps, le microcosme et le macrocosme. Bref, c'est dans ces voyages que Derouin a découvert ses racines.

D'autres artistes avant Derouin ont voyagé, sont allés chercher ailleurs une inspiration, une technique, une expérience. Les voyages sont depuis longtemps incontournables dans les carrières artistiques. On peut penser à l'Italie, au Grand Tour, etc. Que ce soit pour aller découvrir des œuvres (par exemple anciennes), pour rencontrer des maîtres et d'autres artistes, pour trouver de nouveaux motifs, renouveler des techniques, les artistes ont des buts et des objectifs variés. À partir du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, ces voyages sont même devenus essentiels dans un cursus artistique.

Les artistes québécois n'échappent pas à cette règle. À la fin des années 50, après la réception houleuse de leur manifeste *Refus global*, les membres du groupe automatiste sont partis presque « naturellement » en Europe et notamment en France. L'automatisme était un courant artistique québécois actif dans les années 1940 et 50, proche du surréalisme mais surtout de l'expressionnisme abstrait (notamment de l'*Action painting* américain). Ce groupe de quinze artistes entourant le peintre Paul-Émile Borduas a publié un manifeste en 1948, *Refus global*.<sup>1</sup> En 1954, après une ultime exposition de groupe, les automatistes ont quitté le Québec. Même si plusieurs d'entre eux, comme Borduas lui-même, ont aussi séjourné aux États-Unis tout proches, la ligne transatlantique semblait la plus évidente. Le Québec d'alors ne leur offrait pas l'espace de liberté (liberté artistique, politique, religieuse, sociale...) dont ils avaient besoin. Les Borduas, Ferron, Leduc et autre Riopelle vont ainsi passer plusieurs années à Paris, s'y installer, y créer, y exposer. Mais si ces artistes ont effectué un ou plusieurs

1) *Refus global* est un manifeste rédigé par Borduas et contresigné par quinze de ses amis, dont Jean-Paul Riopelle, Fernand Leduc, Marcelle Ferron et Jean-Paul Mousseau. Il annonce les ruptures amorcées par les automatistes dans l'accession du Québec à la modernité. Il est lancé le 9 août 1948 à Montréal, en pleine période duplessiste. Pour Borduas, il ne s'agit pas simplement de faire le point sur le plan esthétique. L'art apparaît comme étant de plus en plus lié aux problèmes sociopolitiques : refus d'une société passéiste, refus de l'omnipotence de la religion, remise en cause des valeurs traditionnelles. Les signataires du manifeste affirment leur profond besoin de libération et leur désir de spontanéité. Même si plusieurs des signataires quittent alors le Québec, *Refus global* reste comme l'un des écrits majeurs au Québec, et pas simplement sur le plan artistique.



séjours en France, et même s'ils ont réalisé quelques allers-retours entre le Québec et leur nouveau lieu de résidence, ils n'ont pas, pour la plupart, conservé ce rythme toute leur vie, contrairement à un René Derouin qui poursuit, aujourd'hui encore, ses voyages au Mexique commencés en 1955, dans d'incessants échanges entre le Nord et le Sud.

Nous allons donc tenter de saisir comment René Derouin a découvert son appartenance au territoire québécois, au Nord, au continent américain, et comment s'articule la dimension chrono-topologique de son cheminement artistique à l'aune de ses voyages. Pour cela, nous aborderons les points suivants : tout d'abord, la découverte du Mexique et du Sud ; ensuite, la prise de conscience de la nordicité et de l'américanité ; enfin, les vingt ans d'existence des Jardins du précambrien.

Derouin l'explique lui-même : dans une vidéo datant de 2014 et intitulée « Je suis un homme du Nord et du Sud », il revient sur son désir de voyage et sa découverte du Mexique et pourquoi il s'est tourné vers le Sud plutôt que vers l'Europe. Il explique comment sa découverte du Mexique a influencé son art et lui a fait prendre conscience de sa nordicité ; comment cela lui a permis d'habiter un pays et pas seulement d'habiter *dans* un pays. S'il affirme : « Je suis vraiment de culture nordique, ça vient du Mexique », l'évocation de sa découverte de ce pays du Sud est une étape liminaire dans notre compréhension de son cheminement.

## La découverte du Mexique et du Sud

René Derouin est né en 1936 dans le quartier de Longue-Pointe, dans la partie Est de Montréal. Il est issu d'une famille ouvrière qui élevait ses sept enfants. Deux événements tragiques vont marquer le jeune René : un de ses frères se noie à l'âge de 11 ans dans le fleuve Saint-Laurent tout proche, en 1950, puis son père connaît le même destin, trois ans plus tard, alors qu'il n'a que 48 ans. Dans les années 50, Derouin étudie le graphisme et le dessin publicitaire, puis prend des cours du soir à l'École des beaux-arts de Montréal.

En 1955, il a 19 ans et il entreprend un voyage avec un ami : il traverse les États-Unis et arrive au Mexique. À Mexico, où il réside durant plusieurs mois, il découvre la politique, la culture et l'art, mais aussi l'histoire, en visitant par exemple de nombreux sites précolombiens, ce qui lui fait ressentir un « lien profond avec ces civilisations précoloniales » (chronologie du site internet de l'artiste). Décidé à en apprendre davantage, il étudie la langue espagnole et le dessin. Ce voyage sera le premier d'une longue suite de périple à travers les Amériques. Derouin écrira plus tard : « La découverte de l'Amérique a été la source de mon œuvre. Le territoire, l'espace et les migrations, des territoires des mémoires amérindiennes et du patrimoine



précolombien, trois mille ans d'histoire qui me révéleront d'autres ancêtres d'avant la colonisation d'Amérique » (Derouin, *Graphies d'atelier*, 26).

En 1957, c'est à Mexico que Derouin crée ses premières linogravures. Revenu à Montréal, il travaille sur des films d'animation et produit des illustrations. Dans les années 60, il est installé avec sa famille dans l'ouest puis au sud de Montréal, encore une fois au bord du fleuve Saint-Laurent (Anse de Vaudreuil puis Varennes), ce fleuve Saint-Laurent avec lequel René Derouin tisse une histoire forte, faite, si l'on peut dire, de don et de contre-don – nous y reviendrons un peu plus loin.

Derouin produit à cette époque « des linogravures, des bois gravés en couleur, des lithographies, des eaux fortes » (Derouin, *Graphies d'atelier*, 26). Ses voyages ne se limitent pas au Mexique : Derouin fait par exemple en 1968 un stage de quatre mois au Japon, puis réalise un voyage d'étude aux États-Unis (1969). Au milieu des années 70, il trouve un terrain dans les Laurentides, à moins d'une heure au nord de Montréal, et y construit sa maison. Son installation dans la petite municipalité de Val-David va le conduire quelque vingt ans plus tard à créer sur son territoire, dans son domaine privé, ce qui deviendra les Jardins du précambrien. C'est aussi dans ces années-là qu'il retourne au Mexique avec sa famille, la première fois en vingt ans.

## La prise de conscience de la nordicité et de l'américanité

En 1977, il fait une découverte qui pour lui sera marquante. Le cheminement entre le dessin et l'écriture va lui faire prendre conscience de sa proximité avec les autres Amériques. Il est en train de créer son œuvre *Suite Baskatong* et quelque chose se révèle à lui. À la surface de cette œuvre inspirée par l'Abitibi, région qui se trouve au nord-ouest de Montréal, et par le grand réservoir d'eau qui s'y trouve, apparaît un élément qui surprend l'artiste. Derouin explique : « [...] plantée au milieu du triptyque, une forme régulière apparaît. Elle a quelque chose d'étrange dans ce paysage nordique. On dirait une pyramide, une sorte de stèle couverte de petites écritures, des signes runiques et amérindiens. J'ai l'impression aujourd'hui que c'est à ce moment-là que le déclic s'est produit. L'écriture sur la stèle n'était pas décodée, on ne savait pas si c'était précolombien ou amérindien du nord. Cela n'avait pas de connotation précise. Mais c'était une calligraphie, comme si une civilisation ancienne avait voulu laisser une trace dans le paysage. Dans mon paysage. Un peu comme si les signes anciens de la civilisation mexicaine avaient surgi dans ma mémoire, au milieu des grandes étendues d'eau du Baskatong » (Derouin, *Graphies d'atelier*, 17)

Derouin va promouvoir et encourager la vision d'un territoire qui s'étend du Nord au Sud, insistant sur les similitudes de culture et d'identité. C'est dans cet axe Nord-Sud



des Amériques que l'artiste va puiser sa source et retrouver ses racines. Il explique : « Nous sommes de la même histoire de la colonisation de l'Amérique, soit française, anglaise, espagnole ou portugaise. Nous avons tous vécu la rencontre avec l'espace de ce continent et les cultures amérindiennes. Voilà la base de notre Américanité » (Derouin, *Graphies d'atelier*, 11)

À partir de 1983, Derouin, tout en allant également en France, en Espagne, en Angleterre ou encore en Islande, va voyager régulièrement au Mexique. Il va même y vivre le terrible tremblement de terre de 1985 : arrivé à Mexico pour y installer son exposition *Suite nordique*, il va tirer de cet épisode effroyable une expérience intime et profonde. Ses territoires intérieurs ainsi redéfinis seront à l'origine d'une série intitulée *Mémoire et cri génétique*, en réponse au tremblement de terre. Il retournera au Mexique chaque année entre 1985 et 1990.

Au milieu des années 90, un événement majeur va se produire dans la carrière artistique de René Derouin. Quelques années auparavant (1989–1990), il avait réalisé vingt mille figurines en céramique, à raison de plusieurs dizaines par jour, et les avait exposées au Musée d'art contemporain de Mexico puis dans la ville de Québec. Cette « foule dense et hétérogène » en terre cuite, « symbole des exodes de population » (Hakim, *Espace Sculpture*, 29–31.) s'appelle justement *Migrations*. Conscient que l'œuvre en tant que telle ne serait plus montrée, il décide de larguer les figurines d'abord dans la rivière Outaouais (au Québec) puis au fond du fleuve Saint-Laurent. Son épouse Jeanne Molleur photographie le largage qui a lieu entre l'Isle-aux-Coudres et Baie-Saint-Paul. Comme l'écrit l'historienne de l'art Mona Hakim, « Le point de vue plus symbolique de ce que l'on pourrait qualifier de performance renvoie à la notion de territoire, à la mouvance des peuples, à la filiation humaine et aux espaces géographiques. Notions éminemment prégnantes, on le sait, dans le travail de Derouin » (Hakim). Ce largage, qu'on pourrait qualifier de performance artistique, semble l'allégorie « du flux permanent, d'un lieu de passage et d'appartenance » (Hakim). Et c'est aussi comme une trace, comme le souvenir sublimé de la perte du frère et du père pris par ce même fleuve. Mais ce Saint-Laurent qui lui avait tant pris allait bientôt tant lui redonner. Il serait sans doute intéressant d'explorer ici les effets de ce que l'on considère comme le don et le contre-don. Derouin avoue avoir renouvelé sa force créatrice après s'être libéré de ses figurines. En même temps que ces petites créatures de terre retrouvaient leur point d'origine, après leur périple du Nord au Sud de l'Amérique, l'artiste se délestait peut-être d'un passé, voire d'un passif, avec le fleuve.

C'est ainsi qu'une autre période artistique va s'ouvrir pour René Derouin, cette fois-ci tournée davantage sur l'ancrage dans le territoire québécois et l'ouverture au grand public, avec la création des Jardins du précambrien.



## Les Jardins du précambrien

Les Jardins du précambrien ont présenté des œuvres d'artistes des Amériques durant une vingtaine d'années, à Val-David (Laurentides, nord de Montréal). Le lieu de vie de l'artiste est devenu véritablement un espace public, ouvert à tous. Leur création remonte à 1995. Ce sont trois kilomètres de sentiers jalonnés d'œuvres créées par des artistes de différents pays venant tous et toutes des Amériques. Comme l'a écrit l'historien de l'art Gilles Lapointe, qui a souvent collaboré à l'écriture de livres de René Derouin, « Ces symposiums d'art-nature se sont succédé sans interruption durant vingt ans et sont restés fidèles à leur objectif premier, à savoir “favoriser la rencontre d'artistes issus de diverses disciplines provenant des trois Amériques autour de la question du territoire et de l'art *in situ*” » (Lapointe, préface de *Graphies d'atelier*, 14).

Derouin voulait créer « un art qui s'ouvre toujours plus largement sur la société et sur le monde. » Il explique : « Avec les jardins du précambrien de Val-David, je trace une œuvre monumentale sur cinquante acres de territoire laurentien, œuvre consacrée à la rencontre des créateurs dans l'axe Nord-Sud, œuvre qui réconcilie mes idées et mes engagements. » (Derouin, *Graphies d'atelier*, 29). En effet, le but de la Fondation René-Derouin, que l'artiste a présidée durant de nombreuses années et qui est à la source des Jardins du précambrien, a toujours été d'encourager « les échanges et les séjours d'artistes mexicains et latino-américains au Québec. Le but de cette fondation, selon les mots de son fondateur, [était] de trouver une identité continentale américaine dans le contexte des relations Nord-Sud » (Rubio, *Lettres québécoises*, 62). Les titres des symposiums soulignent d'ailleurs l'appartenance au territoire, l'importance de l'espace à occuper : en 1995, le 1<sup>er</sup> symposium s'intitule *Les Territoires rapaillés*. On trouve aussi : *Intégration aux lieux*, *La Sonorité des lieux*, *Mythologie des lieux*, *Pour une culture du territoire*, *Espace et densité* ou encore *Les Jardins du précambrien*. Il faut noter que le terme même de « précambrien » (précambrien : première des ères géologiques, avant l'ère primaire) fait référence à une époque et à un lieu originels, communs à tous, hors des notions de frontières et de pays.

Les Jardins du précambrien ont cessé leurs activités à la fin de l'été 2015 et sont aujourd'hui « en jachère », tel que l'indique le site Internet de la Fondation. Cet événement annuel a permis durant vingt ans à des artistes des trois Amériques d'échanger, de créer et de laisser une trace dans le monde artistique et culturel à travers ces symposiums internationaux d'art-nature.

Pour conclure, soulignons que René Derouin est toujours très actif dans le monde artistique québécois. Après avoir été maintes fois honoré (il a reçu le *Prix Paul-Émile-Borduas* (1999), l'Ordre mexicain de l'aigle aztèque (2006) ou encore le *Prix Artiste*



pour la Paix 2016), après avoir publié bon nombres de livres d'artistes, de recueils d'entretiens et de correspondances, il continue de produire des œuvres, d'arpenter le monde, son monde, son Amérique et ses racines. Une de ses dernières expositions, *De la chapelle au mur des rapaces*, a été présentée en 2017 au Centre d'exposition de Val-David (Québec). Et comme le souligne Gilles Lapointe : « Qu'il soit à l'étranger ou au Québec, qu'il dessine ou écrive, ou même lorsqu'il recourt à des matériaux ou des supports différents, l'artiste vit en continuité dans le temps et l'espace de sa création » (Lapointe, préface de *Graphies d'atelier*, 23).

Comme nous l'avons vu, la découverte de sa nordicité à travers son cheminement vers le Mexique et le territoire américain lui ont fait prendre conscience de son appartenance au continent américain. Cela n'a pas seulement affecté sa vie intime et son monde intérieur, cela a été tout à fait déterminant dans sa carrière et ses choix artistiques, que ce soit dans ses œuvres personnelles ou dans la création et le maintien des symposiums des Jardins du précambrien.

Enfin, un film documentaire immersif sur René Derouin est en cours de tournage : *Territoires des Amériques*. Le titre à lui seul est assez évocateur de la problématique au cœur de notre étude. Cela souligne également l'actualité de cet homme qui, malgré ses 80 ans passés, continue à occuper la scène artistique québécoise et, peut-on dire, américaine. Sur le site internet consacré à ce film en devenir, l'artiste déclare : « Je suis René Derouin. Je suis un artiste. Je suis un Québécois. Je suis un continentaliste. Je suis un métis d'Amérique du Nord en errance au Sud. Je suis un enfant du territoire et du continent. Je suis l'Américanité. »

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**VÉRONIQUE MILLET** / est titulaire d'une maîtrise en langue et littérature françaises (Université de Franche-Comté, France, 1984) ainsi que d'une maîtrise en histoire de l'art (Université du Québec à Montréal, 2017). Elle est professeure et coordonnatrice-adjointe au département de français du collège Dawson (Montréal, Québec). Ses recherches portent sur l'œuvre de Marcelle Ferron, principalement sur la notion de transparence, ainsi que sur la peinture moderne au Québec en général. L'auteure a publié dans les revues *Espace*, *Parcours*, *Ex\_Situ* ou encore *L'Artichaut*. Elle a également participé à plusieurs colloques (colloque sur les artistes canadiennes à l'Université Concordia à Montréal, colloque sur le portrait à l'université Ibn Zohr à Agadir, au Maroc).



# Perceptions and Misperceptions of Canada among Non-Canadian Students

Perceptions et perceptions erronées du Canada  
parmi les étudiants non canadiens

Diana Yankova / Andrei Andreev

## Abstract

The present case study is an attempt to establish what university students in Bulgaria know about Canada and how they perceive the average Canadian, providing an outsider's view to a nation that is frequently visited by questions as to its identity and doubts about the image it projects to the rest of the world. The study, which aims to explore both general factual knowledge and subjective personal perceptions, was first carried out among Bulgarian students only; because of the surprising nature of some of the findings, it was then duplicated – with slight modifications – among a group of foreign undergraduates studying at Bulgarian universities.

**Keywords:** Canadian identity, perception and knowledge of Canada, constructing identities

## Résumé

La présente étude est une tentative d'établir ce que savent sur le Canada les étudiants de l'enseignement supérieur en Bulgarie et la façon dont ils perçoivent le Canadien moyen, offrant une vue de l'extérieur à une nation qui est fréquemment visitée par des questions identitaires et des doutes quant à l'image qu'elle projette au reste du monde. L'étude, qui vise à explorer à la fois les connaissances factuelles générales et les perceptions personnelles subjectives, n'a été réalisée qu'auprès des étudiants bulgares; en raison de la nature surprenante de certains des résultats, elle a ensuite été doublée – avec de légères modifications – d'une étude auprès d'un groupe d'étrangers de premier cycle étudiant dans des universités bulgares.

**Mots-clés :** identité canadienne, la perception et la connaissance du Canada, la construction des identités



## Background

Debates about identity have become a defining feature of the present times. The current unprecedented movement of people and ideas across continents has engendered a shift in heretofore more static and clear-cut concepts of nationhood, ethnicity, religion, among others, leading to increasing scrutiny, reconsideration and reassessment of notions and values. The search for our essence and belonging, for the why and how we feel similar or distinct individually or as a group has been the preoccupation of a myriad of researchers and practitioners.

With the sesquicentennial anniversary of Canada already a fact, one concept that has yet to be defined is that of the Canadian identity. Although many attempts have been made in delineating the characteristics of this elusive abstraction, and although it has been the object of attention in popular, media and academic quarters both inside and outside of Canada, to this very day the attributes of national identity have remained loosely, hazily and hardly unanimously described. 150 years after the birth of the Canadian nation many questions are still unanswered.

Initially, especially English Canada was mainly characterized by British influences, visible in preserving British institutions, customs and traditions. At the time of the creation of the country, most English-speaking settlers considered themselves British subjects. “A British subject I was born; a British subject I will die” were Canada’s first Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald’s famous words. They were a clear attestation to his vision of Canada: loyal to the British Empire and independent from the United States. With time, the Britishness of the Canadian identity began to be less pronounced and with the disintegration of the British Empire, the Dominion of Canada was compelled to establish closer relations with the United States. The 1931 Statute of Westminster constituted the legislative sovereignty of the self-governing dominions of the British Empire and Canada achieved full political independence. The struggle for defining Canadian identity became more intense.

As a counterpoint, French-speaking settlers aspired to a country that would not rely politically and economically so much on Britain and were therefore more willing to proclaim their Canadianness and call themselves *Canadiens*. Francophone Quebec has made numerous appeals for the rest of Canada to recognize its distinct society status, accompanied by measures to preserve the French language and culture, finding its most drastic expression in the independence referendums in 1980 and 1995. There is no doubt that, especially in the past, the *Quebecois* or French Canadian has been an identity much less fuzzy and more readily and effortlessly definable than that of the English Canadian: with its distinct language and traditions Quebec seems to be one distinguishing characteristic of Canada’s identity.



Scholarly attempts to define Canadian nationhood saw an unprecedented surge that began 50 years ago when two opposing tendencies arose – the federalist model promoting a unified national identity, and the limited approach which proposed a study of how different regional, ethnic, religious and cultural groups perceive Canada; and the debate is still ongoing (cf. Massolin 2001, Howells 2002, Edwardson 2008). It can be claimed that, in recent years, the search for this new national identity has definitely moved away from the British heritage and has focused more on the acceptance of the lifestyles and traditions of immigrants that have been coming to the country in the past several decades – i.e., that Canada is defined by its multiculturalism, with the implication that therefore there is no Canadian identity and culture proper.

English Canada is viewed by some merely as a geographical concept with a vague cultural definition. At most, it is considered as a reflection of the negative features of the United States, absorbing American tasteless pop culture, demonstrating an increased disposition to engage in lawsuits (especially after the 1984 Charter of Rights and Freedoms, cf. Coe 1988), or adopting hyper political correctness.

The 2000 Molson beer TV commercial “I am Canadian” came to be regarded as a quintessential expression of the Canadian identity – one which had an extraordinary impact on the reinforcement of the defining characteristics of Anglophone Canada and started nation-wide discussions at political and institutional levels. Against a backdrop of Canadian symbols, it shows the flannel-shirted average Canadian Joe, who feels anything but American, extoling the typical virtues of the Canadian character: polite, gentle, with propensity to self-irony, with an immigration model of diversity, not assimilation, peacekeeping, not policing, and ultimately – proud to be Canadian, but mostly a description of what Canadians are not, not what they are. Joe’s ironically bombastic rant actually set out to dispel stereotypes – both American stereotypes of Canadians and Canadian stereotypes of Americans and their lifestyle – and the advertisement went on to become one of the emblems of the Canadian identity, turning into a kind of pledge of allegiance.

Notwithstanding the bulk of research dedicated to the multifaceted Canadian identity, this fuzzy and elusive concept of the English Canadian still merits academic attention and the present study is a modest effort in that respect: striving to elicit how Canadians are viewed from outside the country.

## The study

Cultural stereotypes, or generalized ideas about a group of people, are explored by academics on the basis of forming impressions of self and others, and, depending on whether they are about one’s own group or other cultural groups, they can be



classified as autostereotypes or heterostereotypes (Matsumoto and Juang 2008). Ideally, an analysis of the outsider view, or the “etic” aspects, and the insider view – the “emic” aspects – can provide insights into points of similarity as well as differences between external perception and self-perceived image. The former studies behavior by comparing cultures from a perspective outside the culture analysed, applying a conceptual apparatus which is universal and not culturally dependent, while the latter focusses on behavior from the perspective of the studies culture (Krumov and Larsen 2013, 4).

“Pondering ourselves is the occupational hazard of being Canadian” declares Andrew Cohen, thereby highlighting that the elusive Canadian identity has “animated – and frustrated – a generation of statesmen, historians, writers, artists, philosophers” (Cohen 2007: 3). The perception of Canadians by people from outside can digress from typical popular characteristics within Canada, namely friendly, peaceful and/or polite. Friendly turned out to be an ambiguous concept, since it could be taken to mean opening the doors for someone, which Canadians seem to do, or inviting somebody to your home, which Canadians are not generally inclined to do, according to a survey among international students in Canada (Packer and Lynch 2013: 61). In Cohen’s (2007: 48) view, non-Canadians perceive Canadians as nice, hospitable, modest, blind to their achievements, obedient, conservative, deferential, colonial and complex, fractious, envious, geographically impossible and politically improbable.

The starting premise of our study was that respondents will demonstrate a positive view of Canadians in general and will single out more positive traits that they attribute to Canadians. The reason for this assumption was that Canada has long been a favourite destination among Bulgarian emigrants, and nearly every Bulgarian has a family member or friend living in Canada (and generally praising the quality of life there). This preliminary hypothesis contravenes the view expressed by some researchers that due to an in-group bias, Canadian-born respondents perceive themselves more favourably than members of an out-group (Packer and Lynch 2013: 75).

## Methodology

In the first stage of the study, the data was collected by means of recorded structured interviews conducted with 28 Bulgarian BA students (12 male, 16 female) majoring in different subjects, including English and American Studies at New Bulgarian University, Sofia, Bulgaria. None of them had ever done a course in Canadian Studies.

The study did not include a respondent background question section since the interviews were directed to a group with more or less the same profile: university students in their early twenties, born and residing in Bulgaria. The only background



information that was relevant to the study and was included in the interview was whether any of the respondents had spent time in Canada. This fact was very important in order to establish whether their perception and knowledge of Canada and Canadians was based on personal experience or was acquired through the mediation of friends, films, radio, etc. Most respondents did not have first-hand contact with Canada; therefore one of the main issues under investigation was the basis on which they formed their impression and vision of Canada.

The interview questions were twenty in number and elaborated with two main objectives: to establish students' basic factual knowledge about Canada, and to elicit their perceptions and feelings about Canada. We opted for a combination of types of questions: an unprompted adjective section, open-ended questions, multiple choice questions, Likert-scale questions for reasons we will discuss below. The questions were divided into two main groups: first, questions aimed at eliciting respondents' knowledge about Canada, and second, questions pertaining to their attitude.

The basic knowledge questions were the following:

Where is Canada situated and which countries does it border? Which is the capital of Canada?

Can you name three cities in Canada?

What is the population of Canada and which place does it occupy in territory worldwide?

When was the state of Canada founded: 1660, 1789, 1867, 1903 or 1969?

Is Canada a republic, monarchy, principality? Who is the Head of State?

Which are the official languages in Canada?

What is the currency in Canada?

Can you name any famous Canadians (musicians, actors, film directors, writers, politicians, sportsmen/women)?

What do you know about the social policy/crime level/predominant religions in Canada?

The earliest settlers in Canada are:

a) Americans; b) Englishmen and Frenchmen; c) Indians and Inuit; d) Vikings.

The content of the questions in this part was based on basic general knowledge about a country as accumulated in the obligatory Geography and History classes in Bulgarian secondary schools, and the type was determined by the difficulty: we chose multiple choice questions when we felt respondents were not likely to have active knowledge on the subject, e.g., with history dates or more specific Canadian concepts,



such as Inuit, for instance, and open ended questions when a large number of answers are possible, such as “Name famous Canadians”.

The second part of the interview was comprised of the following attitude questions:

Have you visited Canada? If yes, when and why? If not, would you like to go and why?

How do you imagine the average Canadian (compared to the average American, Brit, Frenchman, Bulgarian)?

What is the first thing you imagine when you hear the name of Canada?

Which of the following words or phrases best define Canada as a country? Tolerant, democratic, immigrant, imperialistic, social, socialist, unstable politically, totalitarian, World Power, peace-loving, a police state?

Why do you think so many Bulgarians have immigrated and continue to immigrate to Canada?

What are your answers based on – your stay in Canada, films, books, accounts by friends, music, the media?

What is it you would like to know about Canada?

In this section we opted for several Likert-scale questions with answers ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” with a “neither agree or disagree” option in order to gauge more precisely the degree of certainty of respondents’ opinions, and an unprompted adjective ranking segment where respondents were asked to provide spontaneous, impromptu adjectives, describing Canada and Canadians.

In the second stage of the study, respondents were 22 foreign BA students (13 male, 9 female) at New Bulgarian University majoring in various subjects, but mainly in Political Sciences, which attracts the largest number of international students to the university. The students came from Greece, Macedonia, Slovakia, Italy, Syria, Somalia, Azerbaijan, Nigeria, and the State of Palestine, among others. The major modification made in the questionnaire was to the question “Why do you think so many Bulgarians have emigrated to Canada?,” which was changed to “Why do you think Canada is such a popular destination for immigrants?” Of the respondents, only one had previously visited Canada and, again, none of them had ever done a course in Canadian Studies; however, because of the predominance of Political Sciences students, it was expected that they might prove somewhat more knowledgeable than their Bulgarian counterparts.



## Factual knowledge: results

Bulgarian students' answers to the questions on factual knowledge about Canada produced some rather – to put it mildly – unexpected findings. Over a third of them could not put Canada on the map at all, even when prompted to consider on which continent the country is situated. The rest tentatively placed it in North America, with two students relatively certain that it lies south of the USA, and one hypothesizing that Canada actually borders on North America. Despite this lack of knowledge on Canada's geographic location, nearly 70% of respondents rightly identified the country's capital as Ottawa, 20% admitted to having no idea at all on the matter, and three students made the rather uncertain guess of Toronto. When asked to list some other major cities, 40% failed to provide any answer whatsoever, while the remaining students came up with Toronto, Ontario, Montpellier and, inexplicably, Quebec itself. As to the population of Canada, the majority of informants could not even hazard a guess, except that it must be "large" – a word also applied to the country's territory, although not a single student had any notion of its world ranking.

Students' knowledge of the history and political set-up of Canada did not prove to differ much in terms of accuracy. 50% chose 1867 as the year when the country was founded, but then admitted to having made a guess on the grounds that "Canada is a young country". Nearly the same number, however, opted for 1879 without being able to provide a reason for this choice, and one student opined that it must have been after the Second World War because "Canada is a young country." 90% were of the opinion that Canada is a republic, while 10% believed it to be a monarchy. Respectively, 80% assumed that the country's Head of State is its President, one student argued that it is the Prime Minister, one seemed to recall that "the English Queen has something to do with it," and the rest simply gave a "Don't Know" answer. About 70% of respondents stated that the official languages of Canada are French and English, in that order, 10% could think of English only, and 20% mentioned "French, English and others" without being able to specify the "others," although two suggestions were made of Spanish. 40% had no idea of Canada's national currency, but 60% did provide "dollar" as an answer; the question, however, of whether this was the same dollar as that of the USA, resulted in considerable confusion.

The task of naming some famous Canadians proved to be a stumbling block for nearly 40% of students, who could not come up with a single name (when supplied with certain well-known names from popular culture – the presumption being that they must be familiar with them at least – they expressed sincere surprise that Celine Dion, for instance, is Canadian). The remaining 60% were able to mention mainly figures from the entertainment industry: actors like Ellen Page and Jim Carrey, or musicians such as The Weekend and Nelly Furtado.





Three quarters of the informants admitted they did not know much about Canada's social policy, with 25% labelling the country a welfare state. 80% stated that the crime rate "must be" low – based on ideas of Canada's high standard of living – while 20% remained undecided. Religion proved to be a confusing concept for most students, as they listed the following as dominant, in their opinion, religions: Catholicism (60%), Christianity (30%), and Protestantism (10%). 60% also pointed to the English and the French as Canada's earliest settlers, 30% chose Indians and Inuit, and 10% imagined Vikings as conquerors.

As can be seen, these findings reveal a serious paucity of factual knowledge among Bulgarian students on the geography, history, and political organization of Canada. This we attributed mostly to the deteriorating quality of public education not only in Bulgaria, but worldwide, a trend that has established itself in the past two decades or so, according to dozens of concerned sociological studies over the years, despite the attempts of numerous governments to reform and update the education system. It was this reasoning, in fact, that prompted us to conduct the same research among university students of a similar age but different national and cultural background, with a view to cross-checking results.

The outcome of posing the same questions to a group of international students established that results did not differ radically from those of the survey among Bulgarians. Thus, the question of Canada's geographic location elicited the answer that it borders on the USA (with only a few informants able to specify in which direction), or that it is "somewhere in North America". Three students selected Toronto as Canada's capital, the same number replied with a question of their own – "Is it Ottawa?" – while the rest simply said they did not know. Major Canadian cities named included Toronto, Ottawa, Vancouver, Montreal, and "the place where they speak French," but still 40% of students could not provide a single name. Speculation as to the country's population resulted in wide range of choices: from eight through twenty to thirty-fourty million, with the one student who had visited Canada stating, "I know the territory is the same as that of Europe, and the population – as that of Poland". As with the Bulgarian respondents, the adjective "large" proved a popular one to apply to the territory of Canada, with a few students guessing that the country must be fourth or fifth in world ranking in terms of size.

The majority of foreign students could not make any choice, informed or not, as to when Canada was founded; five did opt for 1867, but on the grounds that it is the middle option of the three provided. Thirty percent were certain that Canada is a monarchy (one reply consisting in "It's not a republic"), while the remaining respondents had no idea as to its political set-up. Respectively, the popular choice for Head of State was monarch ("because it is a monarchy"), with one student pinpointing Queen Elizabeth II, but 70% opting for "Don't Know".



Eighty percent selected French and English as official languages of Canada, while 20% mentioned English only. The national currency proved a mystery to most, answers varying from the euro (“because of the Queen”) to “some kind of Canadian money,” with four students stating that it is the Canadian dollar. Asked about famous Canadians, nearly all students immediately supplied Justin Bieber’s name, one mistakenly identified Nicki Minaj as Canadian, and three could not think of any name at all.

Most informants professed ignorance of Canada’s social policy, although three said they had heard that the country has “great health care,” one of whom provided the following example: “Sixteen-year-old single mom gets a house from the state, which just funds the stupidity of teenagers.” The prevailing view seemed to be that there is little to no crime in Canada, one opinion being that “crime is almost non-existent, as Canadians are really polite”. Religions believed to be dominant in Canada were Christianity (60%), Catholicism (30%), and Eastern-Orthodoxy (two students). To about 90% of respondents, the country’s earliest settlers were the English and the French, with Indians and Inuit being the choice of one student, and Vikings – of another.

## Perceptions and feelings: results

Exploration of heterostereotypes relating to Canada also did not reveal significant differences between the perceptions of Bulgarian informants and those of international students. For instance, when asked about their first mental images associated with Canada, most respondents immediately cited Niagara Falls, mountains, snow, ice, and “extremely cold weather” (the last was provided by African and Middle Eastern students). Somewhat surprisingly, in view of their poor general knowledge of Canada, as established with the previous set of questions, nearly all Bulgarian students mentioned the maple leaf on the flag (or, alternatively, a red flag with a leaf); this knowledgeability, it transpired, was due to the popularity of watching international sports events on television. A number of informants from the English Studies Programme also made reference to “a different kind of English”. On average, Canadians were considered to be kind, polite, tolerant and, in comparison with other nations: not as conservative as Europeans, more hospitable, friendly, and open than people from the United Kingdom or Americans, more polite and less opinionated than Americans, but often made fun of by the latter – an impression formed by TV shows, in particular the sitcom *How I Met Your Mother*). A somewhat contradictory view emerged from the interviews with Bulgarian students, some of whom (about 30%) stated that Canadians are accustomed to a slower and more provincial life than Bulgarians, while



others (roughly the same number) were positive that they are busier and have less of a social life. In addition, Canadians were acknowledged by all informants to be good hockey players and, in the opinion of the international students, “very smart, not like Justin Bieber!”

Both groups of students seemed to agree, in general, that Canada could be described as a tolerant, democratic, social, and immigrant country. Perhaps because most of them were majoring in Political Sciences, the foreign students were somewhat more consistent in this respect (with one stating that Canada cannot be called a World Power “because they like to keep a low profile”), while about 20% of the Bulgarians produced paradoxical statements such as: Canada is a democratic *and* a totalitarian country, or it is peace loving *and* imperialistic at the same time. These conflicting views made us wonder whether the interviewees clearly understood the meaning of some of the adjectives proposed, but we decided not to alter the question at that point in order to establish whether similar confusion would arise with the second group of informants – which, as already stated, was not the case. However, 47 out of 50 students in total declared that they would certainly like to visit and possibly even move to Canada, most of them on the grounds that it is “one of the best countries to live in” because of its thriving economy and high standard of living. Another predominant reason proved to be sheer curiosity, i.e., the opportunity to learn about a new culture and environment, “see what it’s like over there” and, again, “maybe get a better life”. Surprisingly, an idealized perception of Canadian weather also emerged as a motivating factor from responses such as “it is cold and nice and Christmas must be beautiful,” “I want to see the sights, especially when the ice melts in the North” and “I’d like to go to Toronto, because of the snow in winter”. The weather, however, was also what discouraged the three African students who expressed no desire to visit the country: “it is extremely cold, I’d prefer to go to the USA because Canada is too silent and too cold,” “I’d prefer to move to Spain or France, it’s better over there”. Other reasons for wanting to visit Canada included “to visit my relatives in Vancouver,” “to practice my English,” and “it’s a paradise for vegans there.”

Logically enough, most of the above reasons coincided with the explanations provided by students for the fact that Canada is such a popular destination for emigrants: “the country is richer, will help you start a business,” “there’s a good standard of living, better prospects for work and life,” and “it’s easier to find a job than in the USA”. Along with economic considerations, about 30% of students mentioned their belief that people in Canada are more tolerant to immigrants.

Informants’ answers to all previous questions, whether concerning factual knowledge or personal perceptions, proved to be based on feature films and documentaries (about 50%), the internet (40%), accounts of friends and relatives with first-hand experience of Canada (nearly 30%), personal first-hand experience from the student who had



been to the country, and video games (this from an ardent gamer who was proud to inform us that Canada is the third-largest global producer of video games).

Finally, when asked what they would like to know or learn about Canada, almost all respondents listed precisely the general areas they had been surveyed on: more about the culture and history, what a typical Canadian is like, and how the country is different from the USA and other countries. One student expressed a personal interest in learning more about the status of the French language in Canada.

## Conclusions

The majority of participants in the case study, regardless of their nationality, demonstrated very little factual knowledge about Canada. Their answers to the questions in the first part of the survey indicated that they knew next to nothing about its history and geography: most of them believed the first settlers in Canada to be the English and the French, very few could name more than a couple of major Canadian cities, and some even had difficulties placing the country on a world map. In addition, they appeared to be highly confused or seriously mistaken about the political set-up of Canada, eventually opting to consider it a presidential republic despite the fact that nearly half of the informants were majoring in Political Science. Finally, when faced with the task of naming famous Canadians, be it historical or contemporary figures, they could come up with only a few names from films and pop music only.

The prevailing perception of Canada, based mostly on personal accounts of relatives or acquaintances living there, or on impressions gathered from movies or TV series, proved to be that it is a wealthy country with a high standard of living, a low crime rate, and a warm and welcoming attitude to immigrants. With very few exceptions, informants painted a postcard-perfect picture of Canadian nature and weather conditions, as well, envisaging spectacular mountain views and cosy white Christmases. Canadians as people were generally considered to differ from both Americans and Europeans in being kinder, friendlier and more tolerant. This somewhat rosy vision was further enhanced by the students' failure to attribute a single negative feature to Canadians as they did with representatives of other nations (e.g. Americans are bossy and dominate, most Europeans are intolerant and snobbish), despite not being asked explicitly to do so in either case. Thus, on all the above listed points, respondents justified initial expectations that, as an out-group, they would present a highly favourable and somewhat idealized perception of the subject under investigation.

The findings of the study seem to indicate that the predominant perception of Canada is that of a beautiful, peaceful and prosperous country offering better job and life opportunities than either its Southern neighbour or any European state, coupled



with an easier and more tolerant integration process for would-be immigrants. This generalized impression aside, it would appear that the country does not play a particularly prominent part in international media coverage, whether in the political, sports or entertainment features, as a result of which little is actually known about Canada other than what can be gleaned through personal contacts with people who reside or have at some point resided there.

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**DIANA YANKOVA** / is currently Chair of the Foreign Languages and Cultures Department, New Bulgarian University, Sofia, Bulgaria and President of the Central European Association for Canadian Studies. Her research interests and contributions are in the field of Applied Linguistics and Culture Studies with a special emphasis on legal language, culture and genre-specific characteristics of Common law and Continental legislation, convergence of legal studies and linguistics, EU legal terminology, Canadian studies and cultural awareness.

**ANDREI ANDREEV** / is a lecturer at New Bulgarian University, where for the past twenty years he has taught English for Academic Purposes, Translation Skills, Canadian Studies, Literature in English, and other subjects. His academic interests lie in culture studies, modern literature in English, and translation studies. He has published over twenty articles, mainly on literature and culture studies, in both Bulgarian and international journals. Currently, he is President of the Bulgarian chapter of the Central European Association for Canadian Studies, and member of the Executive Board of the Bulgarian Society for British Studies.





*Circumstantial Poems, Plagiaries and Versifications /*  
*Versuri de circumstanță, plagiate și mici înșălări*

**Ana Olos**

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*Canadian Postcards*

**Elena Ștefoi**

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**Don Sparling**

Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic

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It is probably safe to say that the English-speaking public's knowledge of contemporary Romanian poetry is very, very close to zero. Aside from its notorious lack of interest in literature from cultures outside the Anglophone orbit, there is the additional problem of a dearth of translations. This being the case, it is a pleasant and welcome surprise to be presented with not one but two volumes of verse by Romanian poets in English. And for Canadianists, the pleasure and welcome is doubled thanks to the strong Canadian element in both.

Ana Olos is a name familiar to many Canadianists in the Central European region. Professor Emeritus of North University of Baia Mare, she was founder and director of the Canadian Studies Centre there, developing it into one of the most dynamic and innovative in Central Europe, its spirit reflecting the impulse that has shaped all of Olos's work and that might be summed up in Ezra Pound's dictum "Make it new!" The Unconventional Meetings of Young Canadianists she initiated became a byword for originality and creativity. In *'Twas Nice to Meet Findley Angry*, drawing on the friendship she developed with the Canadian writer Timothy Findley and his partner, William Whitehead, she produced a remarkable and perhaps unique fusion of literary criticism, biography and autobiography. Her openness to new ideas and fresh approaches can be seen in all her writing and teaching.





*Circumstantial Poems, Plagiaries and Versifications / Versuri de circumstanță, plagiate și mici însăilări* is a bilingual collection of Ana Olos's poems; originally written in English – no mean feat – they have been translated into her native language by Olos herself. Certainly a deep reading of these poems would include an exploration of the relationship between the two language versions, but as someone utterly illiterate in Romanian I must leave this to others, and confine myself to the English version and its many merits. These are many, in particular the great variety of poems in terms of theme, mood and form; their playfulness (including verbal play) and pointed humour; their inquisitiveness and keen observation of the world around us; their honesty. Taken as a whole, the collection of poems is an intensely personal diary, both literally and figuratively: many of the poems are inspired by specific places she has visited, while all of them record the inner workings of her mind as it ruminates on life's paradoxes, its times of despair and its moments of joy. And the mind it reveals is deeply grounded in a long cultural tradition, questioning, speculative, prepared to be angry at the world it observes and to make judgments, but also to accept human limitations and human imperfectability, to examine its own weaknesses and prevarications. The poems are clearly the work of someone who has delved deep in the complexities and frailty of the human condition and emerged with a wisdom shaped by their understanding.

The above characterization might give the impression that Olos's work is "heavy," difficult, sombre. Far from it: one of its chief features is the deadpan humour, the self-irony, that both undercuts and reinforces her musings. This element is particularly frequent in poems that recount more directly, or are based on, personal experiences; part of her self-knowledge is clearly that one cannot take oneself too seriously. Nor are the many poems reflecting experiences outside her own country – roughly half of the sixty-six poems in the collection – in any way difficult to access. Rather, they reflect the curiosity of their author, her openness to the new, and the rich potential of cultural interaction. For perhaps obvious reasons, I was particularly taken by the poems relating to Canada – two sets originating in summer schools Olos attended in Ottawa and the West Coast, and "Salmon Series," a complex set of twelve poems taking the form of "recollections" from a stay in Canada. The latter in particular is marked by many of the typical features of Olos's verse, ranging from the self-mocking to the unpretentiously but deeply serious. The sharply observed moments that form the bulk of the series are framed by ruminations after her return, all of these intertwined in ways that make the series a minor *tour de force*.

Ana Olos is also present in Elena Ștefciuc's *Canadian Postcards*, playing a subsidiary but important role. Or rather a triple role, as she is both the translator from the original Romanian of Ștefciuc's poems as well as the author of both an informative Foreword outlining Ștefciuc's career and the valuable accompanying "Close Reading of the Poems," a combination of factual information, cultural background notes and literary analysis



that serves to make them more accessible to their potential audience(s). Elena Ștefoi herself is one of the better-known contemporary Romanian poets, a prize-winning author of nine books of poetry. In addition she has been a prominent public figure in post-1989 Romania in the cultural world, the field of journalism and diplomacy. From 2005 to 2012 she served as her country's Ambassador to Canada, and it is her time there that gave rise to the poems in *Canadian Postcards*.

In speaking about the book, Ștefoi points out that these are not “postcards from Canada” - that is, not cheerful, informative messages sent to keep in touch with people back home (“Loved Niagara Falls – wish you were here ...”). Instead, they are “a tribute for all those of my family who have left this world (and whom I have brought with me, ‘on a single ticket / that of memory’ – trying to keep them close via flash-backs generated by a reality that they would have been glad to be able to know.” In practice this means that almost all the poems follow a similar pattern. They begin with a description of some particular place in Canada, and this serves as a trigger for memories – of family members, friends, experiences in the distant past – that in turn lead to a series of unfolding thoughts. This may sound simple, even mechanical, as when a pebble thrown into a pond results in a widening circle of ripples. In Ștefoi's hands, however, this model achieves a flexibility that enables her to travel both in space and in time, exploring her memories, recalling families and friends, speaking candidly of deeply personal, even painful, experiences, meditating on the passing of time and on its losses, achieving reconciliation. The poems start from a specific point here and now, reach out in vast arcs encompassing very disparate experiences and great stretches of time, and then return to their starting point, marking a quiet completion.

The Canadian places that make their appearance in Ștefoi's verse are varied. The great majority are to be found in Ottawa and its surroundings, where she of course spent most of her time during her seven years as Ambassador: specific parks and streets and bridges, the Rideau and Ottawa Rivers, Parliament Hill and its famous cat shelter (now, alas, no longer there), the Museum of Civilization. Others include the far North, the Prairies, Vancouver. What is fascinating is how Ștefoi links these places to her memories. A particular flower reminds her of that same flower at a distant point in her past, setting off a series of memories and associations. A scene in an Ottawa park is suddenly transformed as she imagines long dead members of her family mingling with the locals, enjoying its amenities. By contrast, the pleasures associated with the Rideau Canal conjure up in her mind the opposite, the forced labour that was used to construct a canal between the Danube and Black Sea in the 1950s. The “here and now” in Canada absorbs the “there and then” of Romania, freeing her to deal with her past. And this even affects her future: in “Between Two Canals” she imagines, as the last day of her life approaches, how “the best part of me will return to Ottawa, / at least for an hour, to run with my eyes in the sun, / at peace with all and everything, along



the canal.” In her poems, then, Canada, specific places in Canada, take on the symbolic form of “a luminous space” that enables her to conjure up the past, to relive its joys and deal with its complexities and horrors, a space that is a place of healing.

Both *Circumstantial Poems* and *Canadian Postcards* are in themselves memorable poetry collections. For a Canadianist, of course, there is the added interest of the subject matter of many of the poems, relating as it does to Canada and so offering insight into the reception and understanding of Canada by foreigners, its impact and place in their imagination. For me as a Canadian, and a Canadian born and brought up in Ottawa to boot, there is also the very special pleasure of seeing through others’ eyes places that are deeply embedded in my own cultural memory, many of them from as far back as my childhood. So I am prepared to admit the possibility that my praise of these two poetry books is overdone. But I don’t think so.



## *Canada as a Selective Power: Canada's Role and International Position after 1989*

**Marcin Gabryś and Tomasz Soroka**

Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2017, 279 pp. ISBN 9788376387925 (paperback).

**Kenneth Froehling**

Brno University of Technology, Czech Republic

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A long time ago, back in 1980 when I began doing research for my thesis on Canada's relations with Eastern Europe at Carleton University in Ottawa, consulting the works of such scholars as James Eayrs, John W. Holmes, Adam Bromke and Peyton Lyon was prerequisite reading for any young academic writing on Canadian foreign policy. After reading *Canada as a Selective Power*, I would say that this is valuable reading for any scholar and expert writing on Canada's international relations today.

What makes this work special is that Professors Gabryś and Soroka are simultaneously dispassionate and passionate in their writing. They are dispassionate as Polish scholars who have produced an extensive, well-researched narrative on Canada's foreign relations in an analytical way, venturing their views without the inevitable bias a Canadian scholar might have difficulty avoiding. In their separate chapters on Canada's foreign policy under Prime Ministers Stephen Harper and Justin Trudeau they lay everything out in a well-researched manner. They are passionate, however, in their genuine interest on the way both Canadians and non-Canadians see Canada's international relations and their passion in advancing their theory of Canada as a "selective power" since 1989.

In the Introduction the authors make it clear that because of its vast territory, abundant natural resources and economic importance, Canada is "too big to be disregarded" – while at the same time "the American factor" cannot be overlooked in the process of formulating and implementing Canadian foreign policy. However, Canadians and non-Canadians alike have too often focused on the "soft power" aspect of Canadian foreign policy, where being a peacekeeping nation exhorting humanitarian causes is often the global stereotype of Canada. Gabryś and Soroka, moreover, emphasize that the pre-1989 view of Canada as a "middle power" no longer applies since it had two "major" flaws: it exaggerated Canada's global influence while,



on the other hand, it downplayed Canada's significant accomplishments in key areas since the end of the Cold War.

Chapter 1 outlines three known theories of Canada's international relations. The first theory discussed is to see Canada as a "satellite" of the United States, a cynical notion I remember expounded by a few lecturers and students alike at Carleton. The authors themselves see this view as "pessimistic". The second theory sees Canada as a "major/foremost/principal" power. This reminds me of my childhood years when young pupils first learned about Sir Wilfred Laurier's boast that the "20<sup>th</sup> century belongs to Canada". This view the authors regard as the most optimistic and assertive approach of Canada. The third and most popular notion views Canada as being a "middle power" emphasizing multilateralism, internationalism and peacekeeping. All three concepts are summarized in a concise table (pp. 57–58) which shows their "strong" points but then highlights the "weak" points that lead all three theories to be seen as "outdated" by Gabryś and Soroka.

Chapter 2 outlines the view of the authors which sees Canada as a "selective" power. In comparison to "middle power" notions which view Canadian diplomacy as being "mission-oriented"; Canada as a "selective power" affirms a pragmatic, self-centered, objective-oriented approach to Canada's international relations that is the opposite of being a "middle power" which is supposed to be guided by less selfish motives. Naturally, this is a view that would make more idealistic and traditional Canadian experts in the area blush and protest too, as many of them actually did during the Harper years of Canadian foreign policy decision making.

The final two chapters deal with Canada as a selective power under Canada's most recent two Prime Ministers: Stephen Harper and Justin Trudeau. Chapter 3 looks at Canada as selective power in the Harper era (2006–2015) in many areas such as the economy, environment, Arctic sovereignty, China, Israel, the United Nations, etc. Chapter 4 continues from the time of Justin Trudeau's sweeping election victory over the Harper Conservatives in the October 2015 federal election. The authors examine the Liberal campaign platform, which eviscerated the foreign policy of the Harper Conservatives and promised the return to "multilateralism" in areas such as the UN, environment, and military missions, among others. The irony is that Gabryś and Soroka's analysis shows that other than the rhetoric and international perceptions of Canada at international forums and in the media, Justin Trudeau's foreign policy is, overall, following the same selective approach of the Harper years.

These two young Polish scholars need to be highly commended for their exhaustive analysis and their innovative concepts on Canada's international relations. This book is cleanly written and provides the reader with interesting up-to-date facts about very recent Canadian political history. This writer and lecturer on the topic clearly will recommend his students at Masaryk University to read this very informative book.



## *Indigenous Perspectives of North America. A Collection of Studies*

**János Kenyeres, Judit Nagy, Enikő Sepsi and Miklós Vassányi (eds.)**

Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014, 540 pp. ISBN 10: 144385915X.

### **Franciska Kövi**

Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary

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The volume *Indigenous Perspectives of North America* is an international collection of studies which aims at representing how the different social sciences and philological disciplines see the culture and the cultural role of indigenous peoples in North America. The volume consists of four main sections, namely: 1. Wider Perspectives, 2. The Representation of Aborigines in Literature, Fine Arts and Cinema, 3. Culture and Identity, 4. History and Policy Making.

Nathan Kowalsky's article, entitled "Between Relativism and Romanticism: Traditional Ecological Knowledge as Social Critique" (2–31), opens the volume. This study deals with environmental issues concerning the life of native Canadians. According to Kowalsky, a good model is absolutely necessary for us to understand the knowledge of the native people – which is why the article focuses on the so-called Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), which the author construes and presents as an important aspect of Canadian conservation management

The following paper, entitled "GLIFWC: The Founding and Early Years of the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission" (32–50) and written by James W. Oberly, explores the role of the GLIFWC in American native life. The author combines law, science and some aspects of spirituality, presenting a cogently argued and very detailed overview of this organization. Furthermore, Oberly shows the social and economic progress of different tribes and the history of wildlife committees, thus highlighting value.

The next paper, written by Helmut Lutz, surveys in three steps the historical development of aboriginal literature in Canada. "Aboriginal Literatures in Canada: Multiculturalism and Fourth World Decolonization" (51–76) focuses on the impact of multiculturalism on literature, stating that Canada had been multicultural long before the arrival of the Europeans, thereby questioning a popular modern Canadian identity myth.

Augustín Cadena's article, "Representaciones del mundo indígena en la literatura Mexicana del siglo XX" (77–86) moves us away from Canada but also reminds us of



a pre-contact North America. Cadena investigates the case of Mexico, the country with the second largest indigenous population (after Peru) in the Americas. It is thanks to this fact that the world of native people has always been an important part of the Mexican collective consciousness. The author reviews literary texts and he also examines the issue of the indigenous presence in the work of the contemporary writers and poets.

The first main section closes with Brian Ebel's "Prospects for Aboriginal Languages in Canada" (87–101). As its title declares, the topic of this article is similar to that of Helmut Lutz's essay as it outlines the role of language communities and aboriginal languages in Canada, and the country's extremely rich linguistic profile. The examination is based on the newly-available 2011 Census data which promote the present viability of these languages.

The following section entitled "The Representation of Aboriginals in Literature, Fine Arts and Cinema"; opens with Martin Kuester's essay: "From Remote Reserves to the Global Indian Village: Daniel David Moses's *Kyotopolis* as Postmodern Native Canadian Drama." The article is based on the play *Kyotopolis*, written at the end of the 20th century. The author focuses on the role modern technology played in transforming the fragmented world into a Global Indian Village.

In "L'intrusion des 'codes' amérindiens dans le théâtre québécois", Marija Paprašarovski presents the mythological theatre of Huron author, director and producer, Yves Sioui Durand. Durand is the creator of an original kind of theatre that is nurtured by "Pan-American" history and mythologies.

The next study is Cristina-Georgiana Voicu's "Aboriginal Versus the Métis Between Race and Ethnicity: Contexts in Canadian Fiction." This essay explores the relationship between colonizer and colonized as it is mirrored in the Native Canadian literary experience as the author discusses the concept of postcolonialism.

Fátima Susana Amante's paper, titled "'Much of What We Learn About Indians, We Learn as Children': Counter-Images to Biased and Distorted Perceptions of First Nations in Native Canadian Juvenile Literature," is based on a children's picture book which displays deliberate efforts on the part of its author, Thomas King, to correct the different stereotypes which concern American Aboriginals.

Anna Mongibello, in her contribution "Tracking the Land/Memory: Healing and Reterritorializations in Jeannette Armstrong's *Breath Tracks*," explains, through the notion of reappropriation, how Armstrong's verses try to remap the landscape of British Columbia from the perspective of a member of the Okanagan nation, focusing on the importance of the harmony between the people and the land.

The following study carries the title "In-Between Western and Indigeneous: Thomas King's *The Truth About Stories*." Like Fátima Susana Amante, Éva Szizsmann, the author of this paper, offers a survey of another work of the Canadian Native author



Thomas King. King's book includes lots of stories from King's personal life experience as well as quotations from American Aboriginal literature and sources of American and Canadian history.

The next paper, written by Eszter Szenczi, discusses the topic of racial identity but also includes issues of gender. In "Cultural Hybridity in Twentieth Century Métis Autobiographies: Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* and Beatrice Culleton's *In Search of April Raintree*," Ms Szenczi presents the Métis as a new ethnic group as she also describes the two Métis women authors and their respective stories, and delves into how Métis women can find themselves in a patriarchal society where white people are dominant.

Katalin Kürtösi in her study entitled "Indians and Their Art: Emily Carr's Imagery in Painting and in Writing" analyses how Indigenous art forms influenced the literary and artistic career of the famous Canadian modernist writer and painter. The author surveys the early representation of the Natives in Canada from the 16<sup>th</sup> century and draws a complex picture of the story and the evolution of modern art.

Mária Palla's article entitled "From Legend to the Big Screen: Kunuk's *Atanarjuat*" focuses on Inuit identity at three levels: the film itself, the Inuit community in Canada, and last but not least, the community of the filmmakers. This research is important because of the fact that *Atanarjuat* is the first film in the world to have been written, acted, directed, and produced by Inuit persons.

The following study is "Memory, Totem and Taboo in Jim Jarmusch's *Dead Man*" by Tamás Juhász. The author gives a summary of the artistic world of Jim Jarmusch, presents how the director uses the motif of totemism and establishes a link between the Freudian concept of denial and the cultural memory of a very important historical event: the extermination of the Native population of North America.

Katalin Kállay's essay "The Bark-Peelers of the North: Ernest Hemingway's 'Indian Camp'" follows. The article examines Hemingway's well-known short story, which presents a group of Native Americans and their way of life. We come to know the story of a young white boy who accompanies his doctor father to an "Indian" camp to heal a Native American; through the text we get a critical view of the Native and of the white cultures as Ms Kállay gives an analysis of the intercultural communication represented in the story.

Emma Sánchez's paper, entitled "Representaciones de nativos de la Costa Noroeste de América del Norte en los dibujos de la expedición Malaspina (1791–1792). Realidad y ficción," investigates 18<sup>th</sup>-century paintings representing Northwest American indigenous peoples. The Malaspina expedition drawings are interesting because the artists of the expedition produced pictures illustrating different aspects of the traditional culture of the Natives. Ms Sánchez's work is an ethnographic study based on these illustrations.





The second section closes with Mónika Szente's paper "Los indios del istmo de Tehuantepec en los escritos de Károly László." This study is based on the diaries – which offer a colorful picture of the native habits in the region – of an Hungarian engineer who worked in East Mexico in the 19th century. The text focuses on the references that this diary includes about the traditions of the Acayucan, Minatitlán and Oteapan.

The third main section carries the title "Culture and Identity." The first study in this chapter, written by János Kenyeres, is entitled "I Was the One Who Should Have Been Related to Big Bear: Identification with the Indigenous Other in Recent Canadian Art and Literature" (264–280). The author describes a new phenomenon in Canadian art, through the example of some representative works, asserting that Native peoples' cultures have strongly influenced Canadian art and this connection must be understood in the context of multiculturalism.

Krisztina Kodó, in her paper titled "The Creation of the Stereotypical Indian within Native Canadian Culture," discusses the question of the term *Indian* as she puts the question of who the Indians are and what the origins and different uses of this term are. Furthermore, her study also presents images and stereotypes linked to the terms 'First Peoples' and 'Aboriginals.'

The next article, written by Albert Rau, carries the title "Canadian Native Peoples: 'We Are Still Here.' Suggestions for Classroom Activities." This paper presents the potentials of Native peoples of Canada as an EFL subject. It argues that Native literatures are useful for the students to learn about Aboriginal peoples and their cultures and they can be helpful in breaking down stereotypes in the classroom. The author presents the three distinct indigenous peoples of Canada: the First Nations, the Métis and the Inuit.

The following essay, "A Cultural Reader on Aboriginal Perspectives in Canada" (306–321), is written by two authors, Mátyás Bánhegyi and Judit Nagy. They provide a very detailed description of this pioneer project and provide an exact characterization of this significant teaching resource pack for any student and teacher who might be interested in Canadian aboriginal cultures. The authors attach illustrative pictures and tables to their paper, making their work an ideal and convenient addition to Canadian Studies in the classroom.

Andrea Bölcskei's study, entitled "Indigenous Perspectives on the Landscape of North America," comes next. The essay analyses how Amerindian toponyms enhance spatial and cultural orientation among American Natives. It gives valuable insight into how natives processed the geographical entities in their surroundings.

In her article, "Inuit Mental Health and Indigenous Psychology," Zsuzsanna Kövi looks into the statistics of mental health problems among the Inuit and also describes the types of the traditional Aboriginal psychological therapy. This survey is significant



because statistics indicate that Aboriginal peoples have more health problems than the general Canadian population. The author presents the types, causes and consequences of Aboriginal mental health problems (for instance, alcohol and substance abuse, domestic violence and suicide).

The last two studies of this section investigate the aspects and roles of the Christian missions and present how these have related to the Native identity. Tibor Fabinyi's paper, "Jonathan Edwards and the Indians," focuses on the relationship between the missionaries and the indigenous peoples as it discusses how the opinion of Edwards about the Natives changed as he spent more time among them.

The section's final article, entitled "I'll be the Indian, and You Guys the Cowboys': Mission-in-Reverse among Lakota People in Our Days," was written by Eszter Kodácsy-Simon. This paper, partly built on personal experience, explores how American Natives may help us change our religious attitudes. The author draws attention to the fact that if we genuinely learn about Native Americans, we can be helped to look deeper into our own culture and religion also.

The last section, "History and Policy Making," begins with Miklós Vassányi's study "Arctic America through Medieval European Eyes: North-East America in the Old Icelandic Annals and Greenland Deeds" (374–386). The central sources of this historical inquiry are the Icelandic Annals. The author analyzes these works, i.e., a group of late medieval documents written in Old Icelandic and partially in Latin. After that, he presents the evidence for the pre-Columbian discovery of America.

The following article is Magdalena Paluszkiewicz-Misiaczek's "Aboriginal Peoples in the Canadian Military." The author presents the historical perspectives of the aboriginal military in Canada, and focuses attention to the fact that the Canadian indigenous peoples have a long history within Canada's armed forces.

Elvira Nurieva's politically-inclined article goes under the title "A Separate Indigenous Parliament as a Model to Improve Aboriginal Political Representation in Canada." The article presents the effect of a separate indigenous parliament as the best model for Canada to increase political input of the Natives at the federal level.

The next paper, written by Dariana Maximova, presents how minority policies are made in the Canadian and in the Russian Arctic. "La politique sur les questions des peuples autochtones: analyse comparative des régions nordiques du Canada et de la Russie" investigates an interesting topic: the similarities and dissimilarities the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) has with the Nordic regions of Canada.

Palágyi Tivadar in his paper entitled "Indigènes ou allochtones – minorités linguistiques à multiples identités: les Indiens Houmas francophones de Louisiane et les Turcs Gagaouzes russophones de Moldavie" shows how differently the term "Indigenous" is understood in the American as opposed to the European context and touches upon the problem of multilingualism and that of indigenous identities.



Enikő Sepsi and Csaba Pákozdi's study is entitled "L'Inscient littéraire québécois et hongrois ou les droits linguistiques au Canada et en Europe Centrale" (438–458). In this paper, literary analysis merges with political considerations. The authors show the similarities and differences in the Canadian and Central European linguistic situation, thereby drawing parallels between vastly different geo-political contexts. In the conclusion of the article, they argue that in Central Europe, the "bigger nations" have laws protecting their language use, while in Canada, the "smaller nation" has.

The following study, "Francisco de Vitoria y la conquista de América: los comienzos del derecho internacional," was written by Dezső Csejtei. In this paper, the author presents the role of the philosopher, theologian and jurist of Salamanca, Francisco de Vitoria in establishing the beginnings of international law.

In "Derechos de los indios en las constituciones, decretos y manifestos políticos de México (1810–1824)", Viktória Semsey describes a short but very important period of Mexican law history concerning the native peoples. Her research concerns the degree to which the legislation of the time dealt with the codification of the rights of indigenous peoples.

Izaskun Álvarez Cuartero's study is entitled "'Muerte a los que lleven camisa:' acciones civilizadoras y conflicto étnico maya durante el siglo XIX." The author analyzes the reasons and the political background of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Maya rebellion in the Yucatán peninsula.

The last article of the volume is José Del Val's work, entitled "Perspectivas de los Pueblos Indígenas en el Proceso de Globalización: Multiculturalismo y Despojo." This paper analyzes the actual political situation of the Mexican Natives in a wider, global economic context and refers to the multicultural integration of the Mexican Nation.

To conclude this overview with a final word of appreciation, I would like to say that this collection of studies offers a detailed overview of the general situation of Native North American people and, as this brief assessment shows, also updates quite a few important themes which are connected to the Native world. This multilingual (English, French and Spanish) collection of articles presents a fresh and diverse outlook on this wide topic. I think that reading the papers of the volume introduces us into this fascinating world and helps us understand the Native peoples' present-day social and cultural position in North America: Canada, the United States and Mexico.



## *Double-Voicing the Canadian Short Story*

**Laurie Kruk**

Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2016, 240 pp. ISBN: 9780776623238 (paperback).

**Jason Blake**

University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

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Laurie Kruk's *Double-Voicing the Canadian Short Story* is one of those rare scholarly works that the reader might well enjoy more the second time around. I know I did.

Kruk is clearly juggling many a ball in her study of the short fiction of Sandra Birdsell, Timothy Findley, Jack Hodgins, Thomas King, Alistair MacLeod, Olive Senior, Carol Shields and Guy Vanderhaeghe. Readers looking for yet another academic tome on Margaret Atwood and Alice Munro must look elsewhere. My point is not to criticize Kruk's choice of authors; one can always kvetch about a writer not making the list. Rather, my point is to applaud Kruk's focus on authors who are, if not lesser-known, definitely less studied in Canada-focussed academia. (It is a sad sign of the times and of shifting trends that Kruk has to provide a footnote on who Mavis Gallant was, namely, a writer "who had a long career writing acclaimed short stories, beginning in the 1940s, while living in Paris, France since 1960" (24).)

The "double-voicing" in the title is, like irony or satire, an elastic term. Kruk glosses it thus: "The ability to speak in a double voice is intrinsic to expression within a subordinate culture, whether such subordination is due to gender, race, class, sexuality, nationality, or any other position" (2). The suspicious reader (i.e. me on first reading) might retort that mixing an elastic term with a hodgepodge octet of authors that have only the short story genre in common is forcing connections where no real ones exist.

Kruk, to her credit and to my delight, does not force parallels, even as she sniffs out links that may not be obvious – such as the fact that many of the writers she examines "reflect other languages, or other communication modes, within a supposedly monological medium of English" (17). But Kruk doesn't argue that, say, the occasional bits of Gaelic in Alistair MacLeod's work link him indelibly or inevitably with the "patwa" or "Creole" in Jamaica-born Olive Senior's tales. Indeed, even while connecting Findley, Hodgins and MacLeod in the chapter "Mothering Sons: Stories by Findley, Hodgins, and MacLeod Uncover the Mother's Double Voice," Kruk writes, "to bring these three 'sons' together is to acknowledge their differences" (45). There is



no fusing by violence here and Kruk is too intellectually honest to go in for simplistic merging.

If Kruk is juggling quite a few authors, she is also juggling a variety of approaches. Though Judith Butler and Jean Baudrillard make appearances, the leading theoretical force of this volume is Mikhail Bakhtin, especially his “theory of dialogism, which insists that every literary work contains multiple perspectives” (4). Kruk is clearly a formalist or narratologist at heart and she neatly achieves her stated goal of elucidating “the formal, technical construction of the of character-focalizer, narrator-focalizer, and implied author, which together make up what I call ‘story voice’” (4). Importantly, generously, and usefully, Kruk carefully defines her terms. Perhaps we should all know what “implied author” means, but Kruk’s endnotes make sure that no reader is left behind when it comes to “polyphony,” and “parody” and even the hobgoblin of “postmodernism” that has belatedly made the jump from academic articles to newspaper column and alt-right blogs.

Kruk is good at defining her terms, but she is even better at putting those terms and her theory to use, without becoming a slave to them (methinks she must be a heck of a teacher). For example, leaning on Judith Butler’s idea of gender as performance, Kruk quotes Timothy Findley’s story “Come as You Are,” in which a character dresses up as “a drag queen dressed as a college boy” (how’s that for a gender-bending mise en abîme?). I admit that “Come as You Are” is one Timothy Finley story I haven’t read and to which I – like many of us here in Central Europe – do not have easy access.

...which brings me to another fine part of Kruk’s book: she neatly interweaves quotations from the stories she examines, thus giving us all a sense of the voices or “double voices” that drive stories. All the explanations in the world of creole and cadence and code-switching cannot replace the pulsing fecundity of this line from Olive Senior’s “You Think I Mad, Miss?”: “Is there is still Massa God up above me, is what I do why him have to tek everybody side against me?” I was also thankful for the slick overviews of stories that I don’t know. Again, Kruk does not leave the reader behind. How many among us have read all of Alice Munro, let alone the eight authors chosen by Kruk?

If Kruk keeps the reader in view, she also keeps the author around. Kruk cribs again and again from her 2003 *The Voice is the Story: Conversations with Canadian Writers of Short Fiction*, returning to the authors to help us see how stories come together. The “voice is the story” is an assertion by Jack Hodgins that, given the “continuing role within fiction of the dramatized speaker or storyteller,” voice is what the short story is all about. After all, you don’t tell a ghost story in the same way you crack a joke. Furthermore, Guy Vanderhaeghe has commented that “the biggest advantage of the first-person voice is intimacy. Because I’m interested in colloquial language, I’m drawn to the first person” (82).



This is not to say that a fictional first-person voice is necessarily natural and pure. As on the stage, and as in real life, one's voice depends on who is listening (politicians speak much differently when they think the mic is off). Narration is also a way of acting out events, even within the family, that intimate space where we "first 'perform'" our identities – "In a family, you are 'on stage,'" notes Jack Hodgins (62). Performativity and role-playing is not high theory and drag, it's also part of our daily, intimate routines.

A final example of Kruk's helpful recycling from her previous book, this time from Alistair MacLeod: "very often, when I write stories, I write the concluding paragraph about half-way through. And I find that this more or less helps me because I think of it as, 'This is the last thing I'm going to say to the reader, this will be the last statement that I'll make—the last paragraph or the last sentence'" (38). Elsewhere, MacLeod has described the short story as a trip, in essence wondering, *how do I get there from here?* Voice is important, but events are too.

Fittingly for a book that highlights voice, Kruk includes her own. Discussing a MacLeod story, she casts academic aridity aside and positively gushes: "This ten-page story truly is an amazing feat of compression, a testament to the power of short fiction, as it double-voices philosophically as well as culturally and linguistically" (81). Here we are reminded that Kruk is not only a critic but also a reader, given to the old-fashioned emotion of enjoyment.



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